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APPROACHES TO FELLOWSHIP

Norman J. Threinen

Although the question of church fellowship among Lutherans has posed a problem in various parts of the world, it is really, strictly speaking, one which has emerged out of conditions and circumstances existing in the Americas. For where one has a free church tradition and a multitude of religious bodies co-existing alongside of one another, one quite naturally also has a tendency to have different church bodies of the same tradition or confession growing up. Where in Europe one had divergences of theological opinion contending against one another within the same church body, in America these divergences took on organizational form and were embodied in church structures. As a result, essentially the same question confronted Lutherans in

America in their dealings with other Lutherans as had confronted the churches of differing confessions in Europe in their dealings with one another. The question was changed from "Is that body Christian enough?" to "Is that body Lutheran enough for fellowship?" Yet the overtones of the former were still contained in the latter as Lutherans used words like heterodox to describe other Lutherans.

FORMATION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

As one looks historically at the fellowship question one sees it raised in a significant way at the time of the breakup of the General Synod in the 1860s. The breakup really came in two stages. In 1863 the synods in the southern states withdrew to form the General Synod South. In 1867 a number of other synods withdrew to form the General Council. The breakup of the General Synod is interesting in this regard because it shows clearly how various kinds of non-theological factors inevitably are involved in the fellowship question and how these non-theological factors take on theological dress. However, for our purpose here I want to point out how the fundamental question about the genuineness of the Lutheranism of the other was posed in this historical event.

What led up to the formation of the General Council was an invitation in 1866 by the Pennsylvania Ministerium to a meeting of all Lutheran synods, ministers and congregations in the United States and Canada which confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Charles Porterfield Krauth in his *Theses on Faith and Polity* expands on the implications of the stance taken by the drafters of the invitation. He cites the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as the confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and states that "acceptance of its doctrines and the avowal of them without equivocation or mental reservation make, mark and identify that church which alone in the true, original, historical and honest sense is the Evangelical Lutheran Church."¹ What the General Council people were thereby saying to the continuing synods in the General Synod was that they were not genuinely Lutheran. They were not genuinely Lutheran because they did not accept without equivocation or mental reservation the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Or, if they did, they weren't following through on it for they were in close fellowship with the Frankean Synod, which had been accepted into the General Synod without explicitly accepting the Augsburg Confession.

It did not take long before the fundamental question which the General Council asked about the General Synod was asked by others about the General Council. As early as 1867, the Ohio Synod posed the question by requesting clarification about the General Council's position on four points: 1) Chiliasm; 2) Mixed Communion; 3) Exchange of pulpits with Sectarians; and 4) Secret Societies. Discussion about these four points caused a number of synods, including Ohio and Missouri to decline membership in the General Council. They soon recognized each other as orthodox bodies, established pulpit and altar fellowship and formed the Synodical Conference in 1871.

Where the General Council held that mutual acceptance of the Unaltered Augs-

1. Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 145.

burg Confession per se was necessary for fellowship, the Synodical Conference added the ingredient of the modern expression of doctrine based on the Confession and the way in which such doctrine translated into church life, i.e., agreement in doctrine and practice. But the question about the genuineness of the Lutheranism of the other was still there. For the General Council was viewed by the Synodical Conference as not genuinely Lutheran because it had an unacceptable stance on the four points.

FOLLOWING WORLD WAR I

The latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century saw various configurations of church fellowship due to instances of disruption and rapprochement too numerous to mention and, for our purposes, of limited significance. Suffice it to say around the time of the 400th anniversary of the Reformation major unions of Lutherans in North America took place. As well, World War I occurred which prompted Lutheran bodies to enter into cooperative relationships. In an effort to eliminate confusion and overlapping programs and to give Lutheranism a united representation before the government in the emergency wartime situation, the Lutheran churches in 1917 created the Lutheran Commission for Soldiers' and Sailors' Welfare. This led, the following year, to the formation of the National Lutheran Council. The Synodical Conference, which by this time consisted of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods along with two smaller bodies, cooperated with the others to a limited degree but declined to participate in either organization.

