

# ON THIS ROCK

## Translations from the Ministry of The Reverend President Herman Amberg Preus (June 16, 1825–July 2, 1894)

After the publication of *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging* by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1979, which offered a sampling of the work of Ulrik Vilhelm Koren in English, work which I had headed up by invitation of former Bethany Lutheran College president B.W. Teigen, I began to work on material from the ministry of The Reverend President Herman Amberg Preus. He was first elected president at the 1862 Convention, succeeding Adolph Carl (A.C.) Preus [no relation]. He had been president of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America from 1862 until his death in 1894, thirty-two years, one-half the life time of that church body. From the materials available to me the following has resulted.

**Eighteen Presidential Addresses:** One of the synod president's responsibilities has always been the delivery of a President's Address at the opening of its conventions. The addresses speak in general to the theological positions to which the synod adheres and the addresses speak to specific issues of the time. Having all of Preus's addresses together here gives the reader-student a good view of the man he was, of the spirit which motivated him, and of the work he was given grace by his Lord to do during the years of his pilgrimage to heaven's eternal home. These addresses also define the synod of which Preus was president. There is no address to the 1867 convention because Preus was in Norway for reasons of health and also to deliver "Seven Lectures on the Religious Situation Among Norwegians in America," which in 1990 were offered in English translation by the Norwegian-American Historical Association under the title "*Vivacious Daughter*."

In separate files are **Twenty-five Sermons and Addresses**. In other separate files is the translated text of **Wisconsinism**, including a Glossary and Endnotes.

These three works are all the Preus material I have translated. If one can envision a single apt title for it all, it might well be **ON THIS ROCK**. As I worked through the material I was conscious always that it is *ON THIS ROCK* that Christ promises in Matthew 16:18 to build His Church. And I was conscious too that Preus was a pastor, not a professional theologian, not only a church administrator, who dealt with theology in abstract terms. He is thinking always of the people in the pews.

When possible quotes from Martin Luther are from the American Edition of *Luther's Works*. When Preus gives no hint of the source of his quotes, and where I see nothing I recognize, I try to translate Luther. Whatever emphases are in the texts are those of President Preus. Many of the footnotes are in the original texts. Where it has seemed helpful, I have added footnotes, and I freely concede that I may not have included all the footnotes a reader might wish were there. But I am assuming that readers of these translations are already quite familiar with the history of the church and do not need to be introduced to every name, date, place, etc. which are mentioned. Because he didn't, I have not given chapter and verse for every scripture reference President Preus makes. The translations were made from the annual synod reports.

The hard, painstaking, and pleasurable, work of turning some of Preus's, and other men's, work into English was done in my study as part of my preparation to preach, to teach and to do the work of an evangelist. For several years Pastor [now emeritus] M.E. Tweit assisted by reading several of the pieces critically and offering suggestions. They have not been made public due to the press of parish work. Since retiring I have returned to these pages, now stored in computer files, in order to refine the translations.

I suspect this is the largest body of Preus in English available in any form; if that is not the case, I, and others, would love to see more. In whatever form some of Preus's work is available it will provide source

material for anyone interested in his work—and in the church-scene of his times. They provide the context from which quotes can be drawn.

During the years that I was privileged to be pastor in two congregations President Preus helped to organize in 1851, St. Paul's in Lewiston Township, Columbia County, Wisconsin, just outside Portage, and Newport in Newport Township in the same county, just outside Wisconsin Dells, I visited Preus's grave behind the Spring Prairie church, a short distance north of Madison. Earlier in my ministry I had "succeeded" U.V. Koren as pastor in Winneshiek County, Iowa, and sometimes visited his grave at the Washington Prairie church. During his years of service in the West Koshkonong church in Dane County, Wisconsin, Jakob Aal Ottesen had been my family's pastor, baptizing among so many others, my maternal grandfather. Prior to Ottesen A.C. Preus, whose wife was God-mother to one of my great, great grandmothers, served the congregation. A great, great grandfather, Guldbrand Gulbrandson Holtan, was one of four deacons chosen to assist the Reverend J.W.C. Dietrichson back in 1844. And in Norway, in the 1840s another great, great-grandfather, Herbrand Knutson, was a leader in his community, taking the conservative, more-scriptural side of Hans Nielsen Hauge against the liberal side represented then by the State Church. I mention none of this in a spirit of boasting but simply to show that my life and my family roots—as is of course the case with so many persons—touch some of the pioneer pastors today's Evangelical Lutheran Synod numbers among its fathers. This might explain some of my interest, and my willingness to stick to it, so that words such as these might be yours to read now. I was anxious to learn how these pastors handled the Bible, what they said when they preached and wrote, praying that our Lord might make me at least an echo of them. I feel a debt to my brothers and sisters in Christ to share these fruits of my labors of love in His vineyard. May they edify and inspire. I believe no one can gain an accurate picture of the "old" Norwegian Synod, acquire a true "taste" of it, only by listing its Doctrinal Statements and engaging in apologetic and polemical exercises. We have to get into the pews and listen to the preaching, and sit in Synod Meetings year after year and listen to its presidents address it, and we have to read in their wholeness some of the articles which appeared in their publications. *Ære være Gud i det høieste!* Glory to God in the highest!

J. Herbert Larson, pastor-emeritus, Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Fischer, Texas

2003

# Table of Contents

6 <sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting .....	5
Rock River Church, Wisconsin	
June 10–17, 1863	
Second Special Synod Meeting .....	10
Perry Church, Dane County, Wisconsin	
June 8–16, 1864	
7 <sup>th</sup> Regular Convention .....	18
Highland Prairie Lutheran Church, Fillmore County, Minnesota	
June 14–22, 1865	
Third Special Synod Meeting .....	27
Gjerpen Church, Manitowoc County, Wisconsin	
June 20–28, 1866	
10 <sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting .....	34
Spring Grove Lutheran Church, Houston County, Minnesota	
June 19–27, 1869	
11 <sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting .....	42
South Prairie Lutheran Church, Lisbon Congregation, Kendall County, Illinois	
July 2–10, 1870	
12 <sup>th</sup> Regular Convention .....	48
East Painted Creek Lutheran Church, Allamakee County, Iowa	
June 22–29, 1871	
13 <sup>th</sup> Regular Convention .....	50
Scandinavia Lutheran Church, Waupaca County, Wisconsin	
June 26–July 4, 1872	
14 <sup>th</sup> Regular Convention .....	51
La Crosse, Wisconsin	
June 21–29, 1873	
15 <sup>th</sup> Regular Convention .....	52
Holden Lutheran Church, Goodhue County, Minnesota,	
June 13–21, 1874	
16 <sup>th</sup> Regular Convention .....	53
Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota	
June 12–20, 1875	
17 <sup>th</sup> Regular Convention .....	54
The Norwegian Lutheran Church, Decorah, Iowa	
June 17–25, 1876	
18 <sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting .....	57
West Koshkonong Lutheran Church, Dane County, Cottage Grove, Wisconsin	
May 30–June 5, 1878	
19 <sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting .....	60
Spring Grove Lutheran Church, Houston County, Minnesota	
May 25–June 1, 1881	
20 <sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting .....	66
Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota	
June 18–25, 1884	

21 <sup>st</sup> Regular Convention .....	68
Stoughton, Wisconsin	
June 3–9, 1887	
22 <sup>nd</sup> Regular Convention .....	76
Our Savior Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota	
June 4–11, 1890	
23 <sup>rd</sup> Regular Convention.....	79
Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, Chicago, Illinois	
June 16–23, 1893	

## 6th Regular Synod Meeting

Rock River Church, Wisconsin

June 10–17, 1863

Dear brethren in the faith and in the ministry! Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

The Lord is especially gracious in permitting us to gather here again during these so un-peaceful and warring times<sup>1</sup> in order to enjoy the blessings of brotherhood through mutual instruction, admonition, encouragement and strengthening. Surely the more we experience tribulation outwardly and are beset by anxiety inwardly, surely the more we pastors in the church in particular, who often feel weighted down by the heavy burden which rests upon our tired shoulders, receive grace to understand the responsibility of our holy office the more fully, will we thank the Lord for his undeserved grace that he promises us such refreshment and strengthening through the fellowship where he himself, the Lord, has promised to be present with his divine power, wisdom and grace, the more energetically will we also ask him to bless this our coming together in order to grant that we be firmly united in the same mind and the same judgment to speak the same thing so that there shall not be division among us, so that we do nothing out of strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind each esteem the other better than ourselves. (1 Co. 1:10; Ph. 2:3.) Yes, may our merciful God grant that in everything we think and say and do, we may seek the glory of God alone in the building up of congregations and that we do only the Lord's will! May he hinder every evil counsel and ungodly deed which are the will of the devil, the world and our flesh by which the kingdom of God is hindered from coming to us, and on the other hand may he strengthen and preserve us in the Word and in faith until we die! Amen!

It is incumbent upon me, dear brethren, as it was on my predecessor,<sup>2</sup> to report to you on the state of our church body! When I comply with this duty now as well as I am able, I believe that the short time in which the presidency has been entrusted to me, together with the many other duties of my Call, and my lack of experience and desired ability, must all serve as an excuse for my knowledge and presentation of the condition of our synod being neither as comprehensive nor exhaustive as could be desired.

When we met last year we felt here and there in our church body the convulsive spasms which also made their appearance everywhere as aftershocks where the generating and regenerating powers manifest a special effect. As in a natural birth things often seem to hover between life and death, so surely not here where God has performed his work of grace among us, could he who has the power of death, the prince of darkness and lies, be missing, as little as he was mistaken about them among us who many times feared that Satan should have gained the upper hand and retained the field of battle with his lies. But, praise God, it did not happen as we feared. God let his work prosper among us as a blessing far beyond our expectation! Fortunately the spirit of lies succeeded in thus binding us neither in the controversy over slavery nor Sunday, hence the Fourth and the Third Commandments, so that on the one hand we confused spiritual liberty which consists precisely in this, that man, freed from the power of sin has the will and the desire to fulfill the will of the Lord revealed in the Word, with the carnal freedom with which the spirit of man in our days in particular urges a worship of self, or, that on the other hand we let ourselves be deprived of our Christian liberty which Christ has earned for us with his blood, and let ourselves be made slaves of men through the commandments and ordinances of men. Through the controversy everyone learned to treasure our precious gem, *Christian liberty*, more and more, and learned in the same degree to understand that free children of Christ are slaves of Christ, who are submissive to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. Many people who did not grasp the precise point of the controversy or its truly great importance because of meager knowledge of the Word of God, but who were, however, worried in their misguided conscience, calmed down again, even if they did not understand fully. Finally, also those people whom the devil has wanted to use as his servants to fight against the truth willingly or unwillingly, and who have frightened its

<sup>1</sup> The Civil War, The War Between The States, was raging during this time.

<sup>2</sup> Pastor Adolph Carl (A.C.) Preus; no relation to President Herman Amberg Preus.

witnesses, have been silenced with their open attacks and ridicule, because the truth was mighty for them with or against their will; they have had to bow before its authority.

So we can say that as far as we can tell the worst aftershocks are passed, and as mothers who forget all the pains they have gone through, so can we now rejoice more calmly at the proofs of God's grace and the power of his Word which little by little he is allowing us to see here and there, because when we ask, "Why has all this happened?" the answer is: "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (Ps. 118:23), and through *the Word* which is a life-creating seed, and even life and spirit, *he* has done all things, because we can only blush.

But even if our Lord has thus far brought this controversy in our church body to a blessed outcome, our battle, dear brethren, is, however, not over, our enemy is not resting! Surely it is obvious how the Lord has blessed the cause of his Gospel among us, and not to praise the Lord for it would be nothing less than rank ingratitude. The writings of Luther, the dear father of our church, have found a wide distribution in many of our congregations, while many of their readers have had to confess openly how they acted earlier when they imagined that they were well at home in Luther's writings and in Lutheran doctrine. Thus Luther's simple and popular, powerful and clear sermons on the Gospel have now made it precious to them and the Lutheran Church dear to them because Luther's writings have revealed this pure Gospel to their eyes so that they see that it is not little squabbles which we have with the different sects and church bodies but that it is in the chief point of the doctrine of our salvation, justification by faith alone, that the Lutheran Church distinguishes itself from all the other church bodies and that it is around the pure Gospel, of which they want to deprive us, that the controversy between them and us revolves. There is therefore also in several congregations a greater desire for the pure, unadulterated milk of the Gospel, a greater ability to test the spirits whether they are of God, not to allow oneself to be satisfied with a well-written moralizing address but neither with an emotional gushing forth in which Law and Gospel, faith and works, justification and sanctification are mingled with each other in the greatest confusion to the harm of unrepentant souls. People expect of the preacher that he shall be a shepherd and caretaker of souls who drives and prods to Christ with the Law and feeds and nourishes with the Gospel.

But people will not tolerate his using the Law—not to say the Gospel—to keep poor sinners away from Christ. But together with this a sharp stimulus is also given us preachers to apply our time and effort toward the preparation of the sermon and to seeking his help and grace unceasingly here because he who has redeemed souls with his blood really wants to make us his servants capable of preaching the Word of Reconciliation.

In the following paragraphs President Preus reports on the progress of various aspects of the synod's work. God blessed its teacher training institution at Luther College, Decorah, IA beyond "our most exaggerated expectations."

He reports that the synod's manpower needs are being met by the ordination of several men. He asks the synod to praise God also for this evidence of his mercy and asks the Lord's blessing upon their work.

He expresses thanks that the Lord has again brought three pastors back into the Synod who had left earlier. He reports that the reconciliation has been accomplished on the basis of agreement in doctrine, not on the basis of a modern-day type: simply forgiving and forgetting.

You see here then that I have mentioned to the esteemed synod some of the most obvious proofs of grace from the Lord toward our church body in the course of the last year. But, as I said, it has not happened in order that we are to settle down to peace and rest after the battle is over. Much rather therefore has the Lord shown us such exceedingly great and varied grace in order that our hearts should be filled with sincere thanks to him for his rich spiritual blessing and be firmly convinced of his gracious presence in the future and in order that we should be inflamed to even greater faithfulness and zeal in the Lord's work, to even greater zeal, courage and perseverance in the battle prescribed for us and to an even greater patience and joy in the trials appointed us. And if these last surely will not cease in the future either, so is the enemy with whom we have to fight not far away nor does he sleep. No, he is in the midst of our congregations. He works there with great craft and cunning. Only through a steady, earnest and dauntless fight in the armor of God can we be conquerors over him and retain the victory.

I have said above that my personal knowledge of our synod's congregations is neither comprehensive nor thorough. However, partly through personal experience during a shorter or longer period of time in about thirty-five different congregations for soon twelve years now, I believe that I have arrived at some knowledge of how conditions are in our church body so that I shall not be mistaken when I mention the following of the chief flaws from which our synod suffers and to which I want to direct the esteemed synod's special attention.

First of all is the neglect of and indifference toward and contempt for the Word of God publicly and privately in the church and in the homes for instruction for oneself as well as for the edifying of other people. We must thank God that in all our congregations we have a solid nucleus of diligent, and certainly also sincere churchgoers, but it must not be denied that overall our congregations are found to be full of people who seem to find it completely in order that they stay away from church once or twice for every time they appear there. Surely there is no shortage in some congregations of such people who regard it as rather superfluous to be in church at other times than when they want to go to Communion or they are to be sponsors. Surely the greater distance which many people lived from church in our fatherland can have contributed to our people having gotten into such a bad habit, the more it is up to us to bring to the people the strong recognition that it is a great sin and contempt for the Word of God to stay away from the divine services when a person is not really prevented from going. But unfortunately it's no better with the use of the Word of God in the homes. Even the most valuable family devotion is neglected in many places. The false Jewish-Reformed understanding of the Third Commandment has certainly contributed not little to the so prevalent opinion that it is all which one can expect of a Christian if he reads his postil with the texts for Sunday, so that it even awakens surprise when it is a question of the Word of God also being read in the families on Sundays. It follows of itself that where the father of the home neglects the opportunity for edification and instruction for himself, there it must fare poorly with the instruction of the children, not to speak of the servants. Were even our public instruction in a better condition than it is, it would, however, not be able to remedy the offence which is caused by parents neglecting their children's Christian instruction in this way. That things are in sorry shape in our synod where zeal and work for missions among the heathen are concerned will be made clear by the foregoing. It is, however, a matter of so great importance that I must earnestly lay it upon the synod's heart to work toward it so that it can improve also this.

This neglect of and contempt for the Word of God is so much more dangerous because in that way one lets go of the single most powerful means for quenching and hindering all other kinds of sin which are given free reign by this neglect. How pitiful things are in our synod also with neglect of the holy Sacrament of the Altar, a look at the parochial reports in our *Maanedstidende*<sup>3</sup> will convince everyone of.

In connection with this sin I must mention the neglect of brotherly admonition and encouragement. It is truly appalling how this duty of love is neglected among us, and it is another principal reason that in so many respects we are doing so poorly. All kinds of discordant and unkind talk which surely is a sin against the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment, and which again begets hatred, strife and quarreling, has taken the place of that Christian duty, yes, many times committed with the thought that one thereby rightly proves oneself as a zealous Christian who chastises sin earnestly. There can be no thought of any proper Christian discipline among us so long as we are doing so badly with brotherly admonition because according to Christ's words this is the first step in church discipline. If one overlooks this, church discipline will become political discipline, yes, often worse than that, pure arbitrariness and sin. Because of the importance of this matter I therefore want to lay on the synod's heart that if possible, as topics for discussion, it take up the doctrine of church discipline, even if people think we are finished with it. It is a matter which really can be discussed at two or three synod meetings. It will now be understood and made one's own so much better since at previous meetings we have gone through the doctrine of absolution and the public ministry.

The third principal sin which is apparent in our congregations is earthly concern, cares for the present, sordidness and covetousness, unbelief and mistrust of God's grace in Christ, and therefore also of his

<sup>3</sup> The Norwegian Synod's monthly publication from March 1855 until January 1874 when it became the weekly *Kirketidende*.

fatherly care are the basis for it. However, if the Lord helps us to firm confidence in his grace and joy in his Gospel and the good things promised in it then there is not going to be room in the heart for anxious concern, but it will be our pleasure and joy to offer our gifts to the Lord!

Finally, I will mention drunkenness and the dance, gambling and bundling<sup>4</sup> as especially common among the youth in several congregations. These sins have their root in the heart's thoughtlessness and unbelief and can rightly be counteracted and put to death only by a change of heart; but of course the greater the offense is which they cause both them who are in and those who are outside the church, the more zealous ought we be toward preventing such excesses and removing the offense. The fact that sins would not be prevalent among us if the two principal sins mentioned first were not so common, is obvious.

These are some of the enemies I spoke of which we have to combat in our midst. If it is going to happen, then it means that above all else the Word of God has to be held in respect and honor among us. Our synod's chief effort must therefore go toward obtaining several pastors, both for our overcrowded congregations and for the many that are without a pastor.

In the next paragraphs President Preus reports on efforts to secure one such pastor; that no new congregations have joined the synod since the previous convention. Two congregations in Illinois had deposed Pastor A.C. Preus because of his position on slavery and had gotten a pastor from the Augustana Synod to serve them. Pastor A.C. Preus, present at the convention, will be able to give a more complete account of the matter. He was now pastor of the Coon Prairie congregation in Wisconsin.

President Preus next addresses a matter which had caused public offense within the synod: the case of a congregation in Chicago holding a lottery. He reports with great joy that after meetings with the congregation it has humbly confessed its sin. An "Explanation" from the congregation is included by President Preus, signed by its pastor on its behalf, in which it confesses its sin, states that a congregation is to trust solely in the Lord to provide its needs through its preaching and teaching of the Word, and asks the synod's forgiveness. President Preus points to the incident as proof of Christian willingness to submit to the Word and as sure the congregation of its forgiveness.

In connection with the above President Preus says the synod has further cause to rejoice in the fact that Pastor A.C. Preus had also admitted his sin of wanting to return to Norway, because he had come over here with the intent of serving only a few years, thereby betraying a wrong attitude toward the doctrine of the Call, and also admitted his sin of having become a partaker in the Chicago congregation's sin by not protesting against it, though he could and should have. His "Explanation" is included in President Preus' Report. President Preus assures him of his forgiveness.

No essential change has occurred in our relations toward the church bodies of countrymen who are separated from us. The fact that the pastors of the Augustana Synod have finally agreed to our invitation to a joint conference and have decided to hold it immediately after the synod meeting, must revive our hope for the future.

Elling's<sup>5</sup> synod is being revealed more and more as a fanatic, unevangelical, law-oriented pharisaical sect, at any rate, in those areas. The Luther whom they have never known, they now want to consume in his own writings; yes, the rage of many people seems to increase everywhere as more of Luther's excellent writings come out among the people and his pure evangelical doctrine becomes better known. But it's no wonder, because which teacher distinguishes and condemns all manner of bondage to the Law and self-righteousness more sharply than Luther? May God look in grace upon the straying sheep and lead them to the path of his truth!

<sup>4</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines bundling as "to sleep in the same bed while fully clothed, a custom practiced by engaged couples in early New England."

<sup>5</sup> Elling Eielsen (1804–1883), a Norwegian layman who came to America ...

Our relationship with the German-Lutheran Missouri Synod is unchanged. The same love and sacrifice was shown us on their part in the past year as before, as well as in many other ways, as also through the instruction of our older students at their institutions. May God reward and bless them for it. Since their general synodical convention will be held in Fort Wayne this coming Fall, I believe our synod ought to elect a couple of delegates to it as a testimony of our agreement in the faith and as a small token of our love and respect.

President Preus goes on to list seven items for discussion at this convention of the Norwegian Synod, to report on several visitations he had conducted in congregations, as well as on conferences, etc. which he had attended, saying that such pastoral conferences are edifying both for the pastors who attend and the congregations which benefit from their attendance.

In closing, I have spoken a bit about my activity as the synod's president. I believe that it would be very helpful for the good of our church body if the president could have more time at his disposal for the carrying out of his office whose importance grows as the borders of our fellowship reach out and the number of pastors increases. Since a new election is now to occur, I hope it will not seem too indiscreet of me—since I know that several people will give me their vote—when I earnestly ask the synod not to let their choice fall upon me again this time, since I possess neither the necessary ability for this office nor can the congregations to which I am firmly committed, spare as much of my time and work as the justifiable care of the office demands.<sup>6</sup>

And now, dear brethren, let us go in Jesus' name to the beginning of the discussions. May the Lord lead them by his Spirit so that they may serve to the furtherance of his kingdom and the glory of his name! Amen! Spring Prairie parsonage, Wisconsin, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1863

<sup>6</sup> President Preus was reelected and continued to be until he died in office in 1894.

## Second Special Synod Meeting

Perry Church, Dane County, Wisconsin

June 8–16, 1864

Dear brothers in the Ministry and brethren in faith!

Again the Lord brings us together as brothers in this time of severe trials with which our country and people are being visited. Certainly we must thank God that thus far he has spared us from seeing our own soil ravaged, our fields destroyed by the wild hordes of war, and streams of blood coloring our lands.<sup>7</sup> We must thank him that peaceful conditions can prevail among us, but above all that the Lord's congregations can be edified in peace through the Word of the Lord in the manner ordained by him. However, there is certainly no one among us who is so selfish, so without feeling, so unrepentant, that the general misery does not go to his heart so that he himself suffers with his suffering people.

Now if we move on from considering the many kinds of outward wailing and distress and look for its deeper reason, and if we acknowledge that it was nothing other than the people's deep moral corruption, their indifference and contempt for the Lord and his Word, their pride and arrogance over toward God and people; if we must finally fear that the people's incessant hardness and impenitence by increasing the flood of sin would multiply the torments and in the future bring even greater misery over our land, then it were really our only comfort that we could say with the pious king Jehoshaphat: "We do not know what we should do, but our eyes are upon you, Lord!" (2 Chronicles 20:12.)

And if it were our congregations over which we cast our glance, we must confess with concern, yes, deep sorrow, that also here it is the same cancerous sore which is spreading, and threatening to consume our congregations' best vigor, that also here the chief evil is the spirit of arrogance which says, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us," (Ps. 2:3) which wants to allow the light of reason to counsel in matters of faith and to find fault with the revealed Word, which, despising divine and human authority, wants the perverted will to rule. If we walked into battle against this enemy, many times it seems in vain, yes, it seems as if the enemy's might is increasing during the battle, and then looking at our own strength we must often cry: "We do not know what we should do." You see, though, that it was our comfort that we could add in faith: "but our eyes are upon you, Lord!"

The Lord grants us now, brethren, in such times, during such struggle and tribulation, to assemble peaceably. O, let us then use the time both properly and diligently during our public meetings as well as private meetings to help each other so that our eyes always may be turned to the Lord, so that also when we have returned home, each to his congregation and sphere of activity, we there constantly may look upon him and teach and help others in obtaining the same thing.

But friends! How should we better be able to render each other such help than to build up each other in the doctrine of the one saving faith through mutual consultation and mutual instruction from the Word of God? For where is the Lord, so that we can turn our eyes to him? The apostle John says: "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." (Jo. 1:18.) But it is in the Word in which he has wrapped himself. The Gospel is his clothing in which he who is the express image of the Father reveals himself to us full of grace and truth, one God, for the salvation of many. Yes, the more we gaze at him there and learn to know his essence, attributes and works, yes, the more we thereby are strengthened in the true faith and pure doctrine, the more should we also learn to turn our eyes to him and look to his hand alone.

But I hear someone say: "It's the Gospel, doctrine, faith again! But what about the life, the life? What's the use of all this talk about doctrine and faith when the life remains just as wretched? We in the

<sup>7</sup> For the most part the synod's congregations were not in areas of the country where battles were fought during the Civil War/The War between the States.

Lutheran Church surely have the pure doctrine. What need is there then constantly to harp on that point? It were better that we worked on Christian life and that the synod took up this matter instead of discussing doctrinal questions over and over.”

Now I want to answer this first, that the one thing is to be done and the other is not to be neglected., that it certainly is pertinent that we explain the Law carefully so that people can know and understand what God actually demands in it , and so that we are busy with admonishing and encouraging them to every good work. But we are also to remember that the ointment of the Gospel does not dull, but on the contrary sharpens the sword of the Law, and that Christ on the cross is the sharpest preaching of repentance at the same time as it is the most blessed word of comfort.

Next, we all agree completely that both building and planting has to begin at the foundation, at the root. But now doctrine, and the doctrine of faith, are precisely the foundation from which the root of life, faith, springs forth which always bears fruit because that is its nature. Now if the proper Christian doctrine of faith is laid as the foundation, then from it will sprout the proper healthy root of life, the true Christian faith which will also show itself active in love which is the fulfilling of the Law.

But if the doctrines of faith are spoiled and distorted with human additions, opinions and views, then a false and more or less sickly faith will grow from such a foundation which will show itself in a life which will soon betray itself as a wretched feeling, as an arrogant, self-sufficient service of self-righteousness, as a miserable spiritless life of bondage full of self-devised sins, self-made torments and unchristian judgments.

Precisely because we are in earnest about working to develop a sound and healthy Christian life in our congregations so that everyone’s eyes can be turned to the Lord both through his work and during his life, in life and in death, precisely for these reasons do we want above all to listen very diligently and attentively to the Lord’s Word, to what he has to say to us, and to see as thoroughly and clearly as possible to acknowledge the doctrines of the Christian faith, that is, everything which God actually proclaims to us to believe unto salvation.