The events of World War I and the post-war period are significant for our purposes because there emerged out of them a third approach to fellowship—the approach of the so-called “middle-way” churches. The new ULCA had essentially taken the fellowship stance of one of its antecedent bodies, the General Council. It regarded itself and the other Lutheran bodies as genuinely Lutheran because all now formally accepted the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. It therefore held that there could be fellowship among all Lutherans in North America on that basis. The Synodical Conference continued to hold that there must be agreement in doctrine and practice before there could be church fellowship. Such agreement it found only among its member bodies. Church fellowship was interpreted broadly to cover both worship-related activities and cooperation in other work of the church. Thus, Synodical Conference bodies had virtually no dealings with other Lutherans.

The “middle-way” Lutheran bodies, some of whom had left the Synodical Conference during the 1880s' controversy over the doctrine of predestination, now differentiated between various kinds of cooperation among the Lutheran bodies. They felt that in some areas of church life cooperation was permissible even if there was not complete theological agreement. In other areas cooperation could not take place because it would compromise one's witness to the truth. The former were termed *res externae*; the latter were termed *res internae*.

Since theological discussions in 1919 and 1920 had shown that there was not agreement in doctrine and practice between the “middle-way” bodies and the ULCA, the “middle-way” bodies insisted that the National Lutheran Council be limited in principle to cooperation in externals. However, these bodies found in the process of the discussion that among themselves there was general agreement. Thus, on the

basis of the 1925 Minneapolis Theses they formed the American Lutheran Conference in 1930. The purpose of the conference was to promote and to provide a vehicle for cooperation in *res internae*. In contrast to the National Lutheran Council which was to function in areas such as public relations, publicity and statistics, the American Lutheran Conference was to cooperate in home mission planning, Christian education, social service, student service, foreign missions, publication of Christian literature, and exchange of theological professors.

One has, then, after 1930, a situation where a number of Lutheran bodies, enjoying fellowship among themselves, cooperated with the ULCA in the National Lutheran Council in externals but felt that the ULCA was not genuinely Lutheran enough for them to have full church fellowship with it. The Synodical Conference bodies, on the other hand, looked at the American Lutheran Conference bodies and wondered how Lutheran they actually were. For one thing, by being part of the National Lutheran Council they were having fellowship with the ULCA. For another, even though the Minneapolis Theses sounded fairly good, neither the Norwegian Lutheran Church nor the other members in the American Lutheran Conference had repudiated the infamous *Opgjoer*, the agreement which had permitted two different views on predestination to stand as equally true in the doctrinal statement leading to the formation in 1917 of the Norwegian Lutheran Church. To show what it meant in its view to be genuinely Lutheran, the Missouri Synod formulated and in 1932 adopted its "Brief Statement." It was a document intended to be an internal touchstone, as well as one which would be used by the Missouri Synod in its fellowship discussions with other Lutherans.

IN THE WAKE OF WORLD WAR II

The third focus of attention must be the events surrounding World War II. By the time of World War II developments had taken place in two areas which affected the relationship between the "middle-way" bodies and the ULCA. One area was within the National Lutheran Council. As time went on the distinction between *res externae* and *res internae* became more and more difficult to make. A dimension of the council's activity which illustrated this was social welfare. It began with a survey by the council of inner mission needs and opportunities. The council was then asked to carry out certain tasks which the survey indicated were necessary, a very normal request since the council had developed important insights in the process of doing the survey. The final step was the formation of a Department of Welfare with an executive secretary in 1939. Coordination of home missions efforts and student service are other examples. By 1944 the National Lutheran Council had transcended the rule of functioning only in *res externae* to such an extent that a reorganization was called for. In the process the "middle-way" bodies had significantly shifted their fellowship stance.

The second area where developments had taken place which affected relationship between the "middle-way" bodies and the ULCA came out of theological discussions between the ALC and the ULCA. As a result of these discussions these two bodies accepted the Pittsburgh Agreement in 1940 upon the basis of which the ALC and subsequently all of the American Lutheran Conference bodies could say that sufficient agreement could be demonstrated among Lutherans in North America to make

inter-Lutheran fellowship possible. To accommodate those who still had reservations about some ULCA practices, the approach taken was that of selective fellowship. Thus, by the 1940s the fellowship stance of the American Lutheran Conference bodies was in practice essentially the same as that of the ULCA.

Around the beginning of World War II some significant developments also occurred within the Missouri Synod which related to fellowship relationships among Lutherans. While the ALC had its conversations with the ULCA in the 1930s, it also had meetings with the Missouri Synod. These talks had almost come to the point where the Missouri Synod was prepared to enter into fellowship with the ALC. The external reason for this not occurring was the Pittsburgh Agreement which the Missouri Synod felt to be not compatible with its own Brief Statement, which the ALC also accepted.

In the wake of World War II, however, the Missouri Synod recognized its responsibility for the massive tasks of providing physical relief to the mission fields orphaned by events in Europe and of providing for the spiritual needs of the armed forces personnel. At the so-called First Columbus Conference in 1941, Missouri Synod president, John W. Behnken, was in attendance and articulated a policy statement on his church's fellowship position. He indicated his genuine misgivings about participating in the calling of the meeting and said that his church could not cooperate "in any form in the disseminating of the Gospel." Before this can be done, he said, there must be agreement in such doctrines as the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, the doctrine of conversion, and the concept of the church. Thus, cooperation must be confined to "externals" such as physical relief to orphaned missionaries and work among soldiers and sailors.² Both the statement of Behnken and the involvement of the Missouri Synod during and after the war gave evidence of a shift in emphasis. While the Missouri Synod did not eventually join the National Lutheran Council or the Lutheran World Federation—membership in both was strongly advocated from within the synod—the stance on fellowship was strangely reminiscent of the one earlier taken by the American Lutheran Conference bodies. Perhaps as indicative of a new openness on the part of Missouri as anything at the Columbus Conference was the fact that, for the first time since the 1880s, Missouri Synod representatives participated in prayer with other Lutherans.

On the Canadian scene this shift in position by the "middle-way" Lutheran bodies in the 1940s had the effect of allowing realignment of some ALC and ULCA parishes and of permitting cooperation in the area of the training of pastors in Saskatoon.

This shift in position by the Missouri Synod almost led to the formation in the late 1940s of a Canadian Lutheran Council which would have had the participation of the Missouri Synod districts in Canada. In the initial meeting to form a Canadian Lutheran Council, Canadian representatives of the various bodies had conceded to Missouri's request that the activities of the proposed council be restricted to cooperation in externals until fellowship had been achieved. However, the ULCA leadership in the U.S. had waited over two decades for the National Lutheran Council to transcend this restriction and to change its constitution to include such things as mission

2. George V. Schick, "The Columbus Conference and its Repercussions," *The Lutheran Witness* (13 May 1941): 168-69.

planning and joint work with university students. They would not therefore go along with the Canadian version of a Canadian Lutheran Council which would have reverted back to what the National Lutheran Council had been. On the success side of the ledger, the shift in emphasis did allow for Missouri Synod participation in Canadian Lutheran World Relief in 1946.

THE PERIOD OF THE '60s

As one approaches the 1960s another shift in emphasis regarding fellowship can be noted. After the Missouri Synod had pulled back from entering into fellowship with the ALC in the 1940s, it called for the joint preparation by the ALC and the Missouri Synod of one document so clearly written that there could be no misunderstanding. It wanted a document which was "Scriptural, clear, concise and unequivocal."³ Subsequent conversations eventually resulted in the Common Confession, Part I, which both ALC and Missouri Synod adopted in 1950. The Common Confession, Part II, was then drawn up to show how the contents of the thetical statements of Part I would express themselves in the life and corporate activity of the Church. After the ALC accepted Part II in 1953, it proceeded to move into union with the ELC and the UELC on the basis of the United Testimony of Faith and Life. Therefore, when the Missouri Synod took action on Part II, it approved it only as "a significant historical statement which may . . . serve our church for purposes of discussion and instruction."⁴

In spite of the fact that the Common Confession had been conveniently shelved and the fellowship question avoided, this document indicated a new approach to fellowship which would characterize the 1960s. While the Common Confession held that "teaching otherwise than the Word of God teaches" was disruptive of the church's unity, there was a strong emphasis on the primacy of the Gospel in fellowship discussions. "Agreement in the Gospel is fundamental to church fellowship," the document held, "for the Gospel constitutes the center from which all teachings of the Scriptures are to be viewed."⁵

When the fellowship talks were resumed in the 1960s between the Missouri Synod and the new ALC, agreement in the Gospel became the starting point in the discussions. In fact, this new emphasis eventually led not only to church fellowship but also to the Missouri Synod becoming a partner in the new councils in Canada and in the United States.