The Lord himself says also, “My words are spirit and life” (Jo. 6:63) and again, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth,” ( Ja. 1:18) and John says, “This is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (17:3). In these passages the Lord teaches us to get the relationship between his Word and life clear, namely that his Word is life and gives life and that the proper acknowledgement of the Lord and God revealed in the Word, exactly that, is true life.

Or, where really does life with all that is good, holy feelings and emotions, with its self-denial and sacrifice, its humility and patience, its love to God and men, where does it really come from except from the faith which appropriates to oneself the love of God to us and believes that God is both so incomprehensibly great that he has in Christ offered himself for us, and for the sake of Christ forgives us all our sins? Thus the apostle says also, “We love him, because he first loved us .” (1 Jo. 4:19.) But this faith which is the fountain of life in us from which streams of living water spring, is, of course, worked by the Spirit of God just through the Word as Paul teaches in Romans 10, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Verse 17.) How earnestly do not also the Lord and the apostles admonish us to take heed to the Word and to continue in the pure doctrine. Yes, in John’s Gospel the Lord sets this as a mark of those who are his true disciples! And Paul says in Galatians 1:8: “Cursed is he who preaches another gospel than that which we have preached to you.” How do the Lord and the apostles not warn throughout the entire Scriptures against false prophets and the leaven of false doctrine! Yes, how earnestly does not the apostle Paul admonish us in the epistles to the Corinthians and Philipians to have one mind and one opinion and to speak the same language, so that factions should not arise among us.

This matter is certainly of extreme importance and the continual cry “not doctrine but life” does not make it less important. I therefore regard it as useful to add a portion of the testimony of Luther, the dear father of our church, on this point. In his explanation of Genesis 9 he says:

In Scripture, eating and drinking means believing. .. As the food is, so is the eating, as the doctrine is, so is the faith. If the doctrine is correct, then there is also a correct faith. If it is false and corrupted then it is a false, dead faith. ... Love bears all things—also the most common rogues, just as Christ has borne us; but faith tolerates nothing, but says thus: That if people are living imperfectly, then one must have patience with them; but I have no patience with incorrect doctrine. Therefore, there is a great difference between doctrine and life. But doctrine is no joke; it must be pure and correct, but we are not as strict where the life is concerned ... The greatest weight lies on doctrine. When it is pure, then a person can bear all kinds of imperfections and weaknesses in life, so long as one remains with the doctrine and acknowledges that life should be otherwise. But where the doctrine is falsified there the life is doomed.

And in the explanation of Genesis 49 he says:

This is strange talk about doctrine; because not as much weight lies on the life. When a person keeps the doctrine pure, he can help with everything. ... Where a person preaches correctly, there the life often follows weakly, gradually and slowly; on the other hand, where one leads people astray with false doctrine, there it does not follow easily. Because where the doctrine is not correct there the life which guides itself according to the doctrine cannot be correct.

In his exposition of Galatians 5:10 Luther says:

Wherefore (as I often give warning) we must diligently discern between doctrine and life. Doctrine is heaven, life is earth. In life there is sin, error, uncleanness, and misery, mingled with vinegar, as the proverb says. There let charity wink, forbear, be beguiled, believe, hope, and suffer all things; there let forgiveness of sins prevail as much as may be, so that sin and error not be defended and maintained. But just as there is no error in doctrine, so it has no need of pardon. Wherefore there is no comparison between doctrine and life. One little point of doctrine is of more value than heaven and earth; and therefore we cannot stand having the least jot of it be corrupted. But we can very well wink at the offences and errors of life. For as also do daily err in life and conversation, yes, all the saints err; and this do they earnestly confess in the Lord's Prayer and in the articles of our faith. But our doctrine, by the grace of God, is pure; we have all the articles of our faith grounded upon the Holy Scripture. The devil would gladly corrupt and over-throw them. Therefore he assails us so craftily with this goodly argument, that we ought not offend against charity and the unity of the churches.

In a sermon on the day of John the Baptist he said:

I've said before that doctrine is one thing and life is another. That's why you do well to distinguish between them; because God does not place as much weight on life as he does on doctrine. That's why he readily lets his people stumble in life, of which we read many examples in Scripture; but where doctrine is concerned, then he doesn't let it fall a hair's breadth; because a wicked life is obviously not as harmful as a false teaching. A wicked life, namely, is not as harmful for someone else as it is for him who leads it; but false doctrine often misleads an entire country.

And again, in the exposition of Matthew's 6<sup>th</sup> chapter:

It is true that where teaching is not right, there it is impossible for life to be right and good either, since life must let itself be controlled and directed by teaching. *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 21, 131.

And in a sermon for the 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity Luther says:

When these doctrines are properly lodged within the heart, they will, first of all, induce people to glory in the goodness and grace of God, to love him with all their heart, and also to live to the honor of this merciful God. They will begin in true earnest to do all that they know to be pleasing to God; and to avoid all that they know to have been forbidden by him ... Therefore Christ so

earnestly admonishes us to adhere to these doctrines and not listen to anything contrary. *Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year*, by Martin Luther, translated from the German, Vol. II, Rock Island, IL, Lutheran Augustana Book Concern, 1871, p. 604.

In a sermon on Matthew 18 he says:

Because there is a great difference between doctrine and life. Because even if the life is wicked, a person can however still help when the doctrine is pure. Because then the light is still at hand according to which the errors can correct themselves. But when the light is gone then everything is lost; then a person is walking in the dark. Therefore the Lord laments not only the fact that they have lived that way but also the fact that some approved of it as right.

In his Table Talk Luther says:

Life is bad among us, as it is among the papists, but we don't fight about life and condemn the papists on that account. Wyclif and Hus didn't know this and attacked the papacy for its life. I don't scold myself into becoming good, but I fight over the Word and whether our adversaries teach it in its purity. ... This is my calling. Others have censured only life, but to treat doctrine is to strike at the most sensitive point, for surely the government and the ministry of the papists are bad. Once we've asserted this, it's easy to say and declare that the life is also bad.

When the Word remains pure, then life (even if there is something lacking in it) can be molded properly. Everything depends on the Word, and the pope has abolished the Word and created another one. With this I have won, and I have won nothing else than that I teach aright. Although we are better morally, this isn't anything to fight about. It's the teaching that breaks the pope's neck. *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 54, 110.

In the explanation of John 14 Luther says:

There is even not so great a need with them who otherwise are weak (as many among us are) and hitherto sinners, if they only remain with the pure doctrine about Christ and do not become sectarian spirits. Because the branch can well receive a scratch or break or another injury; but when it just remains on the vine and does not break off from it, then it can through the same be healed again. Thus also, even if a Christian in his life has fallen and has been injured, yet, when he does not begin on something new contrary to the doctrine, then he can again be helped when he again clings to Christ in repentance and faith, is not then condemned and cast away as a sinner; who according to his foolish understanding enters with another doctrine and sects, wants thereby to have right and the error not punished, or remains in an impenitent life and does not want to hold himself to Christ again.

Finally, Luther says in his exposition of John 6:

The disciples hear God's Word and the Master teaches God's Word; both must here yield themselves captive; they are both captive, bound to God's Word, to preach and hear it, neither dares depart to the right or the left. If now one steps out on the one side, he is false ... In doctrine is nothing false, there we are completely and altogether pure and truthful; the doctrine is upright, because it is a gift of God; but in the life something is still culpable and sinful, but it is something given to us and not imputed ... Thus for the Lord's sake we will be called pure, and we are that also in truth ... In the papacy we were weak saints with our good works. But when it henceforth will not go right with the life, then we must grovel, and even if we are weak saints in this life, so that there is lack, so that we do not fear, love and trust in God sufficiently, yet we do not, however, commit public vices, because we are not harlots, adulterers and usurers; and if we did fall into

them, then however we stand up again through God's Word, stop sinning; because God's Word is in itself clean, precious, pure and truth itself. There is no unrighteousness in it. <sup>8</sup>

This emphasis on life with the setting aside of and contempt for doctrine is by no means anything new. In Christ's time we have the Pharisees, in Luther's the papists. They rejected and despised the pure doctrine, urged works and placed man's salvation in them. And in more recent church history we have the Pietists' warning example before us. It was, that in their disordered times, they earnestly preached repentance and exhorted to conversion and faith too, but it was the sin of Pietism, that especially after Francke's <sup>9</sup> time it did not watch over the pure doctrine but regarded it as an adiaphoron, and contending for it as something to be rejected. In just this way it paved the way for the Rationalism, unionism and infidelity in the Lutheran Church of the times that followed.

Now when a person meets our zeal for the strengthening of doctrine and again and again shouts "life" and cites as the reason, that in our days doctrine is so well developed and established in the Lutheran Church and the acknowledgement of the pure doctrine so common that there is no danger on that score, and such zeal for it is out of place, then, I think that the fact that such a cry is so common is already testimony that pure doctrine is not as well established in the Lutheran Church as people claim. A look around at the divisions of the church which bears the name of Luther will also convince us of the fact that it is less than good in such regards and that just the frightful decay of the pure doctrine in the Lutheran Church at the present time must challenge us, as a part of this church, to throw ourselves into doctrine with all zeal and earnestness and seek by God's grace to come to the greatest possible clarity and fullness in the acknowledgement of it. Yes, I believe that the situation under which the Lord has placed our little church body here must challenge us to look upon it as a chief task for our church body to strive for such acknowledgement of and strengthening in the correct doctrine first of all, so that through the preservation and reception of the pure Word of God we and our descendants can be saved.

Next, so that with us, our descendants can learn to lead a truly sound Christian life, and finally so that with the pure Word of God preserved to us by grace, and the occasion which God might give, we also can lend a helping hand to others and show them who have fallen into error the right way to salvation.

If we look at the plight of doctrine in the church of our fatherland in this way, then it surely is apparent that each of us who loves our fatherland and its church must be inwardly grieved over it. The fact that various sects are gaining ground there is certainly testimony of how little people are established in the pure doctrine. Meanwhile it is again of course beneficial that a drainage channel is found for the spiritual impurities. Nor is anything else to be expected where the bonds of the state church are beginning to be loosened.

No, but the church at the various conferences and meetings, the disunity among the church's spokesmen is surely so striking that it must awaken the deepest concern when one considers that it is not merely indifferent things, adiaphora, or theological subtleties about which people are contending, but articles of faith, chief points of doctrine. At the meetings one finds the strongest contrasts and all similar crossings-over between them in doctrine represented and reflected and yet, at last, no unity. I need only refer to my discussions about lay-preaching and confession at the meeting in Drammen. Some, the Grundtvigians, bring, as is known, doctrines concerning the church, the ministry, ordination, baptism, conversion, original sin, which are obviously papistic and a large portion of the people fighting for the opposite views limp along with them in some points while they stand on the opposite side in other but equally dangerous errors. Others teach that only baptism alone or baptism in connection with the Word, in any case, not the Word alone, works regeneration.

<sup>8</sup> The understanding reader will discern that with his remarks quoted here, Dr. Luther by no means wants to teach us to be indifferent toward life. In these passages he emphasizes the great importance of doctrine also for life. Of how ardent the same Luther is that a sound, holy Christian life be led in the church of God and of how earnestly he chastises the manifestly ungodly as well as the self-righteous life, the reader will convince himself by reading through the sermons on the epistles in Luther's House Postil. (H.A.P.)

<sup>9</sup> August Herman Francke (1663–1727), German preacher

But worse than all these errors, though, is the way in which, as it appears, a large majority view the matter. People consider them as opinions and views to which people are entitled, which a person must, however, tolerate and respect even if one cannot agree with them, partly for the person's sake, partly on the basis of religious tolerance and liberality.

People aren't aware that in that way they draw a line through the church's formal principle, that they do not allow the Word of God to be taken as a clear word or truth which is certain in itself, but rather as an ambiguous, indistinct assertion which permits opposing interpretations and through whose explanation human teaching and subtlety decide the matter.

In the meantime we are firmly convinced that there are people to be found among the clergy and lay-people in our fatherland who simply hold fast to and confess the pure Lutheran doctrine in every point even if the silent in the land seldom let their testimony be heard at the larger public meetings and gatherings. Neither are we blind to how the virtually complete lack of doctrinal discipline is a result of the church's relation to the state as a state church and is felt sadly and painfully by many of its members. We must also acknowledge with thanks to God what has been done for the spread of the pure doctrine there merely through the publications of Luther's writings in more recent times. But at the same time we cannot conceal that the chief tendency which stands out distinctly in the church of our fathers is the indifferentism and false doctrine of the time, indifference for the pure truth. Surely, the more we feel, though, what we have to thank God for through the church of our fathers, and the more heartfelt the love is with which we its children who have emigrated, still embrace it, the more heartily will we also implore the Lord of the Church who always has thoughts of peace toward his Zion, that he will look in grace toward the church of our beloved fatherland and place watchmen there who blow undaunted on the trumpet and let it give a strong and distinct sound so that hosts may assemble themselves to the battle for the pure, unfalsified Word of truth.

Now if the situation with pure doctrine is so sorrowful in far-off little Norway, then we can know beforehand that it is not better in Germany, which is a larger country, and the former cradle of the Reformation, which even now exercises an extraordinary influence in spiritual respects on the remaining Lutheran churches, especially in Europe. It is really Germany's great professors who together are brewing the seductive drink which the smaller foreign nations are nipping at with great admiration and are getting drunk on.

We have there truth and lie combined, and with that the truth-denying principle of unionism in Prussia and most of the other states, together with its cousins, "Evangelical Alliance," "Protestant Church Day," "Gustav Adolph's Union," and whatever they are all called. We have there the papal chair in Breslau under the form of the Overconsistory or General Synod, and a carbon copy in New Ruppin under the cover of a Lutheran clergyman's gown. In Hannover we have a Lutheran people who force their consistory to concede to them the right to believe or not in the existence of the devil. I do not know how many theological schools are to be found there, but there is scarcely one where orthodox doctrine is proclaimed in every point. And of those which for the moment pass for the light of the Lutheran Church, its supporters and defenders, they have mostly supplanted God's Word, each with his pet idea with which they want to explain the doctrines set forth by Luther and the Reformers on the person of Christ, on the Word of God, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, regeneration, justification, the thousand year reign, church, ministry, church government, etc., which they say are still not understood correctly. This is not to mention Kahnis, Hengstenberg, Delitzch, Pestorius, Kuiafodt, Thomasius, Loehe, and several others, who all more or less offend against the doctrine of the Lutheran Church.

That, however, here also individual spokesmen confess and defend the pure doctrine in all points we will be no means deny, but it does, however, appear to be only a voice in the wilderness.

In Denmark the situation is such that one can be in doubt whether he can any longer hallow the so-called People's Church with the Lutheran name. Grundtvig plays the leading role here with his party. Even if he has not succeeded in getting the church to accept his "matchless discovery" along with the Symbols, yet he has, however, forced through the relaxing of the inhibition of leaving one's own parish priest as it concerns both the congregations and the pastors. If people can also get the doctrinal freedom which he and

his colleagues have worked so much for forced through, then one can surely say beforehand that the Danish People's Church will be a complete Babel. And against this attack stands as the champion, the old rationalistic Professor Clausen and the church's primate, Bishop Mortensen, whose speculative dogmatics gives more than enough testimony for this departure from our church's doctrine. Thus, the prospects for the Lutheran Church are truly sad in that country.

I know less about the condition of the Lutheran Church in Sweden. But the participation in the Gustav Adolph societies, the comments of leading men at the church meetings in Scandinavia, inclining toward the Baptists on the part of some and toward the Episcopal Church on the part of others, and, taken as a whole, for the high church tendency, suggests rather great confessional apathy.

If we come now to the so-called Lutheran Church here in this country, then we surely all know how the number of synods calling themselves Lutheran is legion but how also the name is the only Lutheran thing which many of them have. The General Synod, which embraces most of the so-called Lutheran synods, is manifestly a completely disunited church body, while the Iowa Synod represents the German pastor Loehe's theology, and the Buffalo Synod is going straight toward Rome on another path.

However, we must surely acknowledge with praise to God that there is, though, a German Lutheran synod, the Missouri Synod, which has not let itself be content with merely the Lutheran name but tirelessly has brought to life the testimony of the Lutheran fathers, undaunted, shown off the prayers of the Lutheran Church, the pure doctrine, zealously watched over its preservation within the synod's own bounds and fearlessly and openly as well as with scholarship defended it against opponents outside it. It has even thereby procured for itself a host of bitter enemies in our religiously indifferent time which is careless about the pure doctrine and doubtful about the truth. Thus, however, the commendation which it has before God that it has contended manfully for the one truth cannot thereby be deprived it. And when we rejoiced over the fraternal fellowship in which our little and young synod stands with this older and larger synod, then we are assured that with God's help it shall be, as it has been, of blessed importance for us in our striving to apprehend and to hold fast the pure doctrine and remain with the Word of the Lord.

I have given here a brief sketch of the state of doctrine in the Lutheran Church. I know that all these things are familiar facts, at any rate, for the my brethren in the ministry. I hope, however, that I will be pardoned for having taken up the esteemed assembly's time with it. I believed that by doing it I could better convince also my remaining fellow representatives of the fact that just the sad decay of pure doctrine in the Lutheran community of the present time must challenge us, in spite of all the cries, with all possible zeal and earnestness to strive after a deeper and more well-rounded understanding of and strengthening in the pure doctrine at our synod meetings and conferences as well as in our congregational meetings.

There is still one point which I cannot leave untouched here since it must powerfully stir us up to this zeal for doctrine. We in our synod are about to establish a theological school through whose labors our synod shall be supplied with shepherds and teachers in the future. Of what incalculable influence for the existence of the Lutheran Church among us in the future will it not now be that the pure doctrine as it is revealed in Scripture and confessed by our Lutheran fathers is proclaimed clearly, unobscured and unabridged through such a school? Extraordinarily much will depend on the men's orthodoxy, sincerity and conscientiousness, whom the Lord at various times will place as teachers and leaders at our school. But it is, however, really the prevailing spirit in the congregations which always will be not merely exerting powerful influence, but also the determinative influence. If this is of the truth then it will well watch over that the truth is also prevailing at the school and knows how to sweep out the errors and false tendencies which might creep in there. But if the congregations founder off into religious indifference and carelessness for pure doctrine and tolerate all kinds of errors and false tendencies in its bosom, then the synod's school cannot possibly remain untouched by it in the course of time, and preserve purity of doctrine. The false spirit of the church body will swarm up to the chair and make the school a synagogue of the devil. Also for this reason are we challenged to place importance on the appropriation and preservation of pure doctrine with all earnestness.

To work then, dear brothers! Important questions of doctrine lie before us for discussion, important for our Christian comprehension, important for the life of the church. But while we are discussing these

matters now during these days and at other opportunities, let us remember the apostle's words, "Knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies!" Therefore in humble acknowledgement of the fact that we can take nothing if it hasn't been given to us, let us always pray as we work that the Spirit of the Lord who is with his Word will enlighten and guide us into all truth! Let us always strive besides to conduct the discussions in love for the Lord and his Word above all else, but then also for the brethren so that we are faithful to the truth in love! Finally, in this work let us always keep in view that we can be rooted and grounded in love so that we may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses understanding, so that we can be filled with the fullness of God! Then shall we bear the best witness for it that pure doctrine is still the source of the true life, to the proper Christian life here on earth in faith and love, to eternal life hereafter in blessed contemplation.

But may he who can do exceeding abundantly more than we ask or think, according to the power which he works in us, bless this synod meeting and all its work! To him be glory in the church in Christ Jesus to all generations in all eternity! Amen.

## **7<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention**

### **Highland Prairie Lutheran Church, Fillmore County, Minnesota**

### **June 14–22, 1865**

Dear brethren in the faith and colleagues in the Ministry! May our merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant us all his Holy Spirit, and bless our meeting and our discussions, in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior! Amen.

After the passing of another year the Lord allows us to come together to consult with one another as brothers and to discuss such things which we have to believe can serve for the building up and the advancement of his church among us. This alone is a great blessing from him. But we are challenged to even greater heartfelt thanks and praise when we consider that in his mercy he has brought the disastrous war between our country's citizens so near to its close in the past year, so that now when peace has returned to the country as much as it has, we can gather with happier hearts and brighter hopes for the future of our beloved country.

However, here too we certainly have to hope with *fear and trembling* the more we seem to become aware of how little the discipline of the war has bowed people's hearts in true repentance and faith in the Lord our God.

However, *we* want to pray to him that he will let both these things serve us and our congregations for good so that we all might learn from them so much more sincerely to love him and his Word, and to trust in him alone, that we might learn to regard all things as filth and detrimental in order to win Christ and to be found in him, and finally that we might learn to offer ourselves willingly with all that we have to the glory of God and to the service of his church.

Among the several important matters which lie before the synod for discussion is also a proposal regarding the synodical constitution. Far too long have we felt the necessity of a close examination and a sweeping change of our synodical constitution taking place. The matter has been before several conventions but its discussion has been put off so that it could be prepared as thoroughly and carefully as possible. We have regarded it as a matter of no small importance, and therefore we have not wanted to be in too great a hurry, but we have tried to produce a piece of work which is as good as it can be by using the means which were at our disposal. The proposal was drafted by two special committees, by the pastoral conference when it met, and finally by the Church Council. Thus it lies before the synod now as it was adopted by the Church Council for discussion and preliminary approval, so that afterward it can be placed before the congregations for final adoption. In connection with this matter you will certainly also permit me briefly to call the assembly's attention to a related matter.

We do not belong to those people who expect the salvation of the church from the constitution-question, as it is called. We do not believe that a constitution can create or reform a congregation or a church body. The Spirit of God alone can do that through the Word of the Lord and the Sacraments. Through them he regenerates people's hearts and works and preserves faith in them. Through faith they have fellowship with Christ and are members of the communion of saints, the true body of Christ and the true church of Christ. All errors, aberrations and imperfections in the church can be corrected and set right only through the Word of God being taught purely and in its entirety, and received and preserved in sincere faith.

Therefore, when people, be it in state churches, people's churches, or independent churches, turn their eyes first and foremost to the constitution-question and expect a new, glorious future from the adoption of this or that constitution, then people only show in that way how far they have come away from the Word of God, the solid main pillar of the church.

This would certainly show up also in the constitution people might adopt. But even if it were possible that what people produced could not be improved upon, still it would, however, do no good if people trusted in the constitution instead of in the Word of God.

However, that in no way says that it is not important how a church body's constitution is put together. Just as a church body's errors, especially in the doctrines of God's Word about the church and the ministry, will show up in the principles as well as in the form of its constitution, so as a rule will a constitution based on false principles, be seen later to have a harmful effect on a church body's understanding and life.

On the other hand, since God is a God of order, so will his people also adopt their own ordinances or constitution carefully so that all things can be done in decency and order during their outward course here in the world. Now where the Word of God is proclaimed purely and where its proper authority is acknowledged both as a Means of Grace and as the highest rule and guide for faith and life, there, the above work will all have as its object that the order set down by God himself in his Word is not disturbed or interfered with and that the rules and regulations which are adopted do not conflict with the doctrines of faith revealed in the Word of God, and finally, that neither the use of the Lord's Means of Grace is restrained and restricted, but is promoted, and neither that the rights which God has given the congregations as well as their pastors in the Word are denied them, because that would also make the carrying out of the duties assigned them difficult, yes, perhaps made impossible.

Naturally this applies where believers unite in a congregation and adopt a constitution for it, but to an even greater degree, where several congregations join together to form what we call a church body, and accept a constitution for it. I say that it applies "to an even greater degree" in this latter instance because the forming of congregations is ordered and commanded by God himself in his Word, and therefore in the proper understanding of the word are an institution of the Lord, a work of the Lord, while the coming together of individual congregations into a larger church body, be it a state church or synods, is not commanded by God. Therefore the necessity of such joining together taking place, as well as also the form, constitution and expansion of such a church body must be dependent upon many external and internal circumstances, and above all, on what may be considered useful and helpful for the individual congregations as well as for the church of God on the whole.

The communion of God, the Christian Church, is, of course, properly speaking, invisible, since it consists of believers in whom the Holy Spirit has worked faith, which is invisible, through the Word. But it is, however, recognizable by the Word of God and the Sacraments which he has commanded are to be proclaimed and administered publicly. And just as God creates believers through these Means of Grace, so he gathers these believers around the public preaching ministry in an external congregation for mutual strengthening in the one saving faith and in the mutual confession of that faith. And just as it would be sin on the part of believers if they would not seek to establish and support the public preaching ministry among themselves, so it would also be sin if someone would not stay with this preaching ministry and the orthodox congregation which gathered around it. Because the Lord says, "He that hears you hears me; and he that despises you despises me," (Lk. 10:16) and again, "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is," (He. 10:25). I well dare suppose that most people among us agree on these things. But it is another matter with respect to the merging of several congregations into a larger church body, a synod, or the like. And it isn't merely with respect to what can be the best form and constitution for such an organization that more or less different opinions show up. No, it is with respect to the nature and essence of the organization as well of the meaning of the ordinances and regulations adopted by such an organization that views go in opposite extremes.

If we are not going to make a mistake which in the long run can have the most unhappy consequences for our congregations now that we are together to discuss a suitable ordinance or constitution for our church body, or if at any rate we are not going to waste our time in discussions and disputes which could be avoided, then it will be of the highest necessity that we recognize in the clearest possible way, and keep that importance in mind, which according to the Word of God must be ascribed both to the organization of the individual congregations which we call a synod and the regulations and ordinances adopted by it, together with finally also the shape of the church which it brings about.

That our understanding of these matters was extremely weak when our synod was founded fourteen years ago and the synodical constitution was prepared which we are now considering revising, we confess all too willingly. But neither was it so surprising.

Much rather, we have God to thank for it that it was as widely tolerated as it is, but even more, because he led us to a much more correct and clearer understanding also in these matters so that the flaws which certainly are to be found in our old constitution did not lead to the blunders which one might have expected, but rather was helpful toward guiding our practice according to one of the more correct principles. We of course all came over here, lay people as well as clergy, utterly inexperienced in such matters, and we came from our fatherland where the situation of the congregations' complete immaturity, no less than the situation of the church as a state church so naturally had to produce the greatest confusion in our understanding of precisely these points.

Now where the rights and the power which God has given his church in his Word, for example, the power of the keys, and with it the right to install and remove pastors, practice church discipline, stipulate ceremonies and the like, have been transferred to the prince and exercised by him down through the centuries partly through worldly advisors, partly through pastors and bishops as royal functionaries, as has readily been the case in the state churches; furthermore, where the prince, so far from recognizing his right to exercise only such authority as has been *turned over* to him by the congregations, which therefore must always have the right to take it back and to exercise it themselves, much rather, claims it as something which is due him according to divine right (*iure divino*) whether as the supreme bishop (*summus episcopus*) or as ruler; where now to this a legislative assembly, parliament or the like, which does not once need to confess the faith or belong to the congregations, has the power to give all kinds of laws and edicts for the congregations which also should be obeyed by them for God's sake pursuant to the Fourth Commandment, there it is very natural that the concepts of congregation, church and church government become confused, yes, entirely false.