For the Missouri Synod this shift of emphasis was more drastic than for the ALC and more clearly documented. How did the shift take place? Around the time that the Common Confession was consigned to the status of "a significant historical statement" for discussion and instruction, the Missouri Synod requested a re-study of the question of fellowship, prayer fellowship and unionism. The faculties of the synod's two seminaries, who were assigned this task, selected and classified more than three hundred passages of the Scriptures which had a bearing on the fellowship question.

3. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, *Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947).

4. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, *Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 492.

5. Wolf, p. 424.

From these passages they concluded that the biblical concept of religious fellowship centred in the Triune God and that spiritual fellowship consisted fundamentally in communion with God. From this communion there was derived "that unique Christian fellowship" among people which expressed itself in all areas of their life. Pulpit and altar fellowship, prayer fellowship and unionism could be "properly understood and evaluated" only within the larger framework of Christian fellowship generally.⁶

A document, "Theology of Fellowship," was ultimately developed and formally adopted by the Missouri Synod for reference and guidance. It emphasized that Christians should consider church fellowship a normal thing in their relations with one another and should desire to extend it to others. While recognizing the warnings of the Scriptures to avoid persons, teachings, and actions injurious to Christian fellowship, the report cautioned against proceeding legalistically in judging the church practice of others.⁷

Significant for the shift in emphasis was the re-examination of certain Scripture passages. The 1932 Brief Statement cited Matthew 7:15,⁸ in support of discriminating between orthodox and heterodox church bodies. The Theology of Fellowship examined the concept of a false prophet and concluded that the church ought not to use this passage loosely, as if all erring Christians and perhaps erring churches were to be treated as false prophets, who are wolves in sheep's clothing. "This would be a serious error against the doctrine of the church," the document maintains, "because also *erring* Christians are *Christians*, and members of the body of Christ."

Similarly, 2 John 9,10⁹ was cited by the Brief Statement to show that church fellowship with adherents of false doctrine was "disobedience to God's command." The Theology of Fellowship pointed out that the passage was directed against docetists who denied that Christ was truly human. Its proper application was against those who attempted to overthrow the foundation of the Christian faith, particularly those who denied the incarnation of Christ.

Finally, the Brief Statement cited Romans 16:17¹⁰ to show that Christians who have strayed into heterodox church bodies are to leave them; and to show that church fellowship with adherents of false doctrine caused divisions in the church. Noting that this passage had figured prominently in past discussions on unionism, the Theology of Fellowship pointed out the context was concerned about strengthening

6. The Theology of Fellowship, A Report of the Faculties of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Seminary, Springfield, to the Praesidium of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod ([St. Louis]: Concordia Publishing House, [1958]), Preamble. This report became Part One of a longer document by the same name, adopted in 1965.

7. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, *Proceedings of the Forty-Sixth Regular Convention* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p. 284.

8. "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves," Matt. 7:15. The Theology of Fellowship cited the Scriptures in the translation of the King James version.

9. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed," 2 John 9,10.

10. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them," Rom. 16:17.

not disrupting fellowship. Those against whom this warning was directed disrupted fellowship in Christ, caused divisions and offenses, and went contrary to the Gospel. Because they attacked the church's foundation, Christians were to avoid them. A careful study of Romans 16:17,18, the document said, shows the importance of observing the distinction "between erring Christians, who must be instructed, and heretics, who attack the foundation of the church."¹¹

Also instructive in this regard is a comparative analysis of two studies on Article VII of the Augsburg Confession by professors of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. A 1947 essay examines the meaning of the *satis est* in Article VII. "The expression 'doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments' here manifestly stands for the entire evangelical teaching of Holy Scripture over against all man-made tradition . . ." the essay says. "These honest, rugged confessors of the divine truth aimed at complete unity in faith, or true doctrinal agreement."¹²

A second study in 1960 agrees that the doctrine of the Gospel is not essential doctrine in antithesis to expendable doctrines. "All valid doctrines are refractions of the one marvelous light; all valid teachings are reflections of the voice of the one Good Shepherd," it affirms. The unity of the church, however, is something which "both is and becomes. It is both a divinely given reality and an empirical reality in process of being attained." The essay does not fully answer the question which it poses, i.e., "What is enough for the true unity of the church?" Yet, while it cautions against "any merely quantitative simplification of the 'it is enough'," it cited the situation of the early church where "tensions were resolved, differences were borne, the errant were restored, and missions were carried on the basis of, and in the strength of, a common committal to the one Lord, a common obedience to the one Gospel, with all the simplicity and all the comprehensiveness implied in 'Lord' and 'Gospel'."¹³

This shift in emphasis in the approach to Lutheran unity meant that when talks began between the Missouri Synod and the new ALC the commissioners concluded that sufficient doctrinal statements existed and decided instead to "study the Lutheran Confessions in the light of the Holy Scriptures" to see whether the ALC and the Missouri Synod agreed on the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.¹⁴

Eventually the commissioners of the ALC and the Missouri Synod adopted three essays which reflected consensus sufficient for pulpit and altar fellowship. The first essay set forth "What Commitment to the 'Sola Gratia' of the Lutheran Confessions Involves." It sketched in broad outline the significance of the grace of God for the life

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11. "Theology of Fellowship," *Proceedings of the Forty-Sixth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, pp. 285-87; "A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States," *Doctrinal Declarations* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), p. 51.
 12. John Theodore Mueller, "Notes on the 'Satis Est' in Article VII of the Augustana," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 18 (June 1947): 401-10.
 13. Martin H. Franzmann, "A Lutheran Study of Church Unity," *Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Cooperation* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and New York: The National Lutheran Council, 1961), pp. 15-23.
 14. *Toward Fellowship, The Current Quest of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church for Altar and Pulpit Fellowship* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, p. 7.

of the church and pointed up the relevance of this central Lutheran teaching for the life and work of the contemporary church. The second essay, entitled "The Lutheran Confessions and the 'Sola Scriptura'," dealt with the Scriptures in the light of Lutheran Confessions. It demonstrated that the confessional commitment to the Scriptures is made from the perspective of the Gospel. The third essay on "The Lutheran Confessions and the Church," emphasized that the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments not only create and preserve the church but they were also the place where the unity of the church was to be found. In identifying lessons from the Lutheran Confessions for contemporary church unity, the third essay called for the testing of all articles of faith taught in the church "to determine whether they serve the pure preaching of the Gospel." Churches endeavouring to establish or preserve unity in the church should "apply themselves in love to a correction of errors that conflict with a pure proclamation of the Gospel" and "concern themselves with the cleansing of practices that endanger the purity of the Gospel message," the commissioners said.¹⁵

Suggested guidelines by the Missouri Synod in the practice of fellowship show the change in position on fellowship. They indicate that the synod should "treasure the fellowship in the Gospel and in the sacraments" which it enjoyed with sister churches and expressed through pulpit and altar fellowship; that it should work zealously for the extension of this fellowship through doctrinal discussions; that in doctrinal discussions Christians should pray for guidance and blessing. The synod should also recognize that, in necessary work where the faith and confession of the church are not compromised, the churches ought to cooperate willingly to the extent that the Word of God and conscience allow. In borderline cases, the person involved should act from faith and the brother should not judge. Finally, the synod should retain the principle that Scriptural practice is important for church fellowship. When church practice is in harmony with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, the church is edified. When it is a denial of the Gospel, the work of the church is undermined. However, the principle ought not be applied legalistically nor should laboured conclusions be used to prove certain practice against the Gospel.¹⁶

AFFIRMATION AND APPEAL

Talks on the Canadian scene must be seen against this backdrop of what was occurring south of the border on behalf of the whole of North American Lutheranism. In its meetings in 1960-1962 the Canadian commission seemed to be on the same track as the U.S. talks. Discussions focused on agreement on "The Gospel We Preach" and on the Sacraments. However, these talks did not take into account the Missouri Synod's concern for the organic interconnection of all doctrine. Thus, when the question was put following the discovery of agreement on the Gospel and the Sacraments, "Can we then immediately enter into full fellowship?" the Missouri Synod representatives in Canada raised concerns. Aside from the fact that the Canadian constituency could talk but could not ultimately act on its own in the matter of

15. *Essays*, p. 14.