Then when people break from the ties of the state church so that the life of the congregation can take shape and develop freely, the old notions will, however, assert themselves, and people will try as best they can to carry them over into the new, freer situation. Thus we find the error very widely spread that *the church* which is talked about in Scripture, the church which the Lord of the church calls his bride and to whom he gives the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the power and the rights which are connected with them, is not and cannot be the individual congregation but only a group and combination of them, be it now as a state church, people's church, or synod, which therefore alone is due the name "church." These churches of "the church," as they readily are called everywhere, are regarded then also as an institution and work of *the Lord*, commanded by the Lord as superior to the individual congregations, with a power and authority over them which is supposed to be given by the Lord himself. A congregation's refusal to accommodate itself to "the church," or its disobedience to the Word of God, is thought to be a breach of the Word commanded by God, yes, even as a defection from the orthodox church and the orthodox faith.

Over against this error it is of the highest importance to recognize that every congregation which has the Word of God and the Sacraments, even if it is ever so small, yes, even if there are only two or three believers, true children of God, to be found in it, that it is, however, for their sake who lie concealed in it as the true, invisible church, a church of God and the lawful holder of all the power and authority which Christ has earned for and has given to his church. This is altogether evident from Matthew 18:17–20.

Here the Lord says, "Tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto you as a heathen and a publican." How significant he thinks that is is evident from verses 19 and 20 where the Lord says, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." But when he also says now in verse 18, "Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," then, with that, he is giving every visible congregation the power of the keys.

In the next place, while as I said before, we must acknowledge that the forming of congregations is God's command and God's work, and voluntary submission to and joining an orthodox congregation,

everyone's absolute duty, thus on the other hand the individual congregation's joining a so-called church body is nowhere commanded or required in the Word of God. Not doing it would therefore not be a sin for the individual congregations which are involved, when circumstances and the needs of a congregation might persuade it not to join. Even less would it entail their exclusion from the Church of Christ. On the contrary, such congregations would each for themselves possess and properly be able to use the authority of the church which Christ has acquired for his entire church.

But at the same time as we assert the right and the authority of the individual congregation which is given it by Christ over against the false conception of the church, yet on the other hand we must watch ourselves carefully for a false independence which lays all the weight on the individual congregation's complete independence and regards the individual congregation's union every time and under any form—if not exactly sinful, yet, however, very dangerous and harmful, and at any rate unnecessary and useless. There are certainly not so few people round about in our congregations who thus are hardly able to see what use our synod is supposed to be for them, who perhaps even fear force and unauthorized authority on the synod's part, and who at any rate think that since God has not commanded the forming of synods and larger church bodies that every congregation also has complete freedom not to join such synods and that it can never commit any sin by not doing so. The lack of proper understanding of this point is then certainly also the reason that several congregations which agree with us in the faith, have not, however, yet joined our synod—to their own and other congregations' harm.

We have acknowledged that such a union is not expressly commanded in the Word of God and to that extent is a congregation's free choice where it must look at facts and circumstances in order to decide if such a union is profitable and useful for itself and for other congregations. If the latter is found to be the case under certain given circumstances then such a union is a duty for the congregations, because they, as little as individual Christians, should use the freedom given them according to their whim or fancy, but for that which is profitable. If they don't do it then they sin against love, cause offence and division, and hinder the building of the kingdom of Christ both among themselves and outside their circle in ever so many ways.

That now, in our circumstances such a union is beneficial, yes, relatively necessary, and therefore a duty for the individual congregations, is evident for the following reasons: 1) Our congregations of the Lutheran faith here are often located far from each other, surrounded by all kinds of sects and teachers of heretical doctrines. For strengthening in the orthodox faith, for preservation of unity in the pure confession as well as for mutual defense against false teachers, and warding off separatism and sectarianism, we are bound according to the Word of God. (Ep. 4:3–6; 1 Co. 1:10; Ro. 16:17.) In order to achieve all that, an outward union and joining together is very useful and necessary. 2) The greatest possible spreading of the Gospel and the kingdom of God in and outside our circle, as well as the promotion of all the means which can serve these ends, is our duty according to the Word of God. Singly, the congregations, especially the small ones, will be able to do hardly anything, or almost nothing for these ends in comparison with what they can be capable of doing through God's blessing when they combine their strengths and work together through the founding of institutions of learning, the publication of Bibles, hymnbooks, the Confessions, school books and religious books, and through home and foreign mission undertakings. 3) For the sound growth of the congregation it is of the highest importance that the Lord's teachings with respect to the preaching ministry be preserved so that therefore the public servant of the Word is not restricted in the rights and duties which are given him by the Lord. Likewise it is important that encroachment upon or trespassing on his part does not occur in the duties and rights granted the congregation. Owing to human weakness both things will so easily be able to occur where a congregation, with its pastor, stands so entirely alone. On the other hand the congregation's as well as the pastor's rights and duties will be safeguarded and preserved through the association with congregations of the same pure faith and confession. 4) The congregation as well as its pastor, as a rule, need supervision so that everything goes orderly according to the Word of God, just as they often can need counsel, encouragement and admonition. Only with difficulty, or hardly at all, will this be able to occur without several congregations uniting in order to render each other such help, since they can also set up a supervisory office of their own among themselves if they find it necessary and the gifts for it are available. 5) Gifts can often be found in one congregation which are lacking in another, and vice versa. It is the Lord's will that the many kinds of gifts should demonstrate themselves as widely as possible for the common good and to the edifying of the whole (1 Co. 12:4–31). This occurs best, and often only, by the congregations entering into a closer external union with each other.

6) Uniformity in liturgy, official acts, and the like, is certainly not necessary for preservation of unity of faith, but it is, however, often very useful toward edification, while a large diversity in such things can often cause the weak offence and cool love. But through the congregations' enthusiastic association and working together the greatest possible uniformity in official acts and liturgy can also be promoted. 7) And then if we add to this finally, that the apostolic church has already given us an example and a model for such a combining of and cooperation between the individual congregations (Ac. 15:1–31), then we conclude that only lack of the proper recognition, or willfulness, can keep congregations from such a uniting here where not only the wide distribution of the congregations over so large an area must incite them to it, but where also the independent stance of the congregations over toward the state, so far from placing obstacles in the way of such a voluntary submission and union, much more favors it and is in itself more of a reason which speaks for it—namely, so that their precious freedom shall not be misused by congregations through a false independence, yes, carnality.

However, even if we agree that a joining together of our individual congregations is useful, yes, necessary, and that failing to do it would expose the individual congregations to great danger and be a great hindrance and would harm the building up of God's kingdom in and outside our circle, yet it is, however, not said that we agree about the form which such a joining together ought to take, nor about the provisions and the regulations, or the constitution, as it is generally called, which ought to be adopted as regulatory for the church body. Here the widest range is revealed for the most opposite opinions and views. Al though now the greatest freedom must be preserved here for the congregations to give their joining together the form with which they might find themselves best served, yet it is, however, as I said before, their duty through the arrangements to follow such principles as agree thoroughly with the rule of the Word of God, and in their application see to it above all, first, that the pure faith and doctrine can find their expression and be preserved and furthered thereby, as well as in the next place that love can find its greatest possible exercise as a fruit of faith. History surely shows us the joining together of congregations in the most varying forms, all the way from the church-state, or papal church, and the various forms of state churches, to alliances and synods. These last also have the most diverse arrangements and constitutions.

We take it for granted that the joining together of congregations ought only take place by orthodox—we do not say those of identical belief—congregations. A merger like that American-Lutheran General Synod is a babel, just another organization of many disunited churches. But orthodox congregations also have to watch with the most extreme diligence that through their joining together and through their adopting a constitution for it, that while they do relinquish a portion of their freedom and independence voluntarily in love and with concern for their own as well as the common good, that they do not, however, transfer to the synod or to the joint-church such rights or such power which the Lord has not only entrusted to the congregations themselves, but whose exercise by themselves is the best guarantee for the preservation of the pure faith, for example, installing and removing pastors, practicing church discipline, and adopting hymnbooks and school books. But even less must congregations give to the joint-church or its officers such a power and authority that their decisions should *be binding law for the congregations by virtue of a divine authority* which should be due them as those who are over them according to the Fourth Commandment—even if their decisions do not conflict with the Word of God. Such a concession on the part of the congregations would make the synod a papacy which would be just as unchristian as the one which reigns in Rome. It would make the congregations slaves of men and would place a yoke upon them which would be heavier to bear and more difficult to remove than that which imprisons and oppresses them in the state churches.

The history of the church past and present shouts its warning! There is the papacy where the congregations, as is well known, are as good as deprived of all their rights. The church, as it is called, that is, the clergy, with the pope at the head, possesses them. As a worldly authority it demands unconditional obedience according to the Fourth Commandment.

The yoke of bondage which laid upon the congregations under the papacy, the Lord lifted through Luther, when as an angel of God this man brought the pure Gospel to light and taught believers to know the Christian liberty which Christ earned for them with his death, and the church learned to know the rights which the Lord of the church had given it in the power of the keys. And even where he agreed that certain of these rights were exercised by the worldly princes because of the congregations' plight, there, with all

the rest of the reformers, Luther is untiring in reminding both them and the congregations of the fact that they did not exercise this power as rulers but only because it was transferred to them by the congregations who possessed it as they who were looked upon as the congregations' first and leading members because of their power and position. The power which they possessed as rulers only gave them occasion and right to serve the congregations so much more as members of the congregation.

Note. In an opinion from the year 1536 which was also signed by Bugenhagen, Melanchthon, Jonas and Myconius Luther says:

The calling and electing of orthodox servants of the church is properly and primarily not the business of the civil authorities but of the church. When the civil authority is a believer and a member of the church, then he calls *not because he is a civil authority* but because he is a member of the church; because "my kingdom is not of this world" (Jo. 18:36).

In 1530 Luther writes to Melanchthon:

As *sovereign* a bishop may impose even less on the church since this would mean fundamentally to mix these two jurisdictions. Should he do it anyway, then he would really be a pseudo-bishop, and we, were we to give in to this, would likewise be guilty of this sacrilege. Against this godlessness and iniquity one must fight and die rather than give in. Of course I speak of the church as a church which has been separated from the political commonwealth. As *sovereign*, a bishop may impose upon subjects as *subjects* whatever seems appropriate to him as long as it is godly and permissible; the subjects are required to obey, since *under these circumstances they obey not as members of the church but as citizens*. For the church is a twofold person in one and the same man . . . It is the same as if Pomer forces his Wittenberg parish to abide by his house rule . . . It is the same as if the emperor ordered all people everywhere to fast, then the members of the church would obey him too, since *according to the flesh*, the church is under the emperor, but the church does *not obey as church*. *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 49, 385, 386.

Brenz writes on Matthew 18:17:

The fact that Christ says: Tell it to *the church* is not to be understood as a large church assembly in which the civil authority is present pursuant to his calling as such, upholding public discipline and decency, but it is to be understood as a small gathering in which the civil authority has no ranking as such, because no vocation has that kind of authority, but is regarded as a private person; because they who follow Christ form such an assembly.

Likewise the reformers were in earnest in cautioning against mixing secular and ecclesiastical power, which had been the cause of such irreparable harm just in the papacy. In the course of time, meanwhile, Luther's doctrine and warnings came to be forgotten and in most state churches a Caesaro-papism developed in which the Lord's church, far from being the bride of Christ, the mistress of the house to whom he has entrusted the keys in his absence, has had to be satisfied with occupying the position of a maid. In the hand of God this circumstance has certainly been beneficial for the congregations in many respects.

But where they were taught to see the Lord in their princes and in the royal servants appointed by them, who also had their authority from God in things pertaining solely to the church and to whom the congregations were unconditionally subjected just as in secular things for God's sake according to the Fourth Commandment, there such instruction and such regulations must drag the most ruinous consequences after themselves for the faith and life of the congregations who received such instruction and submitted to such regulations. Discouraging examples of this are not lacking.

The political situation in this country allows congregations a freedom for which they cannot thank God enough and in which they cannot use wisdom enough in order to use it properly for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Instead of state churches we see synods forming everywhere. But how many of them are not bringing the congregations under the yoke of bondage just through false teaching about church government, which lies heavily upon them in the papal church and in many state churches? To mention only the so-called Lutheran synods, since such doctrine is held very commonly in the General Synod through its recognized organs; however, in no synod do we know it carried through more in church ordinance and practice than in the German-Lutheran Buffalo Synod. The same is also the case in the Lutheran General Synod in Prussia, which, however, left the united state church a few years ago just for the preservation of the pure faith, but now itself has had to live to see that a large portion of its congregations, with their pastors, has left it because of the false doctrine and practice in church government which is brought by the synod's Consistory and is sanctioned by the synod. These are enough discouraging examples for us. However, they should not deter us from coming together in a synod and giving it a constitution, but keep us from following in their footsteps when we do it. Thus it is of the highest importance for us to recognize that doctrine concerning church government as basically false, and avoid it. On the other hand we must strive to make the correct doctrine which the Word of God gives us, also in this point, our own, as soon as possible so that through our work we can follow such principles, so that our synodical constitution can be a true blessing for our dear congregations.

This address is not the place to expound and establish this doctrine further. As in all that I have said so far I intend only to give hints which perhaps can do this assembly some good in the discussions which will follow. There is only one Lord, one King in the Church of Christ, namely, Christ. This King governs his church, that is, the believers, through the Word. This Word of God is the one law in church, but a law to which they submit themselves and which they follow in voluntary obedience, not by force but out of love for their King who is also their Savior. The Lord of the Church has instituted the preaching ministry for the proclamation of the Word, so that he himself can govern his church through the Word. Those who hold this office, be they now pastors, bishops, or other leaders of the church, have their power as far as the Word extends, and they govern by means of it, however, not with force, because people who are not willing to obey the Word except through outward force and dictatorial language, do not belong to the church of Christ: "my sheep hear my voice and follow it." (Jo. 10:27.)

Luther teaches the following about *church government*:

This is called the *ecclesiastical office*, or church, where one merely has the Word and governs with it in such a way that one does not exercise any force or compulsion, just as little as one seeks power or authority over others. But why is this? Because God wants to uphold and govern his church solely through his Word, and not through human power. They who are in ecclesiastical offices and have the pastoral office, have therefore the Word alone through which to serve others, and they should not make themselves lords. Therefore it applies equally much, whether a servant of the church is large or small, young or old, when he only *has the Word and teaches it properly*. Because it is only the Word to which one shall look. This is to govern, and not the person who teaches the Word ... But now if anyone dared ask, and say: "But what kind of a government can it be, and how can it exist where there is no head, but where all who are in office are equal and no one has more power or authority than the other?"

Because reason regards such an equality a nonentity and something harmful. On the contrary reason teaches that order is useful and good, where there is a head whom others must look to and be regulated by, and concludes from this: If it is going to go properly in the church, then it *must* also be this way there; otherwise there would be pure confusion; it's disorderly. This is the reason *which still holds many reasonable nice people captive*. Because even though they are enemies of the pope and see the manifest and indisputable offence, yet they, however, who think that *there must be an order in the government of the church* will not agree with them who tear such order asunder and who want to acknowledge neither the pope *nor others* as a head.

To such a question you are to learn to answer: It's true, reason does consider it to be a non-entity, the pope has *made* just such an order both in the church and in the civil government, where the one is higher, has more command and greater authority than the other. But here we have *our dear Lord Christ's express command*. Namely, in his kingdom, which is a *spiritual* kingdom, it is to be otherwise than in civil government; because everyone is to learn that in it no human authority or great appearance, *but only the Word of God is to apply and to govern in Christ's*

*kingdom*. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and others were not high priests, even though they really also have had an extremely important calling and greater gifts than the priests; still, they did not want to force anyone with power nor did they want more authority than other men, but the pious Jews have obeyed them without outward force and accepted their instruction because it was not their word, but God's Word. Likewise St. Paul had many excellent gifts, and the pious bishops such as Timothy, Titus and others looked to him and followed him, not because Paul had more authority and could compel them; but because the church everywhere, where it had seen the Word and the gifts of God, had been pious persons, had heard and accepted them, not for the sake of the person but for the Word's sake. Because everything depends on the Word, nothing on the person."

In another place Luther says:

This is the way it has to be in civil government; he who has the office must also have the power. But in the church it is called: *to serve and to suffer*, not to reign and to have calm and an easy life. He who wants to take this upon himself, does that. But he who does not want to, does not boast that he serves in Christ's kingdom.

And again: Hence it is the height of folly when they command that one shall believe the Church, the fathers, and the councils, though there be no word of God for it. It is not the church but the devil's apostles who command such things, for the church commands nothing unless it knows for certain that it is God's Word. As St. Peter puts it: "Whoever speaks, let him speak as the word of God" (1 Pe. 4:11). It will be a long time, however, before they can ever prove the decrees of the councils are God's word. Still more foolish is it when they assert that kings, princes, and the mass of mankind believe thus and so. My dear man, we are not baptized into kings, or princes, or even into the mass of mankind, but into Christ and God himself. Neither are we called kings, princes, or common folk, but Christians. No one shall or can command the soul unless he is able to show it the way to heaven; but this no man can do, only God alone. Therefore, in matters which concern the salvation of souls nothing but God's word shall be taught and accepted.

Again, consummate fools though they are, they must confess that they have no power over souls. For no human being can kill a soul or give it life, or conduct it to heaven or hell. If they will not take our word for it, Christ himself will attend to it strongly enough where he says in the tenth chapter of Matthew, "Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing that they can do; rather fear him who after he has killed the body, has power to condemn to hell." I think it is clear enough here that the soul is taken out of all human hands and is placed under the authority of God alone. *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 45,106.

Those who administer the different aspects of the preaching ministry, also in the leaders in the church, are not rulers and lords over the congregations, but servants. Christ says: "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But you shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that serves." (Lk. 2:25,26.)

Note, Luther says on Romans 12:8:

But notice how Paul does not turn all order upside down, because he does not place ruling first and at the head of the list, but lets *prophesying take the lead, next, serving, teaching, admonishing, distribution, and places ruling last of all among the common ministers*, namely, in sixth place. The Spirit has without doubt done it because of the coming abomination, when the devil should set up a sheer tyranny and worldly power in Christendom, as it is being practiced now, when ruling is the highest thing, and everything in Christendom must obey their tyranny and harshness, and all prophesying, service, teaching, admonition and giving must cease before this tyranny should suffer injury, so that it allowed itself to be led by prophesying, teaching and the other offices. *But we should know that nothing is higher than the Word of God, which office is above all offices; therefore the governing office is its servant*, which shall exhort and awaken it as a *servant* awakens his *lord* from sleep and reminds him of what belongs to his office, so that what Christ says in Luke 22:26 can be fulfilled: "He who wants to be the greatest among you, shall be your servant," and "the first shall be last." However, teachers and preachers should be the ones to

guide, obedient and following him, and also laying themselves down, so that all Christian work and ministry can be another's servant. In this what Paul teaches in this epistle also happens, that no one consider himself the best and exalt himself over others and think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but *let an office and a gift really be more noble than the others*, however, so that everyone *serves the other with it and is submissive*; thus the governing-office is the most insignificant, and yet all the others are submissive to it, and again it serves the others with its care and supervision. On the other hand, prophesying is the highest, and yet it follows that which governs.

Insofar as the congregations transfer to the synod and through it to its officers some right and authority to direct, then they do not have this office by divine right (*iure divino*) but by human right (*iure humano*); nor does their power reach further than the Word reaches, as it must always be exercised without outward force. In everything else its activity is essentially only advisory.

May the Lord allow us now during the work of these days always to have his Word in mind so that through our examination of the draft of the constitution under consideration, we may follow the fundamental rules laid down in his Word. Then we shall certainly be able to hope for the Lord's grace blessing our work, so that the synod can serve to the true benefit of our congregations with its constitution and other ordinances and be an effective means in the hand of God for the building up of our dear Lutheran Church among us and our posterity, to the glory of God and to the salvation of many souls! Amen in Jesus' name!

# **Third Special Synod Meeting**

## **Gjerpen Church, Manitowoc County, Wisconsin**

### **June 20–28, 1866**

In the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost! In Jesus Christ, dearly beloved brethren in the faith and in the Office of the Ministry!

May the Father of mercy, the eternal, bountiful God accompany us with the grace of his precious Holy Spirit so that we conduct our affairs in the unity of the Spirit on the ground of truth. May he bless them for the sake of Christ, to the edifying of his church and the glory of his name! Amen.

We of course are not able sufficiently to praise our God who permits us to gather again from far and near during our difficult work, struggles and trials in these wretched times<sup>10</sup> so that in the love of Christian brethren, through mutual instruction and admonition we can strengthen each other in the knowledge of the truly saving faith in the true God, encourage each other to faithful fulfillment of the work of our calling to a fearless battle against the enemies and to blameless patience during affliction and suffering, and to counsel with one another according to the Word of God as to what can serve to the edifying of our beloved Lutheran Zion which has been entrusted to us through the blood of Jesus for the peace and salvation of redeemed souls. Yes, the Lord be praised eternally also for his grace and mercy!

When I am now to present my annual report to our esteemed synod as one of the requirements of my office, I would like to accompany it with some words to you, dear brethren in Christ. I truly sense keenly my lack of ability, that I, the least among you, should be raised up as a teacher for such a gathering where so many people understand much better than I the things I have to say. However, you will not be offended but will receive the suggestions, the intimations and the remarks which I am able to make, as friends. They are, however, able to serve to awaken your attention to these points and to lead you to a more precise discussion of them.

We are told in Nehemiah how the servant of the Lord, moved by love to God and his people of whose misery he had heard, forsook the might and splendor of the court of King Artaxerxes and traveled to Jerusalem. He went there alone during the night and looked at the walls. Then he said to the Jews and the priests and the rulers, “You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king’s words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work “(2:17–18). But when the enemies, Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arabian heard him, they mocked and despised him. Then Nehemiah answered them and said, “The God in heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: But you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.” (2:19–20.) So they built, but Tobiah the Ammonite came and said, “Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.” (4:3.) Then Nehemiah cried, “Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: And cover not their iniquity.” (4:4.5.) So they built again and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work (4:6.) But when the enemies heard of it they “conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.” (4:8.)

But Nehemiah and those who worked prayed to God and kept watch against them day and night. Then Judah said, “The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.” (4:10.) But the adversaries said, “They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.” (4:11.)

<sup>10</sup> The time is now post-Civil War, the war having ended in 1865.

Then Nehemiah said to the rulers and to the people, “Be not afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.” (4:14.) And it came to pass that God brought the counsel of the adversaries to nought and they all returned again to the wall, every one to his work. And those who worked on the wall and those who carried burdens did their work with one hand and with the other they held weapons. So they did work and they changed not their clothes, but each had his weapon and water (4:15–23). And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews because the poor were oppressed. When Nehemiah heard their cry he became very angry and he disputed with the rulers and said, “It is not a good thing that you do: ought you not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?” (5:9.) And the people did according to the words of Nehemiah and returned what they had taken. But the adversaries tempted them with lies and false prophets and tried to make them afraid, but Nehemiah said, “Should a man such as I flee?” (6:11.) “So the wall was finished in the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days” (6:15). “And it came to pass that when the enemies heard of it, and all the heathen that were all about, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was done by our God” (6:16).

So far the account in Nehemiah!

I sat and thought about our Lutheran Church, how it was in the days now passed, in the golden era of the Reformation and in the centuries which followed. I thought of how it is now. Then I remembered this description by Nehemiah of the situation in Jerusalem and among its people, and it seemed to me to be a true picture of our Lutheran Zion. But it also contains so many words which were rich in instruction and comfort for me and especially suited to lead and strengthen the despondent heart to faithfulness and dauntlessness in the work of building our beloved Zion. That is why, brethren, I have directed your attention to it.

How beautifully situated, as a city on a hill, our Lutheran Zion was in the days of the Reformation, resplendent with its excellent confession, with the faith, testimony, struggle, and death for the truth, of its citizens. Securely, though always watchful, they dwelt there in the city which the Lord had built, protected by the walls which were as solid as rock—the pure, incomparable, glorious Confessions grounded solely in the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures. No enemy was able to scale those walls or tear them down because the men who stood behind them entertained no doubt of the truth and firmness of their confession. They looked upon them not as a human creation which they could confess for a while and later give up. No. They confessed because they believed, and in the power of faith they fought, died, and triumphed for their confession. And the core of this confession, that Jesus Christ, God and Man, by his suffering and death has atoned for all the world’s sin, overcome death, crushed Satan, burst hell asunder and by his resurrection has become the righteousness of everyone in the sight of God; how precious it was for their faith. It was their comfort, their power, their all. It was the iron gate through which the devil’s fiery darts could not pierce. The power of hell could not break through them.

And friends! Do I need to say what has happened to the glory of this our Zion in the two centuries since?

“Jerusalem lies waste, its walls are torn down and its gates are burned with fire.” Yes, it has happened to our Zion! Luther had foretold it. God’s chastisement came upon the people because of their sins, because of their despising of his Word. Many people openly forsook Zion, turned to Sinai and swore allegiance to the banner of Calvin. And of those who remained, a portion hardened into a dead orthodoxy. The confession was on the lips all right but faith was not in the heart. Therefore the walls were torn down for them and there was no iron gate against the power of hell. Another portion sickened into a false pietism’s false spirituality. They still had a good confession, but another spirit expressed it. They wanted to make themselves pious and blessed, not believing that in Christ they were that. Therefore their confession was not their wall and iron gate either, but they made a garment for themselves of human virtue with which, however, they could not hide their sin. A haughty, flippant rationalism continued the work of desolation. They laid the Confessions on the shelf as an ancient curiosity, mastered the Word of God according to the will-of-the-wisp of their reason, interpreted it as an ancient legend or myth, made Christ to be at best a highly enlightened man, an excellent moralist, and made man himself god. An impudent, presumptuous

unbelief completed the work. The Word of God was considered a delusion, an object of ridicule. Immortality, heaven, hell were sickly fantasies to them. Freedom, equality and fraternity were their trinity, and man, whom they wanted to exalt, they debased and made lower than the beasts. So our Lutheran Zion and its walls lay in ruins. Certainly, here and there still stood an Israelite in whom there was no guile, who also mourned the hurt of Joseph. Surely the voice of a John swelled from one place or another, but as a voice in the wilderness. However, it was the voice of the Lord who cried: Be converted! Such was the situation in Germany and it wasn't much better in Norway. But didn't the people then have on hand, at least among the people, orthodox books of doctrine and the most familiar hymns? Yes, in part, and for this the Lord of the Church be praised! because through them the people were preserved perhaps more than in any other country from sinking into the coarsest unbelief. The masses, however, were Christians out of habit. They were nominal Lutherans, because most often earnest souls were given to a sickly enthusiasm and emotion, or a subtle work-righteousness. And no wonder, because the pastors as a rule were dry moralists, gross or subtle rationalists. The doctrine of the trinity for the individual was still: God, immortality and works. The Confessions of the Lutheran Church were an unknown book to them as were all the writings of the fathers. A pastor who confessed Christ clearly, in simple, Christian faith, as the Son of God, as the Savior of the world, and that man becomes righteous and blessed by faith in him alone, was an oddity in those days as he was generally an object of ridicule and mocking. Yes, Zion laid desolate also in the land of our fathers!