16. "Toward Fellowship," *Proceedings of the Forty-Sixth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, pp. 288-89. Also published separately. References hereafter will be to the published form.

fellowship relationships, they felt there were still some problems to overcome. There had to be agreement in doctrine and practice. What would constitute agreement in doctrine and practice sufficient for pulpit and altar fellowship? Answers from church representatives varied and so a questionnaire was sent to all Lutheran congregations and ministers in Canada. The responses indicated the particular areas of concern to be the Scriptures, unionism, the lodge, and church ethics and piety. The shift in emphasis to an approach to fellowship had apparently not really taken place.

Regional sub-committees were set up in the areas of Saskatoon, Edmonton, Kit-chener and Winnipeg. A 1965 communique from the three church presidents purportedly based on these reported "remarkable agreement on the doctrine of the Scriptures" and the conviction that "differences are not insurmountable." On unionism they reported the finding that all recognize that "not all Christians are Lutheran" and agreement "that great care must be exercised in all ecumenical relationships so that our doctrinal position as Lutherans is not compromised." On the lodge, the communique said, "We all agree that lodge membership is not compatible with membership in the Christian Church but that we must have redemptive concern for all men, including lodge members." On church ethics and piety, the presidents expressed agreement that problems of this type did not derive from theological but at least partly from sociological factors.¹⁷

Actual consensus statements anticipated on these areas never materialized. The sub-committee on the Scriptures found that it could articulate points of agreement and disagreement but little more while it used the Missouri Synod's *Brief Statement* at its point of departure. However, when it picked up a Missouri Synod seminary statement on the Scriptures, which the ALC and LCA members were prepared to accept, the Missouri Synod Member of the sub-committee had serious reservations. The sub-committee on unionism never got around to meeting again. The sub-committee on the lodge felt that its members were in such fundamental disagreement on approaches to their task that it was a waste of time to meet. The sub-committee on church ethics and piety, which had never met in the first place and whose earlier report was the work of one member, regarded its work complete.

At this point the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships (JCILR), as it was now called, recognized that the approach being followed, which basically involved seeking agreement in specific areas without reference to the unity already discovered in the matter of the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, was not going to work. What was working, to all outward appearance, was the approach used by the ALC and the Missouri Synod in their fellowship talks. So, the theological work done by these latter commissioners and the approach used by them were borrowed by the JCILR. In fact, a Missouri Synod member of the U.S. commission attended a special meeting of the JCILR in 1970. The result was the *Affirmation and Appeal* document, submitted to the churches later that year, in which the JCILR indicated that the commissioners were convinced "that consensus sufficient for fellowship exists" and that the churches "should declare and practice altar and pulpit fellowship, delaying no longer than is required in order to follow orderly

17. Karl Hoffeld, Otto A. Olson, Jr., and Fred Schole, Memorandum to the Pastors of the Lutheran Churches in Canada, 10 September 1965, 1965 Inter-Lutheran Theological Discussions, LCIC Archives, Winnipeg. (Mimeographed.)

procedure in the churches.”¹⁸ The vote of the twenty-six commissioners, though overwhelming, was not unanimous. Two of the three Missouri Synod commissioners, one of whom had been on the earlier sub-committee on the lodge, cast negative votes.

Affirmation and Appeal did not ultimately achieve the purpose for which most of the commissioners had hoped. Procedural problems appeared, at first, to be the main reason why three-way fellowship could not be entered into. However, procedural problems only masked the real problem which was a fundamental disagreement on the question of what constitutes consensus sufficient for fellowship. The commission members had developed a sufficient trust level among themselves so that most of them could agree there was sufficient consensus for fellowship in the commission. But in the final analysis several Missouri Synod commissioners, besides the two who cast negative votes and many who were not on the commission, were not really prepared to accept the gauge for determining what constitutes consensus that was used both by the *Affirmation and Appeal* and the ALC/Missouri Synod talks on which it was patterned. This gauge was, “When churches establish pulpit and altar fellowship they acknowledge their oneness of faith and their agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel. Church bodies that have developed their separate traditions will always manifest certain diversities. Diversity . . . may exist without disrupting fellowship among our churches provided . . . [it] does not constitute a denial or contradiction of the Gospel.”¹⁹

To apply this gauge in a practical matter of the lodge membership issue the authors of *Affirmation and Appeal* borrowed liberally from the document *Toward Fellowship* which was published by the Missouri Synod in anticipation of fellowship with the ALC. That document noted a greater degree of laxity in pastoral concern by the ALC over lodge membership; but it pointed as well to the instances in the Missouri Synod where some had legalistically applied the recommended procedures while others had ignored the objectives and procedures. *Affirmation and Appeal* recommended application to the broader Canadian context of the principle set forth in *Toward Fellowship* that church bodies work together in resolving this problem “on the basis of the Gospel and in loving concern for those who are involved in the problem.” What was needed was that this problem be dealt with “in an evangelical, consistent, and also effective way.”²⁰

A similar approach was taken on the matter of unionism. *Affirmation and Appeal* acknowledged that the Missouri Synod normally applied strictly the principle that its altars and pulpits are for those with whom fellowship has been established, whereas the LCA relies more heavily on the judgment of its pastors in these matters. In resolving this question, *Toward Fellowship* was again used which counsels that “we must . . . operate with the Gospel and the standards which this Gospel sets for us.” If such involvements constitute “a denial or contradiction of the Gospel,” it is wrong and must be avoided; however, Christian love will cause us “to put the best construction

18. *Affirmation and Appeal* (Winnipeg: Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships, [1971]), p. 1.

19. “Joint Statement and Declaration of Representatives of The American Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches to their Respective Church Bodies,” *Essays* ([St. Louis]: Concordia Publishing House, [1967]), p. 16.

20. *Affirmation and Appeal*, pp. 16-17; see also *Toward Fellowship*, p. 20; *Essays*, p. 16.

on everything” until a uniform practice is found.²¹

If the question of the ordination of women had been discussed in the Canadian talks, the approach would probably have been that arrived at by a 1970 consultation sponsored by the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. The findings in brief of that consultation were: “Although the Gospel does not change, conditions do . . . The Church must periodically ask whether its practices give the fullest expression of the will of the Lord. In the past the Church has hesitated to ordain women because Scripture seemed to forbid it. Yet strict and literal enforcement of passages such as I Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:33-36 have never been applied. In practice churches have given several kinds of leadership functions to women. Hence, and in the light of further examination of the biblical material, the case both against and for ordination is found to be inconclusive. Among the Lutheran bodies, therefore, a variety of practices on this question ought not disrupt church fellowship.”²²

PRESENT SITUATION

Finally, a word about the current situation. The Missouri Synod broke fellowship with the ALC in 1981 and has had discussions with the ELCC on the subject of fellowship. While the Missouri Synod constituency negative to fellowship tends to return to the stance of the *Brief Statement* and to calling for agreement in doctrine and practice, most Missouri Synod theologians are, at least outwardly, maintaining the stance of the 1960s approach. Studies including *A Statement of Doctrinal Differences* and a *Bible Study on Fellowship* issued by the Missouri Synod in 1980 indicate this. The latter, in particular, shows virtually the same emphases as the Theology of Fellowship did in the 1960s, i.e., that unity is to be found in Christ and that unity is to result in fellowship among His people. But even *A Statement of Doctrinal Differences*, which is less irenic and supportive of fellowship, quotes the Missouri Synod concerns as “Gospel” concerns. Quoted with approval from a 1978 LC/USA document is the statement, “The LCMS representatives argue that a less-than-complete commitment to the Scriptures, an uncertainty about its truthfulness, a hesitancy or disagreement with regard to some of their contents, will endanger the proclamation of the Gospel.”²³

However, if the assessment of the ALC was accurate, i.e., that the LCMS emphasis on the Gospel in all its doctrinal articles “tends to reduce the Gospel to an extended set of doctrinal propositions”²⁴ then the Missouri Synod theologians have also returned to the earlier agreement in doctrine and practice approach to fellowship in different guise. Beneath the concern over fellowship is the fundamental concern, whether expressed or unexpressed, about what it means to have a genuinely Lutheran stance.

21. *Affirmation and Appeal*, pp. 17-18; see also *Toward Fellowship*, p. 21; *Essays*, p. 16.

22. Raymond Tiemeyer, *The Ordination of Women*, ([Minneapolis]: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), p. 8.

23. [The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod], *The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, A Statement of Doctrinal Differences* (1980), p. 13, quoting from *The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church* (Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., 1978), p. 9.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 20.