However, there surely were those who mourned the hurt of Zion and lamented over the wound of Joseph, and the Lord heard their sighs. He was merciful toward his Zion and the cry of his faithful servant: "Be converted," was not preached in vain. The Lord did turn the hearts of the children to the fathers. He raised up more than one Ezra and Nehemiah, and they and the people began again to build the walls and the gates of Jerusalem. It was no longer so common a disgrace for a Christian to believe in Christ. Yes, people again began to tolerate that someone believed and preached the Gospel of Christ as Luther had done, as the power of God unto salvation to those who believe. And the work progressed here and there, even if slowly. The walls rose higher and higher into the air. Lutheran writings found greater distribution among the people. Our excellent Confessions and other excellent books of doctrine were rescued from oblivion, dusted off and read. A purer confession took over and people took more and more to letting Scripture be explained by Scripture. People distinguished the Law and the Gospel from each other and the latter was heard, even if still as an exception, yet purer, more fully and more powerfully from the pulpit and classroom.

But perhaps the work is completed now, the walls and the gates finished? Alas, unfortunately, there is still much to be done.

Look at Germany! What controversy there is over the true meaning of the Confessions. Look at the land of our fathers. Alas, how much there is of the old leaven! The most varied opinions, views and trends are set forth. With all their respect for the Word of God, yet it is still, however, for many people a strange thing which is not easy to comprehend. No one can really say for sure what its meaning is—even the simplest truths—no one can say for certain and everyone lets everyone have their own opinions and everyone is considered to be good Lutherans. On the other hand many people will not tolerate it when someone, certain of his faith, wants to hold to the Word which is written and to reject everything which is not written. This one has his favorite view, another another, and in order to hold his own in peace he looks the other way at the opinions of the other. Various kinds of Roman as well Reformed errors are written and published and most often still taken to be good Lutheran wares, but a real, thorough study of our Lutheran fathers' basic writings is still not common. And among the people there is still not only a great ignorance and unclarity even in the important matters of the faith, little real evangelical knowledge, and Christianity as a habit is still very prevalent. And where more earnestness actually is to be found, it does not have so much the restful, joyous sincere Lutheran character but rather the sickly Reformed tint, partly a sickly Methodism, partly an outward legalism.

And along with much that is good most of us have received something of this heritage also so that there were both the walls and the gates of the Lutheran Zion to build among us.

But how have we also now built? We have not boasted of ourselves nor do we have anything of which to boast; but glory be to God, it can, however, be said that we have begun. It was a great blessing of God that we met here in this country older brothers and fathers, old warriors who understood how to build the walls aright. <sup>11</sup> They were not Freemasons nor did they build with hay or straw, but as servants of God with solid, first-rate stones. We learned the art of building correctly from them and the Lord has allowed our work to move forward. We sought to be faithful to the old Lutheran theology and rightly to deepen our understanding of it, and to penetrate into the doctrine and confession of the fathers, the solid beds of ore and gold of these truths. Through discussion of the doctrines in various ways we sought to lead the congregations to the knowledge of the glory of our Lutheran Confessions, to awaken in them faith in the unfailling truth which saves, which God offers to all sinners in the Gospel, to rejoice in the Word of truth and pure doctrine, to a zeal for its unblemished preservation, and God be praised, the work has progressed among us! While a clearer knowledge of doctrine through public discussion, through controversy over absolution, the ministry, the Third Commandment, a constitution, and church discipline have advanced among us, we have at the same time, in the past year, completed the erection of our college<sup>12</sup> for the strengthening of our youth in the truth and for the training of servants of the Lord. There were enemies who looked scornfully upon our work. They said mockingly that foxes could tear down such walls. The foxes also came with their union devoid-of-truth, with their indifferentism and love without faith, with their “Yes” which was also “No,” and the wolves were their accomplices, but they were beaten back! However, God in heaven let us accomplish it and the work moved forward. But still there is much lacking before the walls are finished! Oh, what meager, unclear, often erroneous knowledge many people still have! What effort we must constantly put forth to cleanse it of old reformed Methodistic and pietistic leaven! What contempt and neglect of the blessed Word of God! What anxious desiring of the things of the world and the subsequent unwillingness to offer the good gifts of God for the spread and establishment of his kingdom—for schools, for the training of teachers, for missions both home and foreign, etc. On the other hand, how selfish many people are! What fear of man is often so great that many times people allow their brother to continue in sin rather than chastise and warn him so that he can be converted and be saved! What lack of understanding in bringing up children, what indifference toward leaving the children the best heritage, for procuring for them the costliest treasure for time and eternity: a true knowledge of God and the peace that goes with it! Yes, where shall I begin and where shall I end if I would count up the shortcomings and the sins?

We have the pure confession. The Word of God is preached correctly from our pulpits according to it. Our synod will not tolerate any departure from it, or that individual’s opinions should carry as much weight as the Word of God. It wants the Word of God to be the Word of God and the only word which carries weight. It has shown that this is its earnest desire. God be praised for this! Herein also lies our hope for a brighter future. However, what good does it do an individual to have the best confession on paper and the purest sermon about the cross from the pulpit? What help is that when the devil shoots his fiery darts at him, if his confession is not the confession of his heart and his faith is not that Jesus is his righteousness? No, when false prophets cunningly want to seduce you, when sin, death, and the devil attack you, then only do you have a solid wall for protection if your heart has acknowledged that our precious confession is the truth unto salvation which is worth living and dying for. When the powers of hell attack you, then you find no gate which holds out such attacks except that in spite of your sin, in spite of your conscience, law, death and the devil, you hold firmly to the Word of God and believe that Jesus has atoned for the sin of all the world and therefore also for yours. Believe that Jesus is your righteousness before God, and you are righteous in him. Brethren! The walls of our Lutheran Zion lie waste in many places. It behooves us to work and not become weary. It behooves us that at the synod meetings as well as in congregational meetings, from the pulpit and in the homes we urge doctrine—pure doctrine, by teaching, instruction and admonition, with the help of God, seek to awaken a proper knowledge, a true faith and an active love. And it is especially important that we urge the chief article of our faith that God justifies the unrighteous, that God, reconciled to all the world by the blood of Jesus, in the Gospel offers to everyone who hears it the forgiveness of sins out of undeserved grace and without setting up the slightest condition which we are supposed to fulfill, so that he who hears need only believe in his heart and be fully assured of it that it is the

<sup>11</sup> President Preus is referring to the Missouri Synod.

<sup>12</sup> Luther College, Decorah, Iowa

earnest desire and truth of God which he is hearing, so that he has forgiveness of sins and is saved, etc. It is important to present this costliest pearl among the articles of faith in all its purity, that sinners are justified by the grace of God through faith alone without the deeds of the law. If people will only let themselves be led to the proper knowledge in these matters, only let themselves be convinced in their heart to believe this truth, then, with the help of God, by faithful meditation upon the Word of God they will also acknowledge the other divine truths, in every case not despising or contending against the other truths which are still not acknowledged or grasped. Then willingness to sacrifice for the progress of the kingdom of God will not be lacking, or proper zeal and discretion to work for a brother's salvation through brotherly discipline and admonition, still less, lack in caring for their own children's welfare in time and eternity.

Yes, the more this article is attacked and ridiculed by the open and secret enemies of our church in our day, also by those who sail under a false Lutheran flag, the more important it is that we, as it were, rally ourselves around the most glorious banner of our faith and defend it to the shedding of blood.

We see how the impudent deniers of the Christian faith, unbelieving philosophers such as a Renan, Strauss, Schenkel<sup>13</sup> and others obviously are presently directing their chief assault against the Second Article by denying that Jesus Christ is God and Man, the Savior of the world. But it is actually in unconscious alliance with them that some of our enemies attack the same article, when instead of acknowledging that a complete atonement for the sin of all the world has occurred through the blood of Jesus and that therefore an unconditional, complete forgiveness of sins is offered to and bestowed upon all the world in the Gospel, they insist that apart from the blood and death of Jesus God has also placed another condition for his grace, namely, man's contrition, repentance, faith, good feelings and emotions, struggling and striving, etc., as something by which God is required and caused to bestow upon them what Jesus has earned, namely, the forgiveness of sins. But who does not see that by such teaching the complete atonement of Jesus is violated, that Jesus then is not our only Savior, nor everyone's Savior, but at best only half a Savior, because man gives himself the glory for the other half, or more correctly: since the Lord cannot share his glory with anyone, man makes himself his own Savior and deprives the Lord of his glory. Why not say in so many words: "We are not justified solely or not at all by faith, but also or solely by the deeds of the Law."

But let them form an alliance to come and strive against Jerusalem and to lead it astray. We will not cease from building because of it, but we will pray to our God as Nehemiah did, and while we are building we will keep watch against them day and night. (Ne. 4:6.)

Nor are they the only enemies with whom we have to contend.

There are the so-called Humanists; decent, enlightened people of good principles who are always talking about how the true welfare of mankind lies on their hearts. The enlightenment, progress and well-being of the people is their motto. By no means do they want to think of themselves as enemies of the Lord and of his Church. They claim to have the same objective as we, only they are somewhat different with regard to the interpretation of what that goal is in which this happiness consists and by what means it can be achieved. They think that in the church the old prejudices and a good deal of superstition are still making themselves felt in both regards. In their opinion man's happiness must consist in something more tangible and substantial than a belief in something which cannot be seen or a hope about a joy and blessedness which no one can feel here. Their chief effort is aimed at freeing people from an antiquated age of lack of self-knowledge and religious prejudices rising from gullibility and simplicity in conviction and ways of doing things, and on the other hand, to lead them to an awareness of man's natural nobility and innate, inalienable rights, to make them participate in the modern exalted ideas of equality, freedom and progress, and thus develop in them the so excellent spiritual gifts and powers which they possess by nature, so that they can become enlightened members of an enlightened century. Who does not see that these enemies of the church, who basically deny the natural corruption of man, redemption, the Word of God, etc., are not found only among them who talk so big outside the church—philosophers, writers, politicians, etc., but also constitute a substantial portion of many Christian sects and church bodies?

<sup>13</sup> Ernest Renan (1823–1892), French philosopher; David Friedrich Strauss, ###1874; Daniel Schenkel, ###1885.

There are also within and outside the boundaries of our Lutheran Zion a host of tender-hearted people, all of whom are kind and friendly, who because of sheer tender-heartedness can never say anything against anyone even when the honor of God and his precious truth call for it. They always use words such as love, peace, conciliation and unity, accusing those who rise up to the defense of the truth of a lack of love, pride and quarrelsomeness, and seeking to silence them by talking a great deal about Christ's conciliatory spirit, forbearance and love. Sometimes they are well-intentioned but injudicious Christians who do not bear in mind that Christ has said: "I am not come to send peace, but a sword."

Most often these people are lukewarm Christians whose Christianity is only in their mouths, who regard the fellowship of men as more important than the honor of God, who do not want to believe that the truth is something for which to contend, is worth all our sacrifice, even of life if it came to that. But they seem to imagine that Christ's reconciling power consists in this, that the truth must have equality with lies, light with darkness. We shall not believe that these enemies are less dangerous than those mentioned a minute ago, but since their numbers very likely are greater, I fear that they cause us the greater harm and hinder us more in our work than both we and they many times believe, just because they often show themselves in other matters as sincere Christians who ought to warn of offense. We should of course be careful about giving offense, but that many take it we can never avoid. However, it is also written: "Woe unto him from whom," etc.

We should be reminded here of the Word of the Lord: "He who is not with me is against me; he who does not gather, scatters." Certainly, we should be conciliatory toward everyone, willing to forgive every kind of personal injury or disgrace, but let us never, from fear or love of man, in fleshly wisdom be beguiled into surrendering the least of Christ's honor, a tittle of the truth of the Lord revealed in the Word!

Now when we look at all these enemies which we have, at their large numbers, their power and wealth, their wisdom, their cunning and falsehood, and on the other hand, at our own little group which lacks everything which the world considers important and which itself is so small and weak, yes, then fear and anxiety can easily enough grip us so that we say despondently with Judah: "The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall." And, oh, how often must we really not confess to our embarrassment that it has happened to us! However, brethren! "Be not afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives." Yes, is it not a shame that we shall fear the power of wretched man, even if it was of the devil, we who have a King who has rendered him powerless, who has the powers of death, who takes back their spirits, and, behold, they perish? O, let us, however, be reminded of the psalmist's words in the Second Psalm: "He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. I, I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion ... Ask of me, and I shall give you the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." No, brethren! We are very wealthy children of God, a very mighty host of the King. We have a very sure promise of victory that God will bring their counsel to naught, so that we should not be afraid in the face of our paltry enemies, and dispirited, give up the work. We will take up the building with renewed courage and strength and do as Nehemiah and his men: "They did their work with one hand, and held weapons with the other."

In the future let the enemies, yes, let our Lord find us united in this posture! Let us, in our congregations and in our homes, continue with instructing the young and the old, the adults and the children with this blessed doctrine! Let us with all earnestness encourage everyone to be zealous in every good work. And surely the wider God extends the borders of our tent in this land and adds to us great numbers of countrymen and brethren in the faith who surely are in need of so much more of the Bread of Life because very few of them perhaps have thought much about it—"Because man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"—so much the more let us apply ourselves to being able to create from the masses a host of young evangelists with a message of peace to the wretched who are corrupted by sin, but are redeemed souls by the blood of Jesus! Let us gladly offer our young men to the Lord's service and consider it to be a great honor and grace that with our prayers and earthly means we can help with the training and preparation for the Ministry of the Word and to the growth of the kingdom of God. It would not only be a scandal before our enemies, but we would commit a cruel sin and

an irreparable offense against our own and our children's souls if the classrooms in our newly-constructed college should become empty for lack of strong support on the part of the congregations. And on the other hand let us resist the enemies by girding our "loins with truth and putting on the breastplate of righteousness" and grasping the shield of faith with which we ward off all the other fiery darts! Let us strike about us on all sides with weapons that are not carnal but spiritual, with the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and not be afraid if there are thousands standing on our right and thousands on our left. It concerns the Most High, the glory of our God. It concerns the eternal salvation of our souls! Therefore, no compromise, no equality or peace with them except on the basis of truth, rather sacrificing life than yielding a foot's-breadth to them or giving up a tittle of the truth!

And I especially challenge you, my colleagues in the Ministry, along with myself, to all diligence and patience in the work, to zeal and fearlessness in the fight. Let us work while it is day, the night is coming when no one can work. Surely, we read of Nehemiah and all his servants and all his men, that none of them took off their garments so long as the work and the battle were going on, but each had his weapon and his water with him. Oh, let us then be watchful that we are not sluggish and lukewarm to the work, or from fear and anxiety become weak and retreat from the battle because of the love of ease or the world! For them it meant only the earthly Jerusalem but it means the heavenly for us.

We heard that while Nehemiah was building, he not only had a battle with enemies on the outside but also grief from those on the inside because "there was a great cry of the people and of the wives against their brethren the Jews." Alas, unfortunately, we also have such a grief and burden in our work and in our battle. How many of our youth live according to the manner of this world in vanity and evil lusts, how many of the adults in drunkenness and luxury or in covetousness and concern for a livelihood. And especially in this last sin a cancerous sore is in us which reveals itself in many kinds of unfairness in business and conduct, in practicing usury, in sinful speculations and transactions, which since they sprang out of unbelief, hinder and extinguish brotherly love. However, just as Nehemiah was not silent, but his wrath was sorely kindled and he said to them: "It is not a good thing that you do: ought you not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?" so in holy zeal, without respect for persons, should we also admonish them by the Law, very frankly show them the abominableness and the damnableness of their sin, reprove them for the shame of it, that they who were redeemed by the blood of Christ, will by their evil life cause the precious name of Jesus to be mocked among the heathen, and in that way sincerely admonish them not to continue in their sins but to repent and cease from them. And the Lord shall also bless such words and not let them return void. Then even if the enemies test us cunningly with lies and slander to make us afraid, we also answer: "Should a man such as I flee?" In spite of all secret and open opposition from the side of the enemy, and all sorrow and grief from our own, we will, however, in confidence in the Lord, with patience and hope in the grace of God, continue building the walls of our beloved Lutheran Zion until our dear Lord concludes our daily work and lets us enter into his rest. Then we shall see that our hope is not put to shame either, but the day will come when the walls and the gates of our Zion shall be completed and we shall rejoice. But "our enemies shall be cast down in their own eyes: for they shall perceive that this work was done by God."

Lord, during these discussions and deliberations let us also build faithfully upon the walls of our Lutheran Zion!

Yes, Lord, let it come to pass, and prosper the work of your servants for the sake of Jesus Christ!  
Amen!

# 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting

## Spring Grove Lutheran Church, Houston County, Minnesota

### June 19–27, 1869

In Christ, dearly beloved brethren in the faith and in the Ministry! Grace to you and peace from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit! Amen.

Again the Lord affords us the grace to be gathered for our mutual counseling at a time which has been more filled with controversy and trial for our church body than ever before. But the more our fellowship is disturbed by various and violent attacks from without, and the stronger doubt, despondency and strife from within may be, the more beneficial it is that we, the teachers and representatives who are gathered here, with thanks to God, use the opportunity which is here given us to become perfectly clear about our position, and thus in sincerity of heart and true fear of God seek light and strength from the Lord so that we all, genuinely bound together in firm confidence in God and the power of the truth, in genuine concern for the needs of the church, and earnest concern for its welfare and the salvation of souls, can here both resolve and carry out the business with one another, and later, each in our area, in the full armor of God, with true fidelity, zeal and understanding, do the Lord's work and fight the Lord's fight against this and our common enemies.

In every age the devil has always been in the habit of doubling his attack against the church of God and applying all kinds of cunning and craftiness to destroy it. It was so in the time of Christ and the apostles. It was so at the time of the Reformation.

What happened then on a greater scale, he is now attempting on a smaller scale against our current Lutheran church body. Ever since it was organized he has raised up enemies against it and caused divisions and controversies so that one struggle has followed the other. Yet it is especially in the later years that he has revealed his genuine hatred against our synod by liberally sowing the seed of discontent and dissension, stirring up many kinds of storms and gathering enemies of every stripe against it.

And yet it cannot surprise us when we consider what the grace of God has shown us by letting so many things and so much be cleared up for us, the truth become known clearly in so many points, pure and unadulterated, and the correct confession more and more finds its appropriate expression in ordinances and practice. Because the Word of God is and always remains the worst thorn in the devil's eye and the more firmly we hold to it, let it be our light and our guide, and hold the banner of the true confession high and aloft and follow it without fear and without hypocrisy, the more we can be certain that the devil will not leave us in peace but will attack us from every side. But many people are now becoming worried, hesitant and despondent over this and think that it is almost over for us and that the church's ship must surely perish in the storm, while the enemies on the other hand are gaining the upper hand because of the injuries and wounds which have happened to us because of the divisions and withdrawals which have occurred, and predict a hasty ruin for our little synod.

But is the danger really so great? Is the dissolution and ruin really so certain? Far from it, dear brethren! There is nothing to worry about if only Jesus is with us in the boat, that is, if we just hold fast to his Word and contend for the truth. Because "we can do all things for, but nothing against the truth," and, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Then we hear him calling to us, "Fear not, little flock, because it is your Father's will to give you the kingdom!" and comforting us with his, "Blessed are you when men mock and despise you and speak all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake; rejoice and be glad!" No, then we can trustingly sing with the fathers:

Well I know, that the Church of God shall sail,  
And as though lost, must oft the fear bewail  
The 'whelming waves will it sink;  
Yet I am glad, And by the faith am cheered,  
That in His Church's ship Jesus himself did step;

Crash 'gainst it, O, wind and waves,  
Beat with all your might its sides,  
It is never going to sink!

But if we are not to fear them who are able to kill the body but yet are unable to destroy soul and body in hell, yet on the other hand neither are we carelessly to let things go their way or presumptuously to disregard the enemy. Least of all should Zion's watchmen sleep and lie like dumb dogs. Neither should they let the trumpet give an unclear sound. No, we should much rather strive to become clear about both our own situation and position as a whole, and of the enemy, what he is up to, and his various ways and manner of fighting, so that equipped with the proper weapons we shall always be prepared for battle. Still further, as those who bring the Gospel of peace, always wanting peace on the basis of the truth and always striving with meekness to convince those who oppose, and to show as well, the proper Christian caution with simplicity.

Some hints and suggestions ought perhaps not be without benefit through such an examination and consideration.

We hear our enemies exulting that the walls of Zion are already broken down and our church body near its dissolution just as they surely are applying all their strength to bring about such a thing as quickly as possible. Now we certainly cannot hide the fact that Pastor Clausen's<sup>14</sup> withdrawal from our synod last year has been like a signal to the enemies of our church for an all-out offensive and has been the cause of individual congregation's withdrawals. But at the same time it can also be very beneficial, in the proper place, that we are reminded of God's great kindness toward our synod since its founding, and consider what great things he has accomplished among us. If we look first at the outward things, then it must be confessed to the laud and praise of the Lord that he has extended the cords of his tent far and wide among us.

When our synod was organized at the synod meeting at Koshkonong in 1853 it consisted of 38 congregations in three states, with 6 pastors, while the number of souls was estimated at 12,000. Now, after 16 years our synod consists of 122 congregations which have joined the synod, besides about 125 which are being served by pastors who belong to our synod. The number of pastors has grown to 47 and with those who will now request ordination, will reach 57. Add to this 5 professors, 2 of whom are ordained, one of whom serves a congregation. I cannot give a completely accurate account of the number of souls and confirmed members due in part to the delay of some pastors in sending in their parochial reports and partly because of gaps in those sent in. However, I believe it to be somewhere near correct when I estimate the number of souls at 70,000 and the confirmed members at about half that number. While the number of souls in our synod has increased six-fold over the years, the number of pastors has increased ten-fold. At that time our synod was confined to three states: Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa. Now the Lord has extended it to over twelve states and territories of the Union, namely, besides the three mentioned, also Minnesota, Michigan, Indiana, New York, New Jersey, Missouri, Kansas, Dakota and Texas. Instead of the regulations adopted by the synod at its organization, which were lacking in many basic principles, a synodical constitution has now been adopted on thoroughly Lutheran principles throughout, which surely does not leave out any essentials, except that its rules and regulations must be properly followed in life and practice.

More important, however, is the progress which has occurred with respect to our schools of higher learning. First and foremost, and that by the grace of God, we have been able to erect an excellent preparatory school for those who want to become pastors and teachers, at our Luther College in Decorah. Next, and that because of our association with the Missouri Synod and through its great goodwill and unselfish sacrifice, our students can receive their theological training at the excellent theological seminary in St. Louis. So long as God preserves these institutions and awakens in pious young men the desire to offer themselves for the Lord's service, a condition which is absolutely necessary for its continued existence, then our synod has abundant opportunities for getting the holy ministry established in new or vacant

<sup>14</sup> Claus Lauritz Clausen (1820–1892) was one of the Synod's organizers but later became one of its most persistent and bitter opponents.

congregations with capable, knowledgeable men well grounded also in the pure doctrine and evangelical confession.

Sixteen years ago our synod was young and inexperienced, completely alone in the midst of numerous sects in this land. Now the Lord has placed an older brother at our side in the dear Missouri Synod. We shall not forget the great guidance and strengthening that it has been to us with its deep insight into the Word of God and the doctrine of the fathers, its thorough knowledge of them and its faithful steadfastness to them, but will thank both God and it for it in spite of attack, mockery and derision of which they as well as we partake precisely because of our association. We can just as little measure the favorable influence this association has had on our synod's expansion as we can measure the influence of teachers who have graduated from our schools, but it meets us in the sermons and in the life of the congregations just as it has found its expression in the synod as well in the discussion of various questions of doctrine and in the newly adopted constitution. Anyone who can be blind to this and can exalt our former theological knowledge and church practice among us at the expense of our present situation must either lack the proper spiritual insight entirely or be dull and impaired to a high degree.

If we look back to earlier battles on various points of doctrine, the goal of our synod was to preserve the Word of God pure and unadulterated to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

As a Lutheran synod, as a member of the Lutheran Church which values the principles to which it wanted to hold firm and which wants to carry out the principles which the Lutheran Church has always held to steadfastly, our synod must not and cannot yield without yielding its orthodox character, no matter what the cost. These principles are that the written Word of God is the only, perfect and infallible source and rule for faith and doctrine, and that man is justified by grace alone for the sake of Jesus Christ. In order not to subvert, but to hold fast to these basic truths, our synod must always be prepared for battle, never tolerate any departure, but testify and fight against them whether they arise within the synod or try to intrude from the outside. And let us praise God, in spite of much unclarity and weakness within our own fellowship, yet little by little it is finding the right expressions for the confession of the pure doctrine and is giving truth the victory among us so that in every case the opponents have to be mute, even if they do not always acknowledge earlier errors and give truth glory. Within our fellowship we can say that these controverted questions have found a clear-cut resolution in agreement with the Word of God and the Confessions and that they no longer awaken unrest which is worth talking about. Individual congregations whose earlier development led them away from us have in part returned to the association of our synod, in part, come to a closer, more confident attitude toward us.

Finally, concerning the internal state of the congregations, which certainly leaves extremely much to desire, whether we look to the knowledge or to the life; yet—all things considered—we must say *:to us belongs confusion of face* but to the Lord all glory and praise, because he has done all things well. He has done great things among us and to this day has led our synod not so few steps forward through a steady, sound evangelical spirit, with greater confidence of faith and zeal, and with fewer mistakes and fewer weaknesses, promises our fellowship an even brighter future—surely not without conflict, but rich in victory.

Certainly our synod is more severely visited by trials now than ever before, caused in part by the violent attack of enemies on the outside, in part by the defection of individual congregations, and by controversies, discontent and mistrust within others. Certainly because of this, steady, sound development is hampered and obstacles lie in the way of several congregations developing such an activity as the good of the synod requires and which is proper for Christian congregations. But that confidence in our synod is still not as inconsiderable as our enemies like to wish it were and with their loud screaming would like to make us believe that it is, it seems to me that we have an eloquent testimony in the fact that precisely at this time an extremely large number of congregations most urgently desire pastors through our synod and almost entirely those who are trained at our own institutions. It would be especially unreasonable to accept that great spiritual need would drive them to this if they do have full confidence in our synod that the pastors they will obtain through it, also with God's assistance, will be found to be capable, faithful and conscientious pastors genuinely committed to the Lutheran Church and the faith.

But perhaps our synod has wavered from the Word of God and the Confessions of the church through the latest controversies occasioned by the Slavery, Sunday and Absolution questions, and entered upon another course because of which destruction threatens it?

No, God be praised, neither is that the case! We have in all these points held rigorously to the Word of God and proven to our opponents the correctness of our teachings. We have also proven from the Confessions of our church and from the writings of the fathers that our doctrine is nothing new but is the old Lutheran doctrine which the fathers have confessed. That we have not always been able to defend the truth as clearly, strikingly and powerfully as could have been desirable, yes, that blunders and frailties have also occurred on our part during the battle, that we are willing to acknowledge and to confess wherever it is pointed out. But we also believe that God has forgiven us such frailties for Jesus' sake.

He will not let his truth succumb because of them, or its defenders come to shame, or take his hand from our synod. He is faithful. Let us just see to it that we always be faithful to him and the truth. Then we have nothing to fear for our synod's existence from new attacks and disputes.

However, as I said, it can be profitable to discuss these individual doctrinal controversies more precisely and particularly to point out why it was necessary to us to enter into battle, even on such points of doctrine which in themselves are of no apparent importance for us, precisely in order to establish these two chief principles of Lutheran teaching.

The last controversy dealt especially with the question of whether or not slavery is a sinful practice. We have always acknowledged, and in practice in the congregations known, that this question in itself is not of importance *to us*, so that it made religious controversy necessary even if many persons were ignorant of or unclear in their grasp of what the Word of God teaches concerning it. This matter first became important for us when we realized that those who were opposing us were proceeding from principles that were directly opposed to evangelical doctrine, namely, from the standpoint of absolute innate human rights, the necessity of outward freedom, and similar propositions of the spirit of the times which have their basis precisely in this, that the complete culpability of sinful man, and loss of *all* right to *all* good, is not acknowledged, so that of necessity neither the doctrine of God's grace nor of Christ who is the sinful man's One and All, could be given its due. Our duty not to yield in this controversy became even clearer to us when the spokesmen for our opponents showed very plainly that in order to defend their position they did not hesitate to assail this basic principle about the Word of God as the only infallible and clear source for all faith and doctrine, namely, since they insisted that completely common and generally accepted words and expressions in the Bible should be taken in an uncommon and figurative sense even though the holy men of God themselves do not give the least indication that their words were to be understood otherwise than they read. Such a handling of the Word of God is the surest way to distortion and destruction of all divine truth, and even though the question in which such a manner of procedure is used is in itself of little importance for us, yet every sincere and orthodox Christian will see, however, that it concerns much more than a subordinate point of doctrine, much more than slavery and the like—that here the majesty of the Word of God is really at stake so that if we would be silent here, then the word of our Savior would apply to us, “Whoever is ashamed of me and my word in this faithless and sinful generation, of him shall also the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in his glory with the holy angels” (Mk. 8:38.)

In a somewhat similar manner this applies to the doctrinal controversy about Sunday. The connection which this doctrine has with the doctrine of justification by faith is clearly shown by the apostle Paul himself in the Epistle to the Galatians, chapter 4, where he says that those who think they can serve God by taking heed to days and months and times and years, and thus make the keeping of the Mosaic Law necessary for salvation, make themselves slaves of this world's weak and beggarly children's doctrines, so that Paul fears that he has perhaps labored in vain among them by preaching the Gospel. On the other hand, how this doctrinal controversy relates to the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures as the only infallible and clear rule for faith and life (the Scripture Principle), is easy to show when we ask from whence our opponents take their teaching that Sunday or another day is seen as necessary for salvation in lieu of the Sabbath, because when the Holy Scriptures do not contain a single word about it, then it is clear that those who advance this teaching do not take it from the Bible alone, while on the other hand, the Lutheran Church,

precisely because it does not acknowledge any other source of faith and doctrine than the Word of God in the Bible alone, so teaches of Sunday as we see in our words and in the Augsburg Confession.

The doctrinal controversy which in itself has been of the greatest importance and most striking significance for faith and life is obviously the Absolution Controversy. Because a doctrine is involved here which in essence actually concerns the basis of our eternal salvation. It is unnecessary to expand on the connection of this question with the other two I mentioned here, as long as we keep in mind that the controversy revolves around to what extent the Gospel in its essence and in its content is the same over toward all people, both unbelievers and believers: a message of absolution and the forgiveness of sins to everyone who hears it, or whether the essence and content of the Gospel are different: so that it should be word of absolution to believers but not to unbelievers, inasmuch as everyone who hears it is either a believer or an unbeliever.

Concerning the so-called “School Question,” or what the relation between our Christian schools and the public district schools is, this is obviously not a question of doctrine but a question which has to do with the Christian life. Its proper resolution will therefore depend upon Christian zeal in seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and upon Christian wisdom in finding the right means for the advancement of the kingdom among us.

Besides this school controversy a new controversy has arisen in more recent times, namely, whether our Lutheran synod should seek higher education and a more general enlightenment for the broader education of the youth primarily by uniting with those who believe otherwise or those who do not believe, and by using their universities and academies which are either indifferent and religionless with respect to Christianity and religion, or in the service of an erroneous confession, or whether we as Lutherans ought not much rather work toward the development of our own elementary and higher education in strict and true conformity to our Confessions without any mixing of religions whatsoever, or union with non-Lutherans, so that the instruction and discipline of our children and of our youth, and therefore their entire upbringing occurs under the influence of a true Christian spirit.

These, then, are the special questions about which there has been controversy in recent times. That our doctrine and our position in each of these questions has been more or less distorted and falsely represented by many among our opponents, I hardly need to remind this assembly. People have ascribed to us both doctrinal statements and motives which we have never held or had, and which are just as untrue as they are improvable. People have made us out to be friends of slavery. They have made us out to be despisers of Sunday. They have ascribed to us the doctrine that all those who hear the Word are saved, that true Christianity cannot be taught in the English language, that all knowledge and learning, with the exception of religion, is to be rejected. People have made us out to be enemies of the English language and of American institutions, and so on. In brief: when the truth which we have defended has shown itself to be invincible, then people have sought to gain a victory over us by first imputing to us things we have never taught or meant and then afterward showing how false and dangerous the teaching is which they have imputed to us.

Besides, during the controversies over the last two points, Absolution and the schools, it has been especially apparent that the bitterness and the vehement attacks against our synod have their basis in an indifferent spirit, which, because it does not accept the Word of God as the clear and perfect source of all truth, can neither understand nor submit to it as God’s infallible Word nor find in it a definite confession of truth, and on the other hand, a clear and complete rejection of every kind of error and doctrine of man. The more our synod by the grace of God has deserved the praise that it has concerned itself with the latter and has in no way tolerated any deviation from revealed truth as equally legitimate with it, the more vehement have the discontent with and the attacks upon our synod and its doctrine become. But more apparent also is the attitude of our enemies and adversaries partly to Christianity in general, partly to the Lutheran faith and doctrine specifically. From this, on the one hand, come the frequent charges against us of orthodoxism, lack of love and prejudice—charges which are also brought up in individual statements of withdrawal, on the other hand in the lukewarm acceptance of precious doctrines, which cannot be gainsaid, and the great indifference for the preservation of the precious truths which are committed to us and whose faithful appropriation alone can bring us comfort and salvation. That our synod should waver a hair’s breadth here

and yield any of those saving truths or enter into a compromise with the enemies and submit to using weaker and ambiguous expressions in its confession and defense in order perhaps in that way to win love and tolerance, there can be no talk of that without the synod at the same time surrendering its orthodox character. The Word is not ours which we can do with as might please us. It is the Word of the holy, righteous God which He has in grace and indescribable love committed to us pure and unadulterated which we therefore are also to proclaim *pure and unadulterated* without addition, without suppression, without obscuring, without distortion, and which we are to preserve unfalsified and unabridged as our most precious heritage to our descendants. Surely there is no communion between Christ and Belial, light and darkness, truth and lies. In order to show honor to the Lord and his Word and love to the brethren as well as the opponents, it behooves us, much rather, it is our Synod's unalterable duty to confess the truth of the Word of God with all the certainty, clarity and precision we have at our disposal, and above all, the truth that the Word of God is not an uncertain word of men which requires the explanation and interpretation of men, but the Word of the God of Truth, the truth unto salvation, clear, simple and intelligible to everyone who uses it correctly, be he lay or learned. With this banner our synod has openly and dauntlessly met all kinds of indifferentism and false unionism and humanism in spite of mockery and scorn, hatred and contempt. Thus, if it will only be faithful to its heavenly Lord and Bridegroom, only then can it comfortably ascribe to itself the Lord's promise, "You have been faithful over little; I will place you over much." But then it is also necessary more and more to make clear to the congregations themselves what a treasure we have in the Word of God, and to that end diligently treat the doctrine of "The Word of God" both in sermons and in congregational meetings.

Now when we cast a glance over the range of the enemies of our synod then we do not count this or that person within our congregations as enemies who may be unclear about this or that question or who because of weakness goes astray but who does, however, love the Lord and His Word and really wants to submit to it; but rather, such false friends who in spite of smooth talk hate the reproof of the Word of God and *do not want* to submit to the truth.

Alas, we do not dare to expect that in the near future we shall find allies in our old opponents, the Ellingites<sup>15</sup> and the Augustana Synod in the general struggle which is going on. Rather it appears that some of our countrymen from the Augustana Synod are always looking for something against us and are aiming at picking a quarrel with us. It appears that Pastor Clausen has struck some kind of alliance with them. That he will certainly do his utmost to sow the seed of trouble, tear our fellowship apart and enhance his own party is nothing else than we must expect after the behavior he has shown since his departure from the synod, since he has surely placed himself at the head of the movement which in spite of appearances of furthering *true* enlightenment of the people, yet because of its indifference, must work to the spiritual darkening of our people. Now, in addition to some of the congregations which have withdrawn, a whole host of people have made their appearance as Pastor Clausen's zealous fellow warriors who up to now have shown by their attitude that they have cared little or nothing about church and the Word of God. Now suddenly they behave as zealous defenders of the faith and want to be our guides in spiritual things. To this phalanx of our synod's enemies several of the political newspapers have also now joined themselves, who with the influence they have at their disposal, are surely employing in varying degrees the excellent opportunity they have for sowing the seeds of doubt and unbelief, arousing distrust and mistrust toward our synod and its teachings, besides stirring up popular opinion and working toward the destruction of our people in various ways.

On the whole it is well to take notice as a distinguishing feature of our present situation and dispute that a large number of leaders among our people who earlier took a more indifferent, passive attitude toward Christianity, church bodies and religious movements and disputes, have now thrown themselves into this battle and appeared on the side of those who in earlier and more recent times have come forward as adversaries of our synod, apparently in the interest of the church. The fact that several of these people, yes, also individuals among our congregations' members, have become more or less accepted publicly and greeted as their true allies and fellow warriors, can do nothing else than deeply trouble every sincere Christian who, however, both knows that there is, and really wants to make, a huge distinction between

<sup>15</sup> Followers of Elling Eielsen.

those who can well be in error and therefore must be fought, but of whom, however, one must have the hope that they sincerely are seeking the church's welfare since they acknowledge the principle that all spiritual controversy is to be settled according to the Word of God, and between such who have openly turned their backs to God and the church and are now using the Word of God only to dissemble, to the peril of the children of God.

These are the various kinds of adversaries and enemies with whom our church body has to fight. That the fight is not always conducted on their part with the proper spiritual weapons is thus natural. Besides those who have attempted in any case to base and to establish their erroneous positions *of the Word of God*, as already mentioned, we surely have also had to deal with various others who have not disdained using distortions, slanders and various untruths in their polemics. Yes, they have often shown such a dishonesty in their way of carrying on controversy that it has filled us with the greatest disgust for continuing the war with such opponents, were it not for the sake of those who were in danger of being misled. But surely nothing else can be expected from those who do not honor the Lord and his Word and who do not show men and their words the respect that is due them either.

“But all this contention and controversy brings nothing but unrest, divisions and misery! That's why it's best to give it up!” Thus do some people cry to us, and our flesh and blood answers, “Yes” to it, but the Word of God and a Christian's conscience say something else. A Christian does not first ask what the contending brings him or what consequences it will have. But he asks if it is the Lord's battle, and when he is convinced that it is, then he follows his Lord faithfully through the battle to victory. Besides, we surely know that the church on earth is militant. The devil wants to destroy the kingdom of God and rob God's children of the Word so that they should not believe and be saved. Against him there must be contending so that the little jewel can be preserved and souls be saved. When God permits the devil to make one attack more violent than the other against his church, then God has his wise and gracious purposes. Thus it is, brethren, also with the contending into which he is now allowing our church body to enter! He wants *to humble* us by means of it. We should acknowledge how great the neglect of the Word of God has been in our congregations all around. From it comes the meager knowledge, the great unclarity in the most important points which are apparent in so many places and from which the consequence is again many errors and much misleading. But we should again acknowledge that this neglect most often has its basis in the worldly mind which seeks its good things in this world. Through contention and its tribulations God thus wants to discipline and purify his children and draw their hearts from the earthly to the heavenly and to lead them thence to the Word of God so that by its diligent use they shall grow in the knowledge of God and become rich in good works. But by this means he will also reveal the hearts of the ungodly.

Also we, dear brethren, whom the Lord has placed as servants of the Word, as examples to the flock, we who must take the lead in going into battle and who are most exposed to its trials and afflictions, we also should see in this a chastening which the Lord lets come upon us! Humbly we should acknowledge that there is much lacking in the faithfulness that is expected of us in our carrying out of the Ministry of the Word and in our watching over the souls entrusted to us. So, by means of the battle the Lord wants to draw us also more closely to himself and to lead us to doing the responsible work of our calling with greater diligence and zeal, sacrifice and self-denial in the future.

If all of us now, both congregations and pastors, through the battle which is at hand with its trials, let ourselves be led to such a self-examination and humbling, if we let ourselves be incited to such increased diligence, then we shall also experience that the fight brings us and our precious synod much blessing. Yes, even if we then lose the fight, according to human opinion, yet we shall, however, more than conquer through Jesus Christ, who surely won his victory over the powers of hell for us on the cross; because the sufferings of this present time are nothing compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us; because if we suffer with him we shall also be glorified with him.

Thus, brethren, we have also considered the fight which lies before us! Should we now draw back in terror before the enemies' numbers and might, before the mockery, ridicule and tribulations which the conflict will constantly bring with it? No. God forbid! The servant cannot expect to have it better than his Master!

Besides, we have surely seen that it has to do with preserving the Word of God pure and unadulterated as the most precious heritage to our children and children's children. Therefore we should arm and prepare ourselves much more to waging the fight in the proper full armor, with the right weapons. It has to do above all with our dedicating ourselves more and more intensely to the two chief truths which we have earlier said are characteristic of our Lutheran Church. Yes, the more we become strengthened in the belief that we are justified before God by grace alone for the sake of Christ and thus have everything in Christ: the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, the more zealously will we fight for the preservation of this blessed Gospel unimpaired, the more willingly will we bear and suffer all things for the sake of this Gospel. And the more fully we are persuaded of it that God in his Word, and in it alone, has revealed to us clearly and plainly all truth unto salvation, the more diligently will we use it, the more firmly will we rely on it, the more faithfully will we confess it and defend it against all kinds of distortion and addition, and the less will we let ourselves be tempted to deny it because of the fear of men or because of human authority. We have therefore considered these chief doctrines mainly within our congregations.

Also the present synod meeting, I believe, could not better use its time than by making the Scripture Principle the main object of its business, by which a foundation will be laid for the discussion of this question in the congregations, just as it already was laid for the consideration of the other chief questions through the synod's earlier discussion of the doctrines of absolution and justification.

# 11th Regular Synod Meeting

South Prairie Lutheran Church, Lisbon Congregation, Kendall County, Illinois  
July 2–10, 1870

Grace and peace in Christ Jesus, dear brethren in the faith and in the Ministry!

In his High-Priestly Prayer the Lord says, “I pray not only for these, but also for them who shall believe on me through their word, so that they all may be one, even as you, Father, in me and I in you, so that they should also be one in us!” Thus had God created us from the beginning so that we could be one in him and one with each other. But the devil really wanted to bring about another union, namely, between himself and the people, because he envied people their union with God and the blessedness which flows from it. However, he did not risk saying to people straight out that they should break off their union with God and become one with him. Because then man would have understood more readily who it was who lurked beneath the serpent’s skin. No, he wanted to bring about his union by cunning and lies, and it has always been his way since. First he tried to make them unsure of the Word of God with his, “Yea, has God said?” Next, by arousing dissatisfaction with only being able to be one with God, and a desire to become like God, he got them to listen to and to follow his word.

And thus the union between the devil and people was brought about and it is so intimate and strong a union that even when people feel unhappy about it, they never really want to or are able to tear themselves loose from it. But God took pity upon man and sought to restore the union between him and himself which was disrupted and changed into enmity by Satan’s cunning. Therefore, he let the Word become flesh and dwell among us. He who now receives this Word which was in the beginning, Christ, the Son of God, becomes one with him and through him one with his Father. The devil, though, is vexed over this and by means of his false union seeks partially to hinder the union with God from occurring and partially to disturb it where it has already taken place. It is against the Church, that is, the believers who are in this union, therefore, that the evil foe chiefly directs his attempt at union. And to this end precisely he must seek to create a division and disunity between the members of the church. On the basis of union with Christ, the Head of the Church, there is and there will always be a unity between the true members of the Church. Therefore, we must confess also that we believe that the Church is *one*. The fact that the Church is one cannot be seen, but it must be believed. The oneness of this Church which essentially consists in this that they have one God and one faith appeared during the time of the apostles in a certain way also in external things because the believers formed a single external fellowship of faith just as Acts says, “And all that believed were together . . . And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking of bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.” (Verses 44.46.) That it was also the will of God that the believers should allow such an external bond of fellowship to encircle them all, we see in part from his warning so earnestly against the sects and factions and castigating them as works of the flesh, in part from his exhorting them so earnestly to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Therefore, we hear Paul say to the Corinthians “that you should all speak the same thing, and that there must be no divisions among you; but that you should be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,” 1 Co. 1:10. And he cries to the Philippians: “Fulfill my joy, that you be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” (2:2.) However, when we see that the external oneness of this church did not last long and that the church unfortunately now presents a multiplicity of sects and factions which contend internally with one another, then the cause of this is chiefly this that Christians have not remained loyal to the truth but have fallen into various errors through the devil’s seduction.

However much God wishes unity to be preserved, yet, however, he does not want it to occur at the expense of the truth. It is unity *in the Spirit* which God wants to have preserved. Unity of Spirit though is only present when there is unity in faith, and that is worked by the Spirit of God through the Word of God. When therefore someone in the fellowship falls away from the true faith and forsakes the word of truth, then a person certainly should seek unity with such a person by leading them back to the true doctrine. But when this does not come to pass, when they harden themselves in error, there a person should not preserve an outward unity with such people be they many or few, because unity of the spirit is lacking and without it

becomes just a false union, and abomination in the sight of God. Rather, one separates from such people in order not to make oneself guilty of the sin of others and in order to preserve oneness of spirit with the true apostolic church. Then if a separation occurs, so that the erring are driven out of the fellowship, or because they are in the majority they throw the orthodox out, the guilt for the division does not lie with the orthodox but with the erring. It is not the orthodox, but the erring who have separated from the true church. Already by their departure from the Word of God and the true church they have separated themselves from the orthodox church even before the outward division took place. The departure made it apparent in the highest degree.

Thus it was with the Reformation. The Roman Church had fallen away from the Word of God and the orthodox faith. Luther and the Reformers wanted to preserve oneness with the apostolic church, and testified against the errors. But this was not tolerated. The Reformers and their disciples were driven out. But although they were clearly in the minority, yet they, however, did not cause the division. It was not they but the Roman Church which made itself guilty of schism because it separated from the true church and formed a sect.

Now as surely as it is the will of God that Christians should *preserve* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, so surely also does he want them to seek to bring it about where it is disturbed. It is the duty of the orthodox church as well as of all sects to seek to settle the existing divisions so that they can all be united in one, so that the church can also bring forward one flock even as there is One Shepherd. But the same thing which we heard pertained with respect to *the preservation* of oneness also pertains to this striving to achieve oneness. It must not be a mere outward oneness, but a oneness of spirit. It must not happen at the expense of the truth with denial of the faith and of Christ. But the kind of union where Christ retains the authority and truth the victory is not what the devil wants.

Therefore he constantly comes forward with his own attempts at union wherewith he reserves the victory for himself and in the highest degree grants the truth equal rights with lies, since he well knows that where he can accomplish it, there, the oneness of the truth and thereby the truth itself is already yielded. Basically it is always truth and lie, light and darkness, the world and the kingdom of God, Christ and Belial, which he wants to promote in such a way. However, his attempt at union appears in different forms, more or less veiled, according to the nature of the people with whom he is dealing. Always, however, he talk about love. "Why so much controversy!" he says. "If only people can be united as one, everything else is unimportant. Let everyone have his own opinion, or no opinion. This is the proper humility, tolerance and brotherly love." But this one thing is naturally also extremely varied according to the different parties who are supposed to be brought together. Over toward the ungodly of the most base sort he says, "There is no God. Love for self is the basis of all human relationships. It brings everyone together." Voltaire<sup>16</sup> especially advocated this principle in the previous century. It has now become obvious, it must be admitted, that self-love brings no union but brings rebellion, war and bloodshed. Meanwhile it is precisely this, however, which forms the bond of union among the children of the world as opposed to the Lord and his kingdom.

On the other hand, if he is working with ungodly people of the more refined type, of which Christianity is full in our days, then this is written on the banner: "We all believe in a higher being, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and heathen. We are surely all children of the same Father. We are all brothers. The Christian Church is terribly intolerant. It considers only its own people as brothers. Our brotherhood extends over the whole world and we all worship the same god whether we say that he is three persons or only one, whether we call him the Lord Jesus, or Jehovah, Allah, or Brahma, whether we confess him and worship him according to his Word in Spirit and in truth, or with the Hindus and the Tamuls seek him in the River Ganges or by being crushed under the juggernaut's wagon." Such a union is being sought at the present time in India between the Hindus and Christianity. It is, however, especially in the lodges of the Free Masons and the other secret societies that these attempts at union have been effective, by which we surely know that many Christians also have let themselves be misled. Likewise, the disengagement of the schools from the church, with their secularization, is, as much as anything, a fruit of the kinds of attempts at union as well as a means for their promotion.

<sup>16</sup> The pen name of François Marie Arouet (1694–1778). French poet, dramatist, satirist and historian.

Such an attempt at union among us, of most recent date, can also be mentioned here: "The Scandinavian Lutheran Union for the Enlightenment of the People." As is surely known, it is supposed to produce a true Lutheran enlightenment among our people of all Scandinavians, Christians as well as Unitarians, Universalists and Swedenborgians,<sup>17</sup> including Lutherans in a union Jews and heathen (Muslims are not found among Scandinavians). But there are more delicate matters which must be handled in a more delicate manner. In our enlightened century, however, a person does not want to be known as a heathen or be regarded as holding common cause with them. No, one must hold fast to Christianity, but not the kind of Christianity which was set forth by the apostles in the barbaric ancient times and interpreted literally according to the dogmatic restrictions and prejudices of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But the kind which the new Bible Criticism has created. A dish must be prepared from Christ and his Gospel through critical skill which can be palatable for the tastes of our time. It occurs now in different ways, partly by presenting Christ as a light-hearted youth who himself has understood what it means to "live" and who also taught his contemporaries and successors to enjoy life, partly by interpreting Christianity as a myth, and the person of Christ as the perfect model who needs only to be set before us in order to make us able to follow it perfectly. This kind of union presently has its standard-bearers in a Renan, a Schenkel, and several others, and its camp in the German Protestant Union.

But there are also many people, however, to whom this union appears too coarse-grained. They say they want to cling to Christ not only in name but to himself, God and man, and his redemption. However, they do not want to retain more of Christianity than that on which Lutherans and the various Reformed bodies are agreed. The remaining doctrines of the Word of God are to be considered as non-essential, as theological questions about which the various human opinions and insights have equally much merit and are equally legitimate, for example, whether baptism is a washing of regeneration or not, whether in the Lord's Supper the true body and blood of Christ or only natural bread and wine are offered to and distributed to the guests, whether in the person of Christ both natures are mutually sharing in and participating in each other's properties, and of the consequence of that, that the glorified human nature of Christ is present everywhere, or, whether, as Luther says, is tightly tied in heaven like a dog on a chain, whether God wants all people universally to be saved, or whether he has from eternity elected some to condemnation, and whether because of this the Gospel remains ineffectual for those who are rejected.

You see, these important doctrines about the basis of grace, of the Means of Grace and the order of grace should therefore be considered unworthy of becoming an occasion for controversy. They are supposed to concern the faith of the church, but at best be considered as theological questions which for the sake of their scholarly interest are referred to the scholarly research and discussion of the learned whose various defenses can only create a lust for controversy and intolerance and serve as a proof for lack of unity of faith and a basis for disruption of the fellowship of faith.

The devil has especially afflicted the Lutheran Church with this kind of attempt at union since the days of the Reformation. He got nowhere with Luther because like his Master, Christ, he held firm to that which written. However, the same thing cannot be said about Melancthon after Luther's death. But matters pleased the devil even better later when the princes found an excellent means for pushing their ambitious plans through with the people in such a political union. Although all state churches in their present form more or less are obvious and visible fruits of this union-game, resting on these unionist principles and feeding themselves from these unionist tendencies, yet, however, the Prussian State Church more than any offers an example of how with what perseverance and with what cleverness, cunning, yes, power, the devil forces these unionist endeavors of his to the ruin of the church and the people. This is not the place to discuss the Prussian Union in all its phases of development since John Sigismund renounced the Lutheran faith in 1613 and went over to the Reformed Church for self-serving political reasons. It can be sufficient to call attention to how this union-net gradually has as good as spanned all the Protestant German lands, so that now a Lutheran theologian and a Lutheran congregation which are not infected and corrupted by unionism are like the lone bird in the cleft of a rock.

<sup>17</sup> The theological philosophy of Emmanuel Swedenborg of Sweden (1688–1772), claiming direct mystical communication between the world and the spiritual realm; it also affirms Christ as the true God.

The devil has also pushed this kind of attempt at union successfully over toward the Lutheran Church in this country. Up until a couple of years ago it embraced the Lutheran name, but in reality, it united the General Synod as well as all the English Lutheran, and many German Lutheran synods and congregations. In it fellowship was practiced between people who said they hold very firmly to all the dogmas of the Lutheran Church and people who were completely Reformed in spirit and confession. Eventually the clear, definite testimony of the Missourians the more Lutheran-minded got their eyes opened to the decidedly unionist alliance they had entered. They separated, and in union with a few other independent synods formed the Lutheran General Council. The thought was that this should come to embrace all the Lutheran synods which could not enter the General Synod, while in the meantime it was as clear as day that there was no prevailing unity of faith between the synods who were to constitute the General Council. The Missouri Synod and our synod then proposed that free Lutheran conferences should be held for the discussion of doctrinal positions before people brought about a common external fellowship. This proposal was in the meantime rejected by most of the synods. That the unionist spirit which the General Council had adopted as a heritage from the General Synod had also gained strength and made itself widely felt in the new fellowship has become evident by the declarations which the Council requires with the introduction of the Four Points, namely, about giving up their pulpits to teachers of heretical doctrines, accepting Reformed persons at the Lord's Supper, Chiliasm, and the secret societies. The Council answered both "yea" and "nay," which has always been the theology of unionism. The unionist posture which the Council thereby revealed prevented the German Ohio Synod from joining, caused the German Wisconsin Synod to separate from it again, aroused opposition within the newly established fellowship itself, and brought the German Iowa Synod, which itself contains a goodly portion of unionistic leaven, to adopt a "wait and see" attitude as it calls it. This wait and see attitude, though, hinders it neither from letting itself be represented in the General Council nor from representing it itself.

Among our countrymen, as we know, there are two others, outside our synod, which call themselves Lutheran. We must say to the censure of the Ellingites that they have not shown themselves much inclined to have union on the basis of truth with their countrymen in this country, yet credit must be given them that neither have they shown themselves very approachable to the prevailing attempts at union. They have not sought connections with all kinds of American church bodies in order to win honor and glory for the sake of expediency. They have shown themselves as tenacious in holding fast to truths as well as errors, though in the course of time they have made some headway in Lutheran thought. If they can even tolerate many things within their own fellowship, it does, however, sooner have its basis in the lower level of Christian knowledge on which they are, than in the politics of union. The situation is different with the other synod, the Augustana Synod, which up to now has consisted of a Swedish and a Norwegian group. One can say that it has really been a pawn in the devil's union-game. The basic elements from which the Norwegian faction was formed already has to make it completely unionistic. And this unionistic character is obviously growing both in external and internal appearance. First it was associated with the notorious Franckean Synod where Reformed doctrine and practice were altogether prevalent, and later with the unionistic General Synod. Although it did right in separating from it, yet we have not been able to see in this step an abandonment of its earlier unionistic position since it has never publicly acknowledged and confessed it as sin, and neither, so far as I have seen, anywhere declared that it took that step in order to get out of the sinful relationship in which it was.

When the Lutheran General Council was formed the Augustana Synod showed itself quite willing to join it and has in actuality, if not formally, done so in spite of the ambiguous attitude the Council has adopted over toward the Four Points I mentioned earlier. The Augustana Synod has shown thereby that essentially it retains its unionistic position even if a more subtle form. The same thing is evident from the consideration of its internal behavior. From its first beginnings it has contained very conflicting elements and highly disunited doctrinal positions: Reformed, high churchly, pietistic and orthodox. I shall only mention here how Ole Andrewsen<sup>18</sup>, who in the old days defended the Reformed doctrines of baptism and the Lord's Supper, toward the last has used the unionistic form of the Lord's Supper. At our second conference with the pastors of the Augustana Synod in Chicago in 1863 a great disunity was evident among them with regard to the doctrine of the means for regeneration. At the conference at Jefferson Prairie in

<sup>18</sup> Ole (Aasen) Andrewsen (1818–1885) was a pastor in the Augustana Synod for a while.

1864 several of them declared themselves in agreement with the doctrine of absolution which we defended according to the Bible, but, however, held with their own and our opponents because of our coarse expressions, as they called them. Recently two of its pastors have shown that they favor completely differing doctrines regarding Sunday. In spite of this sorry situation within the synod with regard to unity of faith, it has, however, never shown any zeal for bringing about greater unity through diligent discussion of doctrinal questions. It was though it feared that by just such a discussion the disunited elements should come to light, and by appearing, force the dissolution of the synod.

What people call church politics, a characteristic of false union, has frequently been apparent in its conduct. It was not only entirely natural, but also our Christian duty to approach these countrymen and brethren in the faith of ours and seek to enter into a church union with them. Not only was this division and sectarianism extremely sinful, but also brought much pain and misery with it and sorely hindered the progress of the kingdom of God among us. This troubled us and we have earnestly striven to counsel repentance for it. But just as we in our synod have never pasted over indifference in matters of faith, but have always sought to bring about unity of faith by persuasion, conviction, instruction and admonition, so have also our efforts toward these separated countrymen of ours constantly been in the direction of paving the way to a true church union through discussions of doctrinal topics. Toward that end we have constantly invited them to conferences and made us of the few it has been our good fortune to bring about. We have been convinced that without unity of the Spirit and a common faith there is no true unity of churches, but only a false union. We certainly have not lacked temptations to such from the devil's side when we acquired the reputation of being intolerant, unloving and contentious because we would not keep silent over toward errors, but thought we owed both God and the truth, as well as our adversaries, publicly to make them aware of the same and earnestly to rebuke them for them. There was surely nothing easier for our natural man than to let all controversial questions drop, let the Word of God say both "Yea" and "Nay" and everyone hold his belief unchallenged, or without regard to the Word of God, let the majority, "The voice of the people," or human authority, make the judgment and settle the matter, and on such a unity build a union. But whom would it have profited? Neither the adversaries nor us. Because it is the truth which makes free, and when love rejoices in truth then our love toward it must reveal itself exactly therein that we speak the truth to them plainly.

Neither would it do us any good. Because "the friendship of the world is enmity against God," and what an earnest caution does not lie in the word of the Lord, "He who denies me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven." In his grace the Lord has thus far preserved us from these attempts of the devil toward union so that we have not aspired to any union on such a basis. In his grace may he help us also further to be faithful to the truth in love. We want rather to be few and to have God and his Word with us than to be many and as a result be without the Word of God as a light and shield.

May God in grace also preserve us against other attempts at union by which the devil wants to mislead us to fashion ourselves like this world. I am not thinking here especially of the world's grossly sinful nature with which he certainly also tempts us and from which God must in grace preserve us, but of the more subtle worldliness which has a pious, handsome exterior, which makes its way into our congregations from every direction and still wants to leave the appearance and name of being Christianity. As a consequence of the devil's various union endeavors in our days there is a strong tendency toward making a, so to speak, fluid crossing over between the kingdom of God and the world. This really wants to pass for Christian, with its purely worldly nature, its decency, its humanism, and human love, its agencies for the enlightenment, development and progress of man, its beneficent, aid and insurance associations, its lotteries, fairs and exhibits for one or another religious aim, is all supposed to pass for Christian even if the whole thing does not have a trace of the Spirit of Christ, but obviously the opposite. Its instruction, education and religiosity are supposed to pass as Christian even if it is altogether lacking a Christian basis and a Christian aim and takes place without Christian means. Outward splendor, the incentivizing of great sacrifices, the improvements which have occurred in outward respects and the undeniable marks of favor under which they appear are often looked upon as sufficiently capable of claiming a Christian character. Much of this is worthy of all honor and can have its great benefit as worldly contrivances. It can, however, for the most part be reckoned to civic righteousness. But now it is supposed to be regarded as true Christianity, yes, as the proper manifestation of life of an ennobled Christianity. And people want us to accept this modish Christianity now instead of the antiquated Christianity of our olden days. It cannot be denied that in this

way the devil is aiming at a union between the world and the kingdom of God, and that great danger is at hand because precisely in this way the spirit of the world is going to enter our congregations and make them worldly. When to our great dismay we see many traces of this especially among our dear youth, then this most certainly is due in large part to the education they receive in the public schools and to the harmful effects to which they are exposed during their accompanying upbringing and development. I see in this the greatest danger for our dear religious community and the rising generation which is so precious to us. I have therefore cried a warning. Truly, it calls for watching and praying.

Our synod is still in its childhood. It is important that the right foundation be laid so that the building can withstand the storms of time and remain standing! It is important that the right course be chosen from the beginning so that the later course will not be a failure but will lead into the right harbor. In a spiritual sense this is still such a time for our synod. But he who sows to the wind reaps the whirlwind. He who sows to the flesh harvests corruption from the flesh, but he who sows to the Spirit harvests eternal life from the Spirit. Dear brethren and congregations, may God grant us and our synod both at this meeting and in all our church work that we might sow to the Spirit so that we and our children, by the grace of God, might one day harvest eternal life from the Spirit! May he hear us for Jesus our beloved Savior's name's sake! Amen.

# 12<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention

## East Painted Creek Lutheran Church, Allamakee County, Iowa

### June 22–29, 1871

To the esteemed Synod of the Norwegian-Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

“Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!”

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”! Ephesians 1:3. Thus I have reason to exclaim with the apostle Paul when I now the honor of presenting to our esteemed synod my report concerning the state of our church body and the Church Council, as well as my own activity as president in the past synodical year. Whether we look at the internal growth and preservation against enemies of our congregations or to our church body’s expansion, the greatest challenge for us is to praise God who has bestowed upon us and thus far so graciously has preserved his Word of Truth among us. With it he has surely given us exactly the right means for our church work and the right weapons for the spiritual fight. And by blessing this Word of his truth in spite of all our weaknesses and in spite of all obstacles from our enemies, he has surely done whatever good has occurred there on the church scene, and over which we can now rejoice.

There certainly have not been a lack of bitter attacks and ominous prophecies of our synod’s near dissolution and ruin. Old and new opponents have also tried their best, partly through intrusion into our congregations and partly through receiving with pastoral service such parties as either have willfully excluded themselves or because of impenitence have been excluded from our congregations.

By carrying into effect the resolution authored at the last synod meeting concerning an invitation to a general conference we have striven to do what is in our power to hinder these unlicensed attacks and the bitter and sad disputes from being kept alive and continuing.

We have long ago acknowledged and busied ourselves with fulfilling our duty to do our part so that Christian efforts for unity on the basis of the truth could be brought about, and I can report with joy to the synod that we have now finally succeeded to the extent that the first general free conference between Norwegian Lutherans has now taken place in Decorah. Besides a large number of the members of the Norwegian Synod, most of the pastors of The Norwegian-Danish Conference, together with individual pastors and laymen from the Norwegian Augustana Synod, and of the Eielsen Synod came to it. The primary result of this conference is without a doubt the experience which we have now had, that by God’s great grace it is possible for us, in spite of the controversies of many years, to be able to confer in Christian composure and decorum about the doctrine of the divine Word, and that therefore the assembled conference has recognized the desirability of similar conferences being held in the future.

Under these circumstances I do not find it proper at this time to go into the particulars in the controversies more precisely, which also in the past year have been carried on between us and our opponents, or now, since there seems to be hope of an acknowledgment from these parties of their error and sin, to characterize these attacks on our church body in such a way as I otherwise would have believed it proper to do. Besides, the necessary documents for some of them are already public.

Since we have had no authorization from the synod it follows of itself that in this conference we have not acted on the synod’s behalf as its authorized spokesman, while here, as at other opportunities, we naturally feel ourselves obligated to give an account of how we have proceeded.

To the glory of God I can report with joy that so far as my knowledge of our congregations extends, a greater confidence and affection toward our church body has shown itself than ever before, with certain well-known exceptions. Its work and its battle are winning more and more appreciation round about. People are learning more and more to understand that our battle really concerns the preservation of the glorious heritage of our fathers, the pure *Word of truth*. Within the congregations, therefore, as a rule, it has

been peaceful and quiet. A trusting attitude, full of love, occurs almost everywhere between congregations and their pastors. They are respected for their work's sake and for the faithfulness, diligence and ability with which they carry it out. They have also been able to work together with each other more calmly for the internal development of the congregations, for growing in true knowledge of God and Christian knowledge, and toward growing in sincere fear of God and good works. The same thing is true in the newly-founded settlements of our countrymen. In spite of our opponents' often alluring seducers and shameful slanderers people as a rule are turning in full confidence to our synod and its pastors for help and service, and although this often can only be meager because of the current need for pastors, yet people are willing, in hope of better times, to let themselves be satisfied with this for a while rather than to throw themselves into the arms of the roving sectarian preachers or to accept a sufficiently ample service from false Lutherans, so that through not uniting with such people they shall not be separated from the true Lutheran church and their old brethren in the faith.

In the rest of this paragraph President Preus mentions a number of new congregations having been organized. He speaks about the shortage of sufficient seminary graduates from St. Louis to meet current needs. He expresses the hope that many pastors in Norway will be moved by God to accept the Calls which have been sent to them from America. He reports the death of an aged pastor of the synod, the poor health some others are experiencing, etc. The remaining pages continue to be more in the nature of a report than an address and are not translated.

**13<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention**  
**Scandinavia Lutheran Church, Waupaca County, Wisconsin**  
**June 26–July 4, 1872**

President Preus had not prepared what we have come to recognize as an address, but gave only a report. From that report of several pages only the first paragraph is translated.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all! Amen.

Dear brethren, we frequently see in our times how men in various positions form associations and hold meetings for the attainment of temporal goals. Yes, unfortunately, they are often for the purpose of being able to force their plans through with much greater power for the overthrow of the existing situation and of such ordinances which not only have the prescriptive right of the centuries but also divine sanction. When we now in these last evil times are able to be gathered in the harmony of faith, solely in the spiritual interest of building up the church of God among us, this might fortress which shall remain standing, yes, be revealed in glory when those proud plans are reduced to nothing and the world's glory passes away, then we have much reason to thank God for such grace. May God grant that we now also during this synod meeting might render him our thanks so that through all our discussions and through all our resolutions we might have our dear congregations' building-up in mind and seek it furthered according to the Word of God. To that end may God grant us all his grace, and bless our meeting for Jesus' name's sake!

# 14<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention

La Crosse, Wisconsin

June 21–29, 1873

President Preus did not prepare what we have come to think of as an address, but presented only a report. Only the opening paragraphs are translated here.

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Dear brothers in the faith and in the Ministry! A year has again elapsed. It has brought us many struggles, many disappointments, many sorrows and tribulations, but also, praise God, hours of victory and refreshment so that now when the Lord allows us to be gathered for our dear synod meeting we must say, “He has done all things well!” Paul says about Christian love that it rejoices in the truth and also that it is kind and does not seek its own. May the Lord then grant us grace to tend to our decisions in these days in such love, that believing the truth we may seek the up building of our congregations and the salvation of souls. To that end may he bless our discussions for Jesus’ sake!

The development of our synod has moved forward quietly and calmly in the past year: No more violent controversy or tremor within any portion of our church body than the constant battles against enemies within and without, in the old as well as in the new congregations. Powerfully, the ruinous stream of the spirit of the times seeks to make its way into our congregations to make the members worldly and to bring them to open falling away. Care for temporal livelihood hinders many people from earnestly seeking the One Thing Needful and doing the Lord’s work. It, as well as the spirit of pride, which with its own works and devices, wants to beatify mankind, and the spirit of false freedom which says, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Ps. 2:3) drives more and more people away into the lap of the secret societies, or in any event to sympathize with them and to make many people indifferent to Christian education and schools, if not to being open opponents of them. The same opposition and breaking down of the Lord’s work on the part of various sects and opposing factions, the painful loss of pious, capable pastors, you see, is what I can mention here as heavy, painful pressure upon our church body.

However, it has given us rich comfort that through just such battles the Lord has let the most precious doctrine of our Lutheran Church, the sum and substance of the Gospel, be placed before us in so much clearer light, and thereby also allowed it to become so much more precious to us so that in spite of all the enemies’ backbiting, the Lord has allowed us to obtain more help from capable pastors from the church of the fatherland in the past year than ever before, so that in spite of the smallness of our pastors’ strength in numbers in relation to our enlarged field of work, the truth for which we are fighting, and appreciation for our synod’s work have gained entry with more and more people and the Lord has opened a wide door to us in our home mission fields.

The remaining pages report on the many aspects of the synod’s work over the course of the previous year.

**15<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention**  
**Holden Lutheran Church, Goodhue County, Minnesota,**  
**June 13–21, 1874**

President Preus again gave a report from which only the first paragraph is translated.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all! Amen.

Dear brethren in Christ! “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body,” 2 Corinthians 4:8–10. With these words of the apostle Paul I introduce the thoughts and the feelings which most want to assert themselves in me now when it is again my duty to present my annual report to our esteemed synod. I am certain that many of you have felt with me both the cross and the comfort, both the pain and the joy, which, of course, always walk more or less together with them for whom it is a serious matter to follow after Jesus in faith and love, in work, struggle and cross. But surely the heavier this following many times fell upon us for reasons I have sought to present in my synodical sermon<sup>19</sup>, the more are we required to thank God who of his grace grants us again after a lapse of time to be gathered in “one Spirit, one faith, one mind, and with one hope.” How much comfort and encouragement, how much instruction and strengthening can we not with God’s help take to ourselves here during our being together, and how needful are we not all of it! Now then let us be wise and redeem the opportune time because the days are truly evil! Important business awaits us, and the orthodox church among our countrymen over here anticipates with confident expectation the results of its pastors and delegates meeting, and their mutual deliberations. May God grant that its hope and ours not be disappointed!

<sup>19</sup> President Preus had preached the sermon on Sunday, June 14, 1874.

**16<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention**  
**Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota**  
**June 12–20, 1875**

President Preus presented his report from which only the first and part of the second paragraphs are translated.

Grace and peace be to you abundantly in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord! Amen.

Esteemed assembly! In many respects the last year which we have gone through has been a year of tribulation. But our joy and our thanks to God must be the greater as we now gather from near and far so that through mutual deliberations on the one ground of truth, we can grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ, be encouraged and comforted to bear our cross patiently in Jesus' name and be strengthened with fearlessness to go forward in our work and our struggle for the building up of our dear Lutheran Zion among us to the salvation of souls and the glory of God.

We certainly should take the apostle Paul's admonition to heart, "Let us not be weary in well doing," Galatians 6:9. We are persuaded by God that our synod's battle and work is good and God-pleasing because it is grounded in the Word of God. But then we should not let our courage sink either and become weary if on the one hand we do not always see the fruits of the struggle and work which we could wish and on the other hand find misunderstanding, mockery and persecution from enemies within and outside the boundaries of the Lutheran Church, or, if in his wisdom God allots to us a special cross and tribulations in order to test our faith and our love. In these last respects the past synodical year has been a year of visitation for us. While the chastisement was only very slight for many of our congregations in the East, a large portion of them in the western states were visited by hail and grasshoppers, so that to a high degree they needed the help of their brethren with regard to both their bodily and spiritual necessities. That because of this, in many places the ability to provide adequate support for our synod's purposes, both the regular and the special, suffered, is natural. However, I do believe that the general cry of "hard times" frightened and discouraged many people and kept them from providing the help, even if small, which they were able to provide, just as I will really not be mistaken in saying that many of us pastors thereby have felt themselves forsaken, so that they have allowed the proper instruction and encouragement to which the congregations in such times rightly could be needing, to be lacking.

President Preus goes on to report on the state of the synod.

# 17<sup>th</sup> Regular Convention

**The Norwegian Lutheran Church, Decorah, Iowa  
June 17–25, 1876**

Dear brothers in Christ! It is great mercy which the Lord demonstrates to us at these annual meetings at which the synod's pastors and delegates come together to consult with one another. It isn't only the brethren who have to work under privation and want in far, out of the way regions without having an opportunity throughout the entire year of going for comfort, guidance and encouragement for the work of their calling through consulting orally with brothers in the ministry, it isn't only they who long for these meetings with brethren in the faith, but also those who in such respects are better situated but who in return have to see and feel the privation and need which makes itself felt on a large scale, and who as it were must bear and be interested in the common burden which weighs upon the entire synod. It is not with less longing that they also look forward to these meetings of brethren.

Because here they can exchange their thoughts about conditions within their beloved congregations. They can get a pointer to the deeper underlying causes of shortcomings and their outgrowths which exist, and they can counsel with one another concerning the best means and the most effective way of remedying them. They can come here for the encouragement, comfort and strengthening which they so sorely need just from the fellowship of brethren, so that despondency or indifference shall not get the upper hand. Then they can return with renewed courage and strength to the work in the place assigned to them in the Lord's vineyard, and work while it is day for the growth of the entire synod and for the salvation of every individual soul.

Our joy must be so much greater this time, our thanks to God therefore also so much greater, since for the first time we are permitted to gather for a synod meeting here where we have our synod's pride and joy, our dear Luther College, our Lutheran university for our youth. We were surely fortunate to get our college building completed recently according to its original plan, through the Lord's gracious assistance. We have the further joy of being able to dedicate to the Lord's service the beautiful chapel where the college's students and teachers can find rest for their souls, encouragement and strengthening for their work through the weekly divine service. Our meeting must also have special importance for us this time in the fact that it concludes as it were the first phase of our synod's development under a constitution which also in its external effect thoroughly knit together the synod's individual parts. This meeting therefore forms the transition to a new phase in the history of our young church body. Because even if it is so that our new constitution rests entirely upon the same scripture principles as the old one, yet we cannot, however, hide from ourselves the fact that at the same time the existing division into synodical districts according to the new constitution has come about because of the synod's steadily increasing expansion, it does, however, in some respects loosen the connection between the various regions of the synod. And hereby the danger undoubtedly arises for the synod that its various districts become more foreign to each other and can easily be tempted to look more upon their special interests and care for them than to work together toward the blessed development of the entire synod.

However, as long as the Word of truth is preserved among us and has its free course throughout the synod and the Spirit binds hearts together through it and a living faith, so long as hearts do not become strangers to life in God, so long will they not become strangers to each other either but will allow the spirit of the synod to get to counsel toward the edifying of the entire body in love, and precisely in the way also to every individual member's proper growth in acknowledgement of the Son of God.

We dare well to hope also that at this meeting not only discussions about that which always is and must be a life and death matter for a church body, which touches on its heart's innermost and most delicate fibers and which determines its heartbeat, I mean the school matter, that which concerns the congregational school, will find a kind of conclusion, and the matter itself thereby get a powerful push forward in the congregation, but that also the question which surely in certain ways is contingent upon that matter's prompt and successful development and whose treatment the synod has let be put off for a long time, namely, our higher education for the education and training particularly for the teaching and preaching

ministry, will find its solution in a way which can better satisfy the growing need within a Lutheran church body with a specific language and an individual religious and cultural development, a solution which also dares make this synod meeting come to shape an epoch in the history of our young synod.

Thus, dear brethren, we have reason enough to thank God who allows us to gather in peace and love at this meeting. But we are then certainly not lacking the summons either to properly call from the depths of our hearts for his help and assistance who by his grace alone can let the work prosper for us. In full confidence in his assistance we thus direct all our thoughts to the main point and purpose of our meeting and strain all our abilities and powers to making its discussions as productive and rich in blessing as possible for us and our church body. Where interest and thoughts are too scattered, not to mention where mind and heart are as it were divided, great dividends cannot be expected from the work either. Therefore, in God's name we take heart and turn afresh and courageously to our work! And may the Lord our God let it prosper well.

The next paragraph says family illness kept him from doing all his work; his knowledge of synod conditions is limited due to half the pastors not reporting; he speaks of certain situations involving pastors.

The Word of God has been proclaimed purely and the Lord's Sacraments rightly administered in our church body, These are, of course, the greatest gift which God can grant a church. As long as they are preserved in a congregation we dare not give up hope, however shaky things can still be otherwise. And even if the gifts and abilities of the synod's pastors vary greatly, yet, I do believe, however, that I can truthfully say that as far as I know, bringing souls these Means of Grace both publicly and privately is a matter of conscience for each of them. The parochial reports show that there are not so few who have shown extraordinary zeal so that the Word can be preached adequately in their congregations.

When our pastors on an average have four to five congregations to serve, even with the greatest zeal, their strength will not reach to give the lambs in the congregations the care and nurture which they need. When in many places the congregational school is going very badly, then the children and youth in our congregations are also the most constant topic of the pastors' complaints. And it is certain that something must be done here, and that something done earnestly by our synod, if it is not going to be destroyed.

Experience teaches us that this has been the case with several of the divisions of the Lutheran church in this country because of their neglect of the congregational school. I said that I see a going backward rather than progress with regard to parochial schools and religious instruction for the children. If one takes the facts in their proper context we will not be surprised by this.

When so little was done to establish parochial schools twenty-five to thirty years ago because we were putting our church affairs in order over here, it got off comparatively easy. Just recently emigrated from Norway, the people were accustomed to the public schools. Their school year was short. Our first newcomers thought only little about it and seldom was there any problem appointing Norwegian teachers of religion and holding parochial schools at the most convenient time. Now, on the other hand, the term of the English-language public school is longer and the pressure that the children should attend the school and learn the English language is naturally increased considerably. Because without a thorough knowledge of this language people will not be able to discharge their duties as citizens or gain any influence in the community. But here our parochial schools collide with the public schools and constantly draw the shortest straw. People are unwilling to pay for a school which they cannot use constantly without neglecting the other, or people cannot keep school teachers because they cannot furnish them the necessary employment because the public school district leaves them no more than a few months of the year in which they can conduct parochial school. Add to this fact that our school teachers' salaries have as little kept pace with the growing prosperity as they correspond to the ability which as a rule the teachers possess and the expenses they have incurred in attaining that ability. The result is that the more capable teachers of religion far more often than not look for other positions in order to secure at least a modest livelihood for themselves and their families. It is to be hoped that the synod itself will subject this matter to a thorough discussion, so I'm not going to detain myself on it any longer, but only again earnestly lay it upon the hearts of my fellow representatives and our entire church body because of its extremely great importance and consequences.

Where the use of the Means of Grace is concerned, as a rule church attendance is good, likewise also communion attendance, even if less so, and progress is being made with family devotions although much still remains to be desired in both regards. Zeal, in any case, for public worship is evident in part by the many costly buildings which either were erected or were under construction also in the course of this year. This zeal can, however, anticipate something critical for us when we appear at the same time to perceive a decline in zeal for procuring men who are capable of proclaiming the Word in all these churches because this can, however, essentially only be attained by our institutions of learning being embraced with genuine interest and finding the proper support. But the treasurer's report will give sufficient enlightenment as to how bad things are in this regard. We pastors certainly bear a substantial portion of blame for this. However, the congregations ought well be on guard against it so that during the time of greater prosperity hearts do not become more and more covetous. Meanwhile, interest in missions seems to be more general. That this interest seems to be directed toward relieving countrymen's spiritual needs is a natural consequence of our situation. Our congregations are themselves in the midst of a mission field.

Progress was made in some of the congregations in using the Word of God for brotherly admonition and public church discipline; in others, the latter, at any rate is virtually unknown. Caution is a good thing. However, let us watch ourselves so that it does not happen with us as it did with the boy who would not go into the water before he could swim. And yet it is of urgent necessity both for the entire congregation's and the individual sinner's sake that discipline be urged with earnestness and vigor. Where nothing else does any good, where all admonition and reprimand has shown itself to be in vain, there excommunication is, however, the last means God has given the congregation for the sinner's conversion, so that it will be employed in vain neither for the sinner nor the congregation if they have had proofs which have brought it into use. And when the congregation must be separated from a member of the congregation about whom it perhaps has far too good reason for believing that he has wandered away in impenitence, how shall the congregation be able to excuse sending this brother to judgment without having tried the one means through which he perhaps could be saved? That neglect of church discipline brings about a slackening of moral feeling, so that sins and vices increase instead of decrease, is a fact. And this dares to be a sad cause for the fact that in several places it is not getting better, but rather worse with open sins such as immorality, bundling, thoughtless engagements, illegitimate births, drunkenness, playing the lottery, etc.

The remaining paragraphs report on home missions, additions to the clergy roster, installations of pastors, education, the orphans' home, meetings, and condolences to the Missouri Synod whose former president, Pastor F. Wyneken<sup>20</sup>, had died during the past year.

And with this, be commended to God! May he hold his hand over the meeting and bless its discussions to the glorifying of his name and the salvation of souls!

Most respectfully, H.A. Preus

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich C.D. Wyneken (May 13, 1810–May 4, 1876).

# 18<sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting

**West Koshkonong Lutheran Church, Dane County, Cottage Grove, Wisconsin  
May 30–June 5, 1878**

Dear brethren! Grace be with you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ! I greet you all sincerely with this apostolic greeting as we are gathered for the general convention of the Synod. I believe our hearts are singularly moved in this hour. There is so much which has to awaken in us an earnest festive anticipation by our coming together, but more than anything else, our hearts fill with laud and praise of him who has brought us so graciously thus far and let the lines fall for us in pleasant places.

Since the synod was divided into districts according to the new constitution, we are now gathered for the first time for a joint synod meeting. We sense the importance of it. It is also going to help hold together and intimately to knit together for general cooperation what otherwise can so easily fragment itself through special interests.

But we are gathered this time also for a Jubilee Festival. It is twenty-five years since some few congregational representatives and pastors came together in this congregation, deliberated, and in the name of God adopted a synodical constitution and formed the Norwegian Lutheran Synod in America.<sup>21</sup> Now when after the passage of almost a generation we can greet the old colleagues and companions-in-arms, and see them, together with so many new, fresh faces who have joined in the course of time, again, in the name of God, tirelessly to go to work and to continue the same work which was begun then—the establishment of the Lutheran Church among us here in America, should it not fill our hearts with true joy? And even if this is mixed with sadness at the loss of this or that dear brother and faithful warrior from the old days whom the Lord called “from strife in the world to peace” at the end of a day’s work, should our joy possibly be interrupted by that when we consider the perfect bliss they now enjoy in the heavenly assembly above, and that exactly the work to which they first applied themselves with us twenty-five years ago in great weakness, through the blessing of God, became for them, as for thousands of other blessed people, an instrument in his hand to help them in obtaining so perfect a joy?

In great weakness, this we confess, that meager beginning occurred. And in great weakness on our part, this we also humbly confess, the work has continued. To us belongs confusion of face but our joy will be the more pure, our thanks to the Lord and Ruler of the Church will be the more perfect when we see that also here the Lord himself has preserved his Word, that his strength is revealed in our weakness. And his power has revealed itself mightily. His grace has been rich toward our synod in these twenty-five years. Yes, he has done great things for us and therefore we are glad.

Even if I could, it is not my intention to enumerate here the blessings of God upon our synod. We can easily see the outward growth: twenty-eight congregations with twelve thousand souls it was who with their seven pastors and forty-two representatives founded this synod and now after the passage of twenty-five years it numbers over one hundred forty pastors with four hundred ninety-three congregations with about one hundred twenty-five thousand souls. At that time none of our pastors and only a few congregations were outside Wisconsin, and that synod meeting consisted of fifty members who gathered over in the East church. Now the Lord has extended the boundaries of our synod so that they stretch out even beyond the United States and today we see almost as many pastors and representatives gathering for this meeting from the farthest regions of the country. Whereas the president of the synod at that time, our dear Pastor A.C. Preus, reported to us in his report to the synod, to our pleasant surprise, that two new churches had been built and three were under construction, two of stone and one of logs, today our district presidents could

<sup>21</sup> The fact is that after a preparatory meeting in Muskego on February 2, 1852, a motion for a synodical constitution was adopted. It was reviewed and adopted at a meeting in Koshkonong’s East Church on February 5, 1853. Then after having received the approval of the congregations it was adopted as the binding synodical constitution for the 28 congregations and 7 pastors who thus organized as the Norwegian Lutheran Synod in America at the meeting held in Luther Valley on the first Monday in October, 1853. (This footnote appears in the 1878 report of the convention.)

report that no less than a score of new churches were constructed in the most recent year, and we could travel thousands of miles and rejoice everywhere at the sight of large crowds who gather in hundreds of houses of God for our edifying services, and at seeing hundreds of them here, trained at our synod's institutions to be servants of the Word, breaking the Bread of Life for their countrymen.

Yet all of this, though, is, of course, important only as a testimony, and that, only to a certain degree, of the synod's inner spiritual growth when the Means of Grace through which the Spirit works are present unimpaired. But it is precisely the greatest proof of grace from God toward our synod that he has preserved his Word pure and the Sacraments unadulterated, yes, through many kinds of tests and struggles helped it to obtain not only a clearer knowledge and a more perfect confession, but we dare to hope also a more sincere appropriation of the saving truth of the Gospel. The streams of the rivers of waters have flowed uninterrupted and every thirsty soul has been able to come and drink of the waters, has been able to buy without money and without price. How many of us there are who honestly have used the good opportunity God has thus given us in our synod to hear his Word, to accept it by faith and be saved from this wicked generation, only he knows who knows the hearts and who is going to reveal also this on that Great Day. May God grant that they be many! The Word of God says to us, however, "Many are called but few are chosen." But whether many or few in our synod are able to say with Paul, "the grace of God has not been in vain," and, "I know in whom I believe," yet we cannot sufficiently thank the Lord that he has borne with us and has not become tired of us so that he removed the candlestick from its place, but thus far has let his light shine upon us and made him who is the way, the truth and the life, known to us.

Just as he is accustomed to doing, the evil foe has certainly not stopped trying to sow the evil seed of error among us since our synod was founded. But his efforts have not succeeded. We have God's unmerited grace to praise for it that they have much rather served to the victory and confirmation of the truth in our synod.

Not that he has failed completely, so that hardly anyone has been misled, no rift has appeared. Even now we think with sadness of those who were with us in the beginning but who have left us. Even if we say of those who were misled, "they were not of us, therefore they departed from us," we still extend our arms to them that they should return and build the walls of Zion with us, except, however, that we will not cover up the rift falsely. But thus has it happened that through the temptations of the evil foe and through the accompanying trials and struggles, God has taught us to take heed to the Word and to base our faith on it and it alone, and he has helped our synod more and more to obtain unity in knowledge and a certainty and firmness in the confession which in any case was not the distinguishing feature of our synod in its first days. And here we say again, not in this way that there is no more uncleanness within our synod nor often disunity concerning the doctrines of faith also. Alas! We must lament our great deficiency in such respects. But in this way, that errors do not hold equality with the truth within our synod, and just as little do all kinds of trends and opinions have homestead rights in it. In this way the truth has become a power within our synod and it is generally acknowledged as such a power, to which the synod as well as its pastors and other members have to submit. Also in this way, that this truth is confessed and defended harmoniously and the trumpet is giving a clear sound throughout our camp. In other words, the Lord has helped our synod to obtain a purity, and a purity in doctrine which is its best adornment as well as its most precious treasure. And it shall not be suppressed here what we owe the Missouri Synod for the guidance, encouragement and strengthening which as God's instrument it has rendered us in this matter as in so many others.

But if the unity of the Spirit is a gift of grace over which we can justifiably rejoice at this Jubilee Festival of our synod and of which our synod has become partaker more and more through the development and struggle God has let it go through, then surely the Word of the Lord applies to us, "Hold fast what you have, so that no one shall take your crown!" Yes, brethren, if the work of our synod is going to succeed in the coming days, then let us take to heart and earnestly lay upon one another's heart the apostle Paul's admonition to the congregation in Ephesus, "Endeavor to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"! The apostle knows that the congregation's success, yes, existence, depends on its being zealous in following this admonition. He knows that if it is disregarded, then disunity, dissension and partisanship will soon hinder the growth and development of the congregation, cause disturbance, yes, divisions, and ultimately the ruin of the congregation.

Neither do we have any reason to rest on our laurels and think that we shall remain undisturbed in the possession of the good thing which, unmerited, God has bestowed upon us. Our enemy shows that he does not sleep. Unity in faith and doctrine is always a thorn in his eye and has long been the object of our adversaries' hatred and scorn. Yet neither do we fear that in the future the cry of intolerance, spiritual tyranny, etc., shall be able to accomplish very much if the willing submission to the Word and resignation to the Spirit's discipline, which in connection with true humility and brotherly love, are requisites for unity of the Spirit and its distinctive feature, did not have a bitter adversary in our own flesh and blood. Pride is the innermost spiritual nature of the old Adam. When he is in control he is generally indifferent toward the truth. False unionism therefore has constantly been his favorite thought, even if only political.

Our synod does well to guard itself against him. "Let him who thinks he is standing, take heed lest he fall!" But "if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples," says Christ. Surely, the more genuinely we appropriate the divine truth in the Word to ourselves in believing hearts, and surely the sweeter grace in Christ tastes to our heart, and surely the more earnestly it lies upon our hearts to bear fruit to the glory of God and to the salvation and blessedness of our souls, the more firmly will we "continue in the Word of the Lord and continue in that which we have learned and which is entrusted to us because we know of whom we have learned them." The more will we then also "hold fast to the correct form of the sound words of faith and love in Christ Jesus, not quarreling about words, which is of no benefit, but to the leading astray of those who hear," and "avoid questions and disputes from which come pride, quarrels," and the like. Therefore Paul also says, "But I admonish you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you should speak the same thing, and that there might be no division among you, but that you should be firmly united in the same mind and the same opinion."

On the other hand, the pride of the natural heart will reveal itself in a self-importance and obstinacy which regards its own as the best, and stubbornly holds to it partly from spite, partly out of contempt for the true welfare of others. If we allow these evil passions, which the enemy is constantly fanning, to have free sway among us, the hatred and bitterness can soon come to separate us and to rend the hearts asunder which were bound together in the unity of the Spirit. They will become a consuming fire which destroys what the fire of love should warm and promote. There is never a lack of combustible material, not even now. Our flesh can also take many occasions for temptation from the dividing of our synod into districts which has taken place according to the new constitution and from the special interests which it can so easily produce. Therefore, brethren, it certainly applies to us all that we be at our post against the enemy we bear in our own bosom, as well as against those who are without, and that we "strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Let us seek after peace, and pursue it! The peacemakers surely have the promise that they shall inherit the earth. Let us give ourselves to one another sincerely in brotherly love and come before each other with respect, and every one submit ourselves the one to the other in love and in the fear of God! He opposes the proud but he gives grace to the humble. Neither let us be stirred up or led astray by a hostile, unscrupulous daily press, or by such who interfere in our affairs without any interest in God and the business of the church in order to sow weeds in our church's fields, who just want to talk big and set the tone also in religious matters although they lack spiritual discernment for judging spiritual things, who most often are revealed as those who are only serving the belly.

Much rather let us keep away from such leaders, but hold together sincerely in faith, humility and brotherly love! What the devil wants to use to kindle division and dissension, you see, that shall God in grace let become for us a stimulus to outdo each other in deeds of love, more genuinely joined together and united through the mutual help the members thus render one another, then shall the growth of the whole body of the synod increase to its edification in love. May God grant it to us by his grace and to that end let also the discussions of this meeting and this our Jubilee Festival be blessed in Jesus' name!

# **19<sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting**

## **Spring Grove Lutheran Church, Houston County, Minnesota**

### **May 25–June 1, 1881**

To the Synod of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America!

Dear brethren in the Lord! Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord!

Psalm 25, verses 4 and 5, says: “Show your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me: for you are the God of my salvation; on you do I wait all the day.” With this prayer to the God of our salvation we meet today as we bid one another welcome to our nineteenth regular joint synod meeting with sincere thanks to God. We have only the grace of God to thank for it that this can occur in these last evil times. We will surely all acknowledge that. This grace is to be praised all the more because we know the evil foe had readily prevented our coming together had he been able. That God will be with us and in us and bless our work with his grace are the things for which we ought all call upon him humbly with prayer and supplication now and all the time we are together, the more anxious the concern of us all is that it truly might succeed and the more genuinely we acknowledge in this hour that it depends solely on the grace of God which works in us both to will and to do.

Our synod certainly has always been beset with cunning and violent attacks. The foe has taken special pleasure in getting our synod divided and ruined. Why? Because in his great grace God has entrusted his Word of truth to it. Surely the more we have striven through this same grace—even if in great weakness—to confess this truth, surely the more we have sought to hold Jesus’ “pure doctrine” in esteem and honor and let it appear clearly in our lives, the more he has fumed and raged and stirred up storms and waves against the little ship of our church so that he could completely crush it. So far, however, God be praised, he has not succeeded! For the fortunate outcome of this struggle as well as for the confessional position which our synod has taken in the course of the years, its love and zeal for the pure doctrine of the Word of God which we have inherited from the fathers of the Reformation, we have essentially to thank, as every man among us knows, next to the grace of God, the Missouri Synod and the man whom God has let be its leader for over a generation. And surely, the more people from various sides and for varying reasons are now seeking to awaken ill-will against these builders and defenders of the Lutheran Church and the faith in these western regions, the more proper it is for us to remember with gratitude all their devoted love toward our synod, and above all the richer acknowledgement of the truth and the encouragement to richer use of it for a sound congregational life and true Christian life of which God has allowed us to be partakers through them.

I especially want to call attention to some basic truths for whose preservation and carrying out, both in theory and in practice, Dr. Walther, together with the whole Missouri Synod, has lifted the banner and fought with unshaken faithfulness, namely, the freedom of a Christian man and a Christian congregation, the universality of divine grace and the total depravity of the natural man and his inability to cooperate in any way whatsoever in his conversion.

Of what importance their testimony has been for our holding fast to these basic truths and our continuance in them in our synod’s fight over the Gospel, absolution and justification, among other things, and through it also for our abiding in the truth of the Word of God in these doctrinal points, I need not explain further here. If we also hold fast to these basic truths in the future, then we surely shall not go astray in the fight which may be imminent, but we will continue in the truth and emerge from the controversy victorious. <sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> A reference to the Election Controversy which shook the Synod so violently in the 1880s.

Through the discussion of the agenda proposed by the Church Council we will again get a good opportunity to deepen ourselves in the consideration of the two basic truths which I mentioned last and to acknowledge to our profound humiliation that in regard to spiritual things we are nothing and can do nothing of ourselves, that to us belongs only confusion of face but that all glory and praise are due to the grace of God alone.

On the whole, however, it has been more quiet with the fight with the other Norwegian church bodies in this country. Naturally, in saying that, I am paying no attention at all to all the scornful words with which people have been pleased to bespatter our synod and various of its members in certain newspapers. From the fact that they have, however, never yet wanted to engage in an orderly discussion with us, but pull back as often as their errors and untruths are pointed out to them, our *Kirketidende* has for the most part in recent issues chosen the only reasonable course—to let them revile, but be silent itself. Even if they now have been untiring in catering to their readers with such articles spiced with hollow phrases about “the instruction of children,” “free congregations,” in a free fellowship, “congregational rule,” etc., yet few conferences of the various members of the synod have been able to proceed unaffected by them and it seems in any case as if a better understanding and progress in important points has been reached here and there. It is, of course, also the old experience that the truth still breaks through eventually and all the righteous accept it. No large joint free conferences have been held during this triennium. But when the president of the Minnesota District, following the close of the last synod convention, in accordance with its resolution took the opportunity of communicating with the presidents of the various church bodies, they agreed to issue invitations to a general free conference for the 24<sup>th</sup> of June and the days following. It is to be hoped that it shall neither be hindered by nor interfered with by violent attacks against it and those people who have been invited, but that God will permit us to meet in the honest attempt to further the glory of God and build the Lutheran Church among us on the ground of truth.

But if it has been comparatively peaceful outwardly, yet our church body has, however, unfortunately lived to see such sorrows during this triennium as never before, and that chiefly through disunity in doctrine.

Surely the pain has been felt deeply round about among us because of it, and while our ecclesiastical opponents, together with the world, heaped scorn and ridicule upon us because of these things, thousands of sighs and prayers were offered that our loving God who had permitted the evil foe to sow his seeds in the garden of his church would also help his poor church to remove the offence and prevent the seed of dissension from taking deeper roots and spreading further.

In the face of such facts it behooves us when we are meeting now as the representatives of our synod to weight its plight and to deliberate on the means for its upbuilding, with shame and blushing also humble ourselves before our Lord and God in acknowledgement of the fact that it is because of our sins that he has laid his hand heavily upon us.

He has thus far preserved his Word pure among us. He has let the rivers of his Gospel flow liberally to the refreshment and healing of all the sick and wounded. But, oh, how much indifference to the Word and to letting its power appear in a holy life, how much surfeit and sluggishness has he not had to be a witness to among us! How much false and habit-Christianity has he not become aware of in us! How little is there, at any rate in a large portion of our older congregations, as things stand, of the zeal for searching into the Word of God, of the willingness to sacrifice time and money so that the kingdom of God can be built up and preserved among us, as so often we could rejoice over seeing in the first days of our synod!

How does not indifference for the Christian instruction and upbringing of the children grow, just as though it is enough that we have good textbooks!

Our loving God had to wake us up in this way so that we should better perceive his grace, use it more faithfully to our own and others' edification and more diligently thank him in a godly life.

In his wisdom he has allowed these tribulations to come upon us and allowed this new doctrinal controversy to arise in order to lead us back to the source of all true wisdom, so that we should seek light, life and salvation in the words of Scripture.

Oh, that it then, my brethren, may not apply to us now as it did earlier to Israel, “I smote them, but they did not feel it!” That would certainly be the worst thing of all. Then there surely were no longer any hope of rescue. No, let us examine ourselves. Let all proud, willful thoughts depart. Let us humble ourselves before God and men, repent of our sins and with earnest prayer turn to God and say with the psalmist, “LORD, let me know your ways and teach me your truths, lead me in your truth and teach me, because you are the God of my salvation. I wait on you all the day,” Psalm 25:4.5. Even now he is still God, the Strong One, the Mighty One, the Gracious One, our tender-hearted Father who chastises those whom he loves, who with each of his blows has thoughts of peace for us. Therefore, only be comforted, my heart, do not lose heart! Let us not give up hope or cast away courage, but with the singer say “I wait on you all the day!” Certainly he will not forsake us or abandon us, but he is still with us in his Word to comfort as to chastise, to exalt, as to humble.

Let us therefore hold his Word in high esteem and honor. Let us, as we have learned in our Catechism, sigh to God for the Holy Spirit’s enlightening and read it with devotion and a willing intent to live according to the Word! Surely the Lord shall then *show us his ways and teach us his paths* so that Satan shall not succeed in enticing us out on the broad way of sin to our common offence. Then shall *he also cause us to advance in his truth* and himself *teach us*. And then shall the cunning foe neither succeed in entangling us in the net of error nor leading us away from the simple truth which is revealed to us by God in the Holy Scriptures and which was confessed by our faithful fathers in the Confessions of our Lutheran Church. And brethren! what an excellent treasure the fathers have left us in these writings, as though God has wanted to remind us through the triple jubilee festival in which we celebrated the coming into existence of Luther’s *Small Catechism* and the Augsburg Confession 350 years ago and the gathering of all the Confessions of the Lutheran Church into the *Book of Concord* which took place 50 years later. In them our faithful fathers have laid down their simple confession of the divine truth and as such we ought to hold them in esteem because they are thoroughly in agreement with the revealed Word of God in the Holy Scriptures.

Through a new edition of *The Book of Concord* last year’s synod meetings/district conventions? hoped to give support so that the excellent treasures which are contained in it would become more generally disseminated, known and loved in our congregations. And truly, if our congregations become properly familiar with this treasure chest of simple, edifying knowledge unto salvation, then we shall find that in these writings the Lord has also given us—the laity as well as the clergy—a powerful aid to “showing us his ways and teaching us his paths, to leading us in his truth and teaching us.” At the very least, the children of the Lutheran Church should not then remain in uncertainty about what is Lutheran doctrine and what is not.

Yes, it is as though the Lord, through these jubilee festivals just now, has wanted to point to this excellent armory in order that we should seek a defense there also in the doctrinal controversy which has recently broken out, and take up weapons against the invading errors of whatever nature they might be. Because therein, must, however, all those who want to be Lutherans also agree that what the 11<sup>th</sup> Article of the Formula of Concord teaches about “God’s Eternal Foreknowledge and Election” is what the Lutheran Church confesses as the teaching of the Word of God on this point.

However, my brethren, if there is going to be talk among us of a more general knowledge and a more diligent use on the part of the congregations of these Confessions of the church for their edification and strengthening in the faith of the father as well as for a rebuttal and defense against errors and false spirits, then a good foundation must be laid for it in the congregations, above all through a thorough *Catechism instruction!* But this is obtained, as conditions now exist, essentially through *Christian schools* where the Word of God rules and permeates the whole instruction and the entire discipline.

And here I have come to undoubtedly the sorest point in our synod’s history and the weakest side of our synodical life. There is nothing of which the complaints of the pastors in the various districts are more

unanimous and eloquent than about the sorrowful condition of education. If the instruction in the home had been carried out with the carefulness with which it ought to have been, the situation would be far from as bad and the damage from the lack of Christian schools not as great as it now is. But the neglect of the parents toward it in the home makes the situation, as it exists, even more critical and dangerous.

That is to say, that while in many places there are a few parochial schools, in other places there are none, so that the largest majority of the children of our Christian congregations are either entirely or to a large degree exposed to the ruinous influence of the worldly spirit which as a rule must prevail in the religionless state schools. In vain shall a person be able to find in the earlier history of the church a phenomenon like this which our times have to exhibit, that Christian parents and congregations entrust their children's upbringing to teachers without regard to whether they are heathen or Christians. It is unbelief and materialism we have to thank for this so-highly-praised educational system which has come into vogue in our days. It appears far too obvious that through the establishment of such a system, it will be able to indoctrinate our children with its leaven most easily, bring on the fall of our posterity from the faith, and make them its slaves. And it is the indifference of Christians who willingly hand their off-spring to this Moloch of our time. It has, however, been the desire of Christian missionaries, as much as possible, to rescue the baptized children of the heathen from the heathen influence and in that way secure for them a thoroughly Christian upbringing. Also in our days when out of hatred for Christianity or in the misconception of its power and from a misunderstood concern for its own welfare through coercive laws, the state wants to take the whole upbringing of the children into its hands, we see zealous Christians, for example, in Holland, Germany and Australia, ready either to sacrifice everything, yes, even to go into exile rather than to abandon their children to the world at such a price.

Also in our country, because of the sorrowful experiences of the fall from Christianity and the demoralization of the growing generation, more and more powerful and weighty voices are being raised for grounding the bringing up of the children and youth on the rock-like foundation, Christianity. The General Assembly of the Episcopal Church, among others, has declared Christian parochial schools and schools of learning to be absolutely necessary if the youth are going to be spared from temporal and eternal damage.

Since my eyes have been opened to the importance of this matter and I have received the grace to see how the preservation and growth of our church, and the temporal and eternal welfare of our successors, depends upon our taking the right steps here, and earnestly caring that our children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, I have not been silent. I have sought to raise my weak voice on behalf of this matter as often as I have had the honor of speaking to the assembly of our congregations' pastors and representatives. Even if I must fear that for the most part it has been a voice in the wilderness, and should this even be the last time this is granted me, I should, however, wish for myself a powerful voice in order rightly to be able to shout it into the conscience of the congregations: Who has bewitched you that you have so little concern for your own flesh and blood, and so little see and heed what is necessary for their peace and salvation! It is therefore of urgent necessity that the synod discuss this matter. It is before you in the report of the committee "On Christian Parochial Schools," the discussion of which was postponed by the previous general convention of the synod.

But brethren! if our dear God, through these so heavy trials, could truly get our hearts to bow to him and to lead us, pastors and laity, as I said earlier, to a richer knowledge and a more sincere acceptance of his truth, to a more genuine fellowship with him and to a more faithful use of his gifts in a healthy and sound congregational life and a pious, God-fearing Christian life, then we should still praise him who smote us, notwithstanding that it is written, "Woe to him from whom offenses come."

Chapter VII, paragraph 2 of the synod's Constitution says: "The presidents of the districts shall, before each regular convention, submit a comparable report for the triennium to the synod's president." The meaning of this directive is really that through these reports the president of the synod shall be in a position to give the synod an overview of the facts and condition of the entire synod for the previous triennium and make the synod aware of what things of special importance might have taken place or because of which some measures ought to be taken. Unfortunately, only the reports of the president of the Eastern District and the president of Luther College were received in time, so that I have been able to make further use of them in the drawing up of my report. The synod is asked to take this into consideration if my report is less

complete than is desirable. The district presidents complain that the pastors' reports did not come in in the proper time.

In the following paragraphs President Preus reports on the numerical growth of the synod during the previous three years, on a number of congregations which have not joined the synod being served by pastors of the synod, reminding them of their consequent forfeiture of the right to take part in helping to determine the direction in which the synod shall go, of ordinations, retirements, and deaths among the clergy, etc.

Thus we have seen that we have much reason to be thankful because the Lord has spread the cords of our fellowship so wide. How widely our synod has also now made comparable progress in *internal development* is certainly difficult to determine. However, brethren, even if it is not possible to separate the tares from the wheat before the time of harvest, yet we must not forget that it is by their fruits that the trees shall be known! Wherever corrupt fruits appear, these are testimonies that Satan still holds power in the children of unbelief, or in the flesh of believers. Likewise, to the same extent that the lack of good fruits comes into view there is also a lack of the Christian life and its root, which is faith. However, we must not forget here that it is written, "Our life is hid with Christ in God," so that the good fruits as a rule are not as easily noticed as the bad and that some of the best fruits of faith either are not seen at all by people, or, like blue anemones only gladden the nearest surroundings.

Now first, concerning *the daily Christian life* among us which of course forms the basis for the life of both the congregations and the synod, there is no doubt that the greatest and most and most dangerous deficiency in our Christian life, the greatest sin of omission, is to be sought in the lack of daily use of God's Word. *The instruction of the mother*, which is of the greatest importance so the children may acquire the grace and growth of their Baptism, is being neglected more and more! Further, how *family devotion* is declining and with it the diligent and careful searching into the Word of God in order to be strengthened in the faith and to grow in the knowledge of Christ! And would not many fallings away be prevented, and how many risings of those fallen have occurred when *brotherly admonition and discipline* was practiced among us! We do not need to look for the sorrowful consequences of these neglects. The reports of the district presidents all complain about the thoughtlessness of the youth and their increasing indifference toward church and the Lord's Means of Grace, and I will add: lack of true respect for the elderly and proper concern for parents weakened by age. They also complain about an earthly mind, which along with covetousness and drunkenness, is more and more on the rise in several places. Something else, which alongside that, appears to me to be the most conspicuous, is a refined worldliness combined with an aversion for the coarseness of the former days. There is a shrinking from the cross and the zealous confession of Christ but it is not ashamed of being yoked with the world and the bitterest enemies of Christ.

If we cast a glance upon congregational life, then, next to the sad state of education which was discussed earlier, we really take notice especially of the sad *neglect of the Sacrament of the Altar*. While *church attendance* taken as a whole seems to be rather good, and in some places exceptional, yet this is far from the case with *attendance at the Lord's Supper*. If we start from this that those who seek the sacrament, as a rule go to communion twice a year, then the reports show that half of the synod's members do not go to the Lord's Table. It appears to be somewhat better in the Iowa District than in the other two. If we look at the reports for the individual congregations then we will find that there are several congregations where not more than one-fifth of the confirmed members seek God's Table. Yes, there are congregations where this is the case with not more than one-tenth; where therefore nine-tenths of the adult members do not go to God's Table.

It is a sad situation which not only must arouse concern, but demands prayer and work on the part of pastor and congregation. It can well be that one person or another can stay away from the Lord's Supper for a while from dread of the unfamiliar private announcement for Communion. This, however, ought not cause a congregation to discontinue this, but rather to seek to make those who come better instructed. On the contrary, the congregation ought to see, and the synod watch over, that this so very profitable custom is kept and is introduced where it is lacking. Unfortunately, it has happened that for one reason or another private announcements have fallen into disuse in a congregation. A congregation ought not tolerate such

neglect on the part of its pastor. "Finally, the church," the Smalcald Articles say. "must not allow confession or absolution to fall into disuse."

That *church discipline*, especially in its final phase, cannot even be expected under such circumstances is thus reasonable. Now there can certainly be congregations which have so little service, are so lacking in comprehension and are so immature that they could not hope to see it through. But many times, ungrounded fear and lack of proper confidence in the power of the Word of God can actually have stopped even the attempt. Above all, we must not forget that this neglect is a great sin and a great offense for the individual souls and for the congregations as a whole. Therefore it behooves us that we exhort one another not to lose heart but to work in confidence in the Lord without becoming weary. The members of our congregations must also truly lay it on their hearts that even the most capable and zealous pastor cannot initiate church discipline alone.

Where the garden is not weeded diligently, weeds grow. When brotherly admonition and profitable church discipline are neglected, gossip, slander and judging take their place. I fear that there is altogether too much of this weed also in our congregations. Yes, many people are not even bashful about trumpeting the frailties of brethren and scandals in the congregation to the world's masses through the public press which naturally grabs onto such things eagerly in order to be able to make fun of them. A congregation ought not take part in such things and even less make itself guilty of it. What concern are a congregation's internal affairs to the world and why do its children insist on meddling in the church's affairs with their wisdom and giving their opinion of them? If a congregation cannot shine before the world as a city set on a hill by proclaiming the deeds of Christ, then, we ought not, however, spread our own disgrace and make the precious name of Christ an object of ridicule for them. The congregations' leaders especially ought to watch themselves here about setting a bad example. If there is something to complain about, something to correct in a congregation or in the synod, and unfortunately there can be enough of such things, then let everyone do his duty with earnestness and zeal, but in a Christian way. But one does not turn, perhaps even by bypassing his own people, to the world with his complaints and proposals, to the general public, to set it in motion and to let it dominate the church and its members with its cries.

Finally, we consider the life of the fellowship within our synod and what is most closely connected with it. The purpose of our affiliation with the synod is of course to uphold and preserve the Word of God pure among us and to further the development of the Christian life especially through such mutual activities which the individual congregation cannot do as well alone. Of greatest importance in this direction are undoubtedly our educational institutions.

President Preus goes on to report on the synod's academy, colleges and seminary; its missions in the United States, the immigrants' mission in New York City, the Negro mission in the south, and its foreign missions; then, on reports of visitations held in several congregations by the district presidents; and on other matters before directing brief attention to the Election Controversy which had recently been instigated by Professor F.A. Schmidt to which he has alluded earlier in his address. An "Explanation from the Church Council to the Synod" regarding the doctrine of election is included with his report. After expressing his appreciation to the synod's members for the confidence and cooperation shown him as president, Preus closes with:

And with this be the synod and its work commended to the Lord and his grace! May his blessings be upon our work, that it truly may succeed!

## **20<sup>th</sup> Regular Synod Meeting**

### **Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota**

### **June 18–25, 1884**

To the esteemed Synod!

Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence comes my help,” Psalm 121:1.

Let us meet today with this prayer, in this hope! This is a troublesome time for our church body, a time full of conflict and tribulation, in which we come together.<sup>23</sup> Who of us should not be permeated by a sense of the gravity of the moment? Our Synod has surely had to go through several doctrinal conflicts since its founding. They were, however, for the most part, with opponents from the outside. The violent doctrinal controversy which had recently broken out when we were assembled at the general synodical convention three years ago, was started in our midst. It was brethren who stood here against brethren. It was to be foreseen that to a large extent it had to be disruptive and damaging for our entire synod if it could not be resolved in time. Efforts have not been lacking, in part to limit its extent so that it should not disturb and ravage our congregations unnecessarily, in part for settling it so that we could achieve unity on the ground of truth. Discussions have been held toward this latter goal without interruption by large and small conferences, synodical meetings and special committees. Even if we dare to hope that these efforts have not been completely fruitless so that on the one hand this controversy is essentially kept away from a large portion of our congregations and on the other hand many of those concerned have gained a more correct understanding, at least to the extent that the primary reason for the controversy and what it all means with reference to the position and the opinion of the various parties, the controversy itself has, however, continued without interruption in the triennium and has still not come to a satisfactory resolution. From whose eyes have the destructive consequences which this controversy has already produced really been able to be hidden? Harsh accusations of false doctrine and attacks on the moral character of persons are made against the large majority of the synod's pastors. The evil seed of suspicion is sown in many of their members' hearts and confidence in their pastors undermined.

Many people are confused in their simple Christian faith and ask in doubt: “Yes, what is the truth?” Base elements, which must be found in congregations, step forward who quickly gain support and attempt to make themselves influential. Respect for the ordinances of the church and for Christian morality is dulled. Doctrinal discipline and the little church discipline which is to be found, are relaxed. Agitation and church politics are promoted. Majorities decide matters instead of the Word of God. Thus we stand in danger of a general demoralization. Suspicion, disunity and conflict arise between members of the same congregation, yes, of the same family. Factions are formed which lie in wait for each other and try to get the best of everyone. Splits in congregations and deposing of pastors have even occurred because of the controversy .<sup>24</sup>

How much the ministers' and pastors' work for the building up of the congregations will be hindered by all this, how much precious time and energies which could be applied to the development of the congregations are now being taken up by the controversy, is not easy to say.

Granted that these sad consequences of controversy, God be praised, have not become apparent everywhere or in like degree. Granted that it has served as a profitable testing of many people, to a deeper knowledge of the divine truth, to the strengthening of their faith, this much, however, needs to be acknowledged by everyone, that the controversy has grown to such an extent and has proven itself so

<sup>23</sup> The election controversy which in 1881 President Preus had said may be imminent, was raging when he addressed the synod in 1884.

<sup>24</sup> President Preus was himself deposed by one of his congregations on Good Friday 1883.

ruinous in its consequences that it must be stopped if it is not going to divide our church body and bring about a larger or smaller division of the church.

And in order to accomplish this great task we, dear brethren, have come together. With all this controversy and misery before us we are to take hold of the work and restore unity, order and peace, so that the congregations can be built up in peace on the ground of truth. The congregations which have sent us expect no less of us. It is truly a task so great that we all must cry out as one: "Who is sufficient for this?" In humble acknowledgement of this, certainly also every sincere Christian among us, when he prepared himself for this meeting, has thrown himself down at the feet of the Lord who has promised to hear his children's cry and to deliver them from the distress of the day. And when we now are to proceed to the work and take hold of the resolution of this great task, to whom should we turn for help, where should we go for light and wisdom, comfort and courage, power and grace, except to him who has redeemed us out of boundless love and gathered us into a Christian people, our church's Lord and King, who reigns at the right hand of majesty and who protects his church and has promised to be with his own until the end of days? Yes, he must do it if it is going to be done. He who has begun the good work among us must complete it!

Let us therefore humble ourselves before him and confess that we have well deserved this severe chastisement because of our many and great sins. In his abundant mercy he let us find our way back to the old paths at the beginning of our Lutheran Zion in this country. He let his holy Law be proclaimed and his blessed Gospel ring out pure and unadulterated among us in an ever wider circle. Under the shelter of civil freedom we found grace to organize our church and the affairs of our congregations according to evangelical principles without limitation of the Christian freedom which Christ has earned for us at so great a price, so that the various gifts with which the Lord equips the members of his church could be applied to the building up of the entire body without breach of the proper order. He let orthodox institutions of learning be established among us from which hosts of messengers have gone out over the years with the Good News and who have spread out over the land to the farthest regions in order to gather souls for Christ and to train up a people of God among us who are zealous of good works.

But now if we ask ourselves how these gifts of grace have been received, how they have been used, this rich opportunity to build up the kingdom of God in our hearts, our homes, in our congregations, to proclaim the glory of his name to them who walk in darkness, to shine as a city on a hill, if we ask ourselves which fruits of the Spirit—blessed fruit of righteousness to the remembrance of his name—to the praise of his glory, then I really have no doubt that also here his promise: "My word shall not return void," has been fulfilled. However, *we* must hang our heads in shame. At any rate, I must confess with the publican: "God be gracious to me, the sinner!"—and confess: We have truly deserved this chastisement. Yes, if the Lord would enter into judgment with us and punish us as we deserve for our drowsiness, indifference and thanklessness, because of our many sins with which we have dishonored his name, yes, then we would be completely destroyed and there would be nothing left of the beautiful vineyard he planted here, no remembrance of his name. But God's mercy be praised! He has not dealt with us like that. He has not forsaken us completely. He has let grace reign. We have been chastised but not slain!

O that we therefore, brethren, now that we come together here, might together with our congregations make a sincere, righteous repentance from the heart and in our deepest distress cry to him: "Return, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which your right hand planted, and the Son, whom you made strong for yourself—so will we not go back from you; let us live, and we will call upon your name. LORD God of hosts! turn us, let your face shine, so we are saved," Psalm 80:12–20.

So will we cling fast to the Lord more zealously and call upon his help since we know that the evil foe will do everything possible in order to demolish our church and to deprive us of the Word of truth. But if we thus lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence help shall come to us, then our meeting here shall not be in vain. Then the Lord himself shall be with us and bless our decisions, let our work prosper, and preserve us in unity of the Spirit on the ground of truth because he has promised that *the way of the righteous shall prosper*. Let it be so, O God, for your mercy's sake in Christ Jesus! Amen.

# 21<sup>st</sup> Regular Convention

Stoughton, Wisconsin  
June 3–9, 1887

To the esteemed Synod of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Dear brothers in the ministry and representatives of the congregations! Grace and peace be yours abundantly in the acknowledgement of God, and Jesus Christ our Lord!

Three years have again passed and the representatives of the congregations are gathered for a meeting of the joint synod. I surely am not mistaken in saying that the doctrinal controversy within our synod is the matter which occupies our minds and which especially will be the subject of the synod's earnest deliberations and discussions. I do not need to expound upon their great importance for our church body and for our congregations. The gravity of the moment must force itself upon every one of us. A great responsibility rests upon us over toward the congregations we represent, over toward the thousands of redeemed souls who are to be nourished in them in the pastures of the Word and upheld unto eternal life, and above all, over toward the Lord of the Church who has committed to us the ministry of the Word so that it is to be administered faithfully in accordance with his institution and for the salvation and blessedness of souls. It challenges us to approach the work with fear and trembling, to call upon the gracious assistance of him who alone can help us, so that with calmness, wisdom and love we can discuss with each other, and weigh, and conclude the important business which lies before us. So that the discussions can be carried on with the composure which is proper for Christians and redound to the glory of God and be a blessing to the congregations, so exceedingly much depends upon our not nourishing unfounded suspicions against one another or passing sentence upon one another without clear proofs, but that we speak and discuss as in the presence of God as we remember that we shall render an account before the judgment throne. Besides, my friends, the Lord has said to us that his grace is sufficient for us and that his strength is made perfect in our weakness! If we preserve his testimony unadulterated and if we hold firmly to it in genuine faith, then we are assured of possessing his grace. And if we have it, brethren, then we have enough, whatever else may happen, because then his strength is made perfect in our weakness. To that end may God help us for Jesus' sake!

As you know, the recent doctrinal controversy began with Professor Schmidt<sup>25</sup> making public accusations of Calvinism and Crypto-Calvinism against colleagues, although we on our part held totally to the Formula of Concord. We particularly emphasized the familiar assertion that there "is not a cause of our election in us," likewise, that believers ought to have and can have an unflinching certainty of faith about their eternal election, which was rejected by the other side. The controversy soon prompted many subtle questions. Vehement, unfounded judgments of dissent were made, because of which many minds were confused and the tranquility of the congregations was disturbed. It was so much more likely that this was the case since the doctrine in question was never discussed publicly in our synod meetings, very seldom had been the subject for thorough discussions in sermons in the congregations, and thus was all but unknown to our laypeople, because with but few exceptions, neither had the pastors of the synod subjected it to any deeper, thorough study. It was, to be sure, not a fundamental doctrine which it was necessary to know for salvation. It therefore also became apparent at the beginning of the controversy that many people were completely in the dark and were undecided over toward the various positions and the ways in which they were stated.

Although both the Lutheran doctrine of Justification and the Lutheran doctrine of Absolution had been thoroughly discussed at our synod meetings and had been generally agreed upon within our synod, and although in doing that a Calvinistic as well as synergistic tendency and slant was strongly withstood and energetically rejected, yet it was, however, not long after the outbreak of the new controversy before new, strange ways of expressing things, which were unsafe for our circles, were put forward and the assertions

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich August Schmidt

defended, which led to fears that a synergistic root had attached itself to them and was growing. This prompted some people among us to request that the doctrine of conversion be made the subject for discussions in our pastoral conferences because they were convinced that if there was, as we hoped, unity of faith in the doctrine of election, disagreement in views and expressions would not be able to justify a split of the congregations and synod where unity of faith was present. The request was, however, rendered suspect. It was said to be based only on the desire to avoid discussion of the doctrine of election. It was unnecessary and unreasonable to go over to a discussion of the doctrine of conversion, since we all agreed so completely on it, and then, it was not so closely interrelated with the doctrine of election. In spite of that objection the discussions and the controversy little by little shifted involuntarily to *the doctrine of conversion*.

In the presentation of this doctrine expressions and ways of saying things which had to shock a Lutheran ear very much were also being used now more and more, which long before the controversy we all wanted to be agreed on rejecting or advising against their use as questionable. It is otherwise well worth calling attention to how these things increased as everything which the controversy pushed forward and people's ears became accustomed to the new ways of saying things. It was as though people were becoming more bold. Assertions were now made. Doctrines were rejected. And the question made the subject for discussion about which we would earlier never have talked.

Thus, for example, that "in a certain sense salvation does not depend on God alone," that "our salvation does not lie in God's hand alone but that it is put into people's hands," that "God has decided to do it (namely, to save us) because of our attitude," that "since God works on a person through his Word and his Spirit to convert him, then a person's conversion will depend on his own choice, on the attitude in which he places himself toward the operation of God's grace" (K.R. Forh., p. 31), that "when God calls to people through his Word, then, through his Word he works *in everyone* so that he *can* "want to convert himself," that "the Word of God cannot come to a person without something new coming into him," that "the natural man receives some powers from God with which he can cooperate in his conversion" (K.R. Forh., p. 29), that through the call a person receives "abilities and powers by the grace of God with which in full freedom of choice he can himself decide to convert himself to God" (Eastern District annual report, 1885, p. 36), that "through prefatory grace God gives a person the ability to convert himself, and a person's conversion will then depend on his using the ability which God gives him," that when God works on them, people's future salvation "does not depend on God but on themselves" (Luth. B. 1884, p. 453), that a person's conversion depends on the *unregenerate* person using the power which he receives in the Gospel to convert himself and that the *unregenerate* person who uses this power which he receives through the Word *cooperates* with the carrying out of God's plan of salvation, concerning himself" (*Norden*, 22 April, 1885), that "the omission of willful resistance is what the act of conversion is about, *not grace*, that there is a middlestate between being spiritually dead or alive (K.R. Forh. P. 29), that it shall be correct to say that a person "builds his hope of salvation on his having allowed himself to be brought into the plan of salvation and that his attitude in this regard had been as it ought to be" (Luth. B., 1886, p. 117), "that with our prayer we can in a way bring God to decide to, we can move God to hear us, or thereby, that we forsake our other transgressions and can bring him to do what he has promised to do in such a case, namely, forgive us our transgressions" (Luth. B. 1886, p. 210). "If people want to have us believe, it is absolutely certain that we should once be saved. Then we know also that we will have something to do with procuring such a faith, because we know that *it is just as certain* that we can one day enter *hell*, namely, if we fall from our baptismal covenant, and being fallen, as it is certain that we can be saved, namely, if we are found in faith in Jesus Christ to our lives' end" (Minnesota District annual report, 1880, p. 14). I cannot see otherwise than that with such talk people contradict several fundamental doctrines of Scripture, namely, that the unregenerate person does not possess a free will or a power with which he can cooperate in his conversion, that our salvation is effected and is dependent upon God alone and lies in God's hand, that we are justified by faith alone without the deeds of the Law, and that therefore works must not be intermingled in the article of justification, that "he who works prayer in us is the Holy Ghost," and that "consequently no one except a true Christian can pray" (Muus, Synod Report 1877, p. 15), and that "where faith is lacking, prayer to God is an abomination" (Synod Report 1877, p. 25), and that God "will forgive us it (sin) entirely *by grace*" (*Small Catechism*, 5<sup>th</sup> Petition), that there are but two classes of people, believers and unbelievers; so that I shall not doubt but believe that God "shall give me and all believers eternal life."

That there is, however, obvious disunity in essential points of doctrine among those who follow Prof. Schmidt's and Pastor Muus's<sup>26</sup> direction in this controversy I have recently called attention to in an open letter to Pastor Muus which was published in *Evangelisk Luthersk Kirketidende*, number 21 for this year, and which is appended to my report. I therefore do not doubt either that several people on the other side disapprove of expressions such as those I have quoted, although no public protest against them has come to my attention. However, even if one does not think that he can attach a completely different meaning to them than the word says, yet, however, the synod will not possibly be able to tolerate that a way of saying things is used by its pastors which must confuse and mislead people, and even rightly stamp the synod's doctrine in this matter as good Catholic doctrine.

But unfortunately it became more and more clear that we could not speak here for everyone about awkward or incorrect ways of saying things.

At the pastoral conference in Decorah in the fall of 1884 some of the members held special meetings and drew up a "Confession Concerning Some Disputed Points of Doctrine." The other members of the pastoral conference saw it as their excuse to give the synod's congregations an accounting of their faith. They did it in "An Accounting to the Congregations of the Norwegian Synod." The majority of those who had subscribed to the "Confession" then held a special meeting in Red Wing (Minnesota) in the fall of 1885. They came to the conclusion that those men who had subscribed to the "Accounting" ought to be deposed, likewise a couple of district presidents. They also took various steps in order to form a more distinct organization as a separate faction within the synod.

The work and the defense on behalf of the new position about the spiritual freedom of the unregenerate person and his ability to cooperate in his conversion became more determined and more persistent, and the old ways of stating it, to be rejected even more. Thus they said, for example: "Scripture expresses itself in several places in this way, that people's predisposition, speech and deeds, or attitude, are causes for their conversion and salvation" (at the conference in Zumbrota [MN]); and: "in this passage (Mt. 25:34 ff.) the Savior cites people's attitude as the reason that they are given eternal life (at the conference in Zumbrota); it is taught also that the *unregenerate person* can pray in a God-pleasing manner about those things to which God himself leads him and prompts him to sigh about (Luth. B., 1887, p. 201), and that God promises that he will take into *consideration* the fact "that an *ungodly person* is calling upon him" and will be merciful to him and forgive him (Luth. B., 1887, p. 199); likewise, "Therefore it will happen that a (spiritually) dead person does a good work, and I do not know how it will happen, but God does; for me it is enough that it can happen, and that I do it" (to the Norwegian Lutheran congregations in Manitowoc [WI], etc., by Bjorn, p. 19).

Meanwhile, a so-called "Peace Committee" of three members from each side was appointed with the right to choose a seventh member, such a man as people generally regarded as the most moderate.

Most people's expectations were made brighter that unity would still be achieved through the work of this committee. These expectations had to be strengthened by the result of the discussions in the Minnesota District in 1885 where it became apparent that Pastor Muus stood quite alone with his error in a fundamental point of doctrine. The bright expectation, however, received a serious setback through the Red Wing resolutions. At the same time, a colloquy was arranged in Lacrosse (WI), and the result exceeded expectations. The colloquy resolved to continue, and strong encouragement for that came from the Eastern District meeting the previous year. However, now there was as hasty an end to all discussions as it was tragic. Except that the Iowa District's meeting concluded that no change whatever had occurred in the doctrinal position. Among other things there was the provisional establishment of a theological seminary in Northfield, Minnesota, and Pastor Muus allowed an immediate appeal to go out to the congregations. Since in doing that he placed himself in open opposition to the synod's schools, completely broke with its regulations, and against the synodical constitution took it upon himself to want to train, examine and send out pastors within the synod as a separate synod within the synod, there surely could no longer be talk about the continuation of the colloquy about which people previously were agreed. The discussions in the

<sup>26</sup> Bernt Julius Muus (1832–1900)

newspapers have also fallen upon a dead calm and instead have been geared to making even more clear what the real point of the controversy is.

I am convinced that the question is whether the *unregenerate person* can possess the ability or the power to decide for grace on his own and thus add something of his own, and cooperate in his conversion. This was the point of disagreement during the discussions of the Church Council in Minneapolis. It is basically around this point that the discussions at the synod meetings have revolved even if it has not explicitly been set up as the theme for the discussions. There is certainly no disagreement that this question is also an important point in the doctrine of conversion because whether the truth is going to be preserved among us that we are saved by grace and that we are justified by faith alone without the deeds of the Law, depends on its preservation. I was convinced that the doctrine of conversion had to be the topic for the synod's doctrinal discussions and have therefore specified it as the topic for discussion in the notification of this meeting. As I said, I have believed that that one mentioned above was the most important of the various points in the doctrine of conversion, and that it would be the most useful for the synod to use in the form in which it has twice been discussed at the Iowa District's meetings, as the basis for the discussions. Toward that end I have left a brief report to be published and I have appointed a couple of reporters.

I mentioned the theological seminary in Northfield a moment ago and touched on the significance which the establishing of this opposition-institution has had for the course of the controversy as well as with regard to the position which a portion of the synod's members have taken over toward the synod.

Certainly a great many things have occurred during the controversy which were contrary to the synod's constitution and to good church order and which were well suited for giving offence to hearts, loosening synodical ties and bringing on discord in the synod and in the congregations. Thus, congregations in the synod have adopted new confessions without its approval and given them such an importance that a pastor's refusal to sign his name to them has been stated as the only reason for his removal. Pastors and lay-people have not merely sent their appeals and circulars around to members of other congregations but also forced themselves into them and have accepted larger or small numbers of congregations' members into their services who have deposed their pastors or separated themselves from the congregation, contrary to the Word of God. Students have been encouraged to pursue their theological studies at the Ohio Synod's seminary and have received assistance for this from members of the synod. After having completed their course there, some of them have been called by congregations in the synod without having submitted to the testing prescribed in the synodical constitution, and with the by-passing of those properly concerned, been ordained by pastors in the synod or by others who had no authorization whatever for it from the synod or its officers. Yes, there are even instances where pastors in the synod, without any authorization whatever, have laid hands on and ordained such as have not passed the prescribed examinations, but for good reasons meanwhile have been denied ordination by the ordinators authorized by the synod, the district presidents. It is not necessary to point out at greater length what a debilitating influence such conduct must have upon pastors and congregations, and how destructive and divisive they must be for the entire church body.

However, none of that, and not all of it combined either, is of as far-reaching significance as is the establishing of the Northfield seminary. This action, together with the existing facts in connection with it, is not merely a breach of good church order, a breach of faith and of laws, a violation of the synodical constitution, but a declaration in action by the participants concerned, that they no longer will submit to the synod, its constitution and authorities to which they pledged themselves through their voluntarily joining the synod, that they will no longer work for and support the synod's various institutions, but will undermine and work against them as far as their abilities and powers reach.

This is evident already from the appeal of Pastor Muus "to the Lutheran pastors in the Norwegian Synod" (*Lutheran Testimony*, V, p. 363). He says: "During the last meeting of the Iowa District I had summoned the counselors whom the pastoral conference in Red Wing had chosen in order to consider what could be done under the existing circumstances. Some of the pastors and laypeople of our faith also gathered several times during the synod meeting in order to consult with each other. Withdrawal from the synod was then discussed and passages from Scripture quoted in support of doing that, but it was decided that it required 'only a spiritual separation' not a 'physical' separation, and that no 'joint church work' remained 'when they carried on a dogged and unceasing fight' against the others in the synod who in their

opinion were teaching falsely. Therefore they decided, he says, to 'attempt to establish a private seminary' in Northfield, Minnesota, and to put the first-year class upstairs at the St. Olaf's school there."

That it was not the intention of this "private" institution to work with and to support the synod's institutions is even more clearly evident from the statements in the appeal: "We have no obligation to support the synod's institutions as we have in the past," "since *the synod's institutions* now insist upon a doctrine which is different from the one the synod's constitution dictates. Thus they have broken the covenant which was established with us through the constitution." "It is presumed that not even the consideration of fairness can justly be cited as reason for supporting *the synod's institutions* such as it was in the past."

In the address with which the new "private" seminary was dedicated, it says: "And now we are, however, gathered here today in order to open our own private school for pastors, which by the nature of the matter must stand in distinct *opposition to the seminary of the church body* to which we either have belonged or still belong." And again, "namely, it is, and with the help of God always will be, a vigorous, strong and successful opposition-institution."

Therefore, according to the public declarations of the founders, the purpose of the new "private" seminary in Northfield is to work against, and if possible, to destroy the institutions of the synod. It will happen by drawing students and the support of congregations away from the synod's institutions to the new institution, by graduating and sending out ordained pastors from it into the synod's congregations. And they have truly worked toward this goal. The synod's seminary is presented as a nursery of errors; those of the synod's pastors and members who wanted to have nothing to do with either the new doctrine or the new private seminary, but held to the old doctrine and to the synod's seminary, are accused of laying another foundation than that which is laid through God's universal grace in Christ Jesus (*Luth. Vidne.*, V, p. 460). Yes, it is called an unfruitful fig tree on which they will not waste more vigorous effort, but which they must "let go."

Special pastoral conferences and meetings are held, appeals and circulars are being sent out, and collections taken in the congregations for these private institutions and missions.

It cannot be necessary to point out more clearly that the establishing of a theological seminary with this goal, and that a union and organization of a portion of the members of the synod with its own government, own treasury and own teachers working for the furtherance of this goal, is contrary to all church order, and is an organization of a synod within the synod and is an act of dissension, which if it succeeds, must lead to the breaking up of the synod. A church body cannot tolerate such conduct without working toward its own dissolution.

That it is also an obvious breach of faith and laws, a breach of the synodical constitution, should not need any proof either.

Every congregation which joins the synod had made the statement that "the constitution of the Synod was adopted in a public meeting of the congregation," and every permanent member declares at his acceptance into the synod that he "submits to its constitution." They have therefore pledged themselves as long as they belong to the synod to cooperate toward furthering its goals, supporting its institutions, maintaining its establishments, etc. If someone believes, with or without reason, that he can no longer do that with a good conscience and if he finds that his efforts for correcting in a constitutional manner something which he regards as wrong, are fruitless, then there is nothing else for him to do than to separate himself from the synod. He can no longer work together with it in agreement with the obligations assumed. But to remain a member and to use his rights as such, incessantly to make a breach against the synod's regulations in the teeth of his obligation, to set himself up against its authorities and to undermine and to destroy instead of supporting and upholding its schools and organizations is no Christian, no honorable method of proceeding.

On the next page of his report President Preus cites the synod's constitution point for point regarding the several matters he has been discussing.

With what reasons are people trying to defend such a method of proceeding? They have called the new seminary a “private” seminary. But if it can be called “private” in any sense, the synod cannot allow a private *opposition*-institution for the training of pastors. It is contrary to the synodical constitution. The real reason, though, is the one which is stated in Pastor Muus’s appeal when he says: “Since the synod’s administration is now insisting upon a doctrine in its institutions which is different from the one the synod’s constitution prescribes, it has broken the contract which is established with us through the constitution.”

The reason, therefore, is this that according to them the teachers at the synod’s institutions, with the aid of the synod’s administration, are insisting upon a doctrine which is alleged to be contrary to the doctrine which the synod confesses in its constitution. They are certainly not stating more precisely at this time what this false doctrine is, much less do they prove from the Word of God and the Confessions that the teachers at the synod’s institutions are teaching any false doctrine. But we are not in doubt as to which doctrine is referred to, nor of the particular point in this doctrine from which people have especially taken offence.

Among other resolutions to which I want to direct the esteemed synod’s attention, some of the pastors who have participated in the establishing of the seminary in Northfield have also drawn up a so-called “Accounting,” namely, at the private pastoral conference in Red Wing, which does contain false and soul-destroying doctrine, for example, section III, paragraphs 15 and 21, under the heading “Theses Which Are Rejected.” The doctrine that a person’s conversion, then, when it is effected by God’s grace in the call, in so sense whatsoever depends upon man, is false and soul-destroying. The “Accounting,” section III, paragraph 15 which is complained against, reads like this: “The cause of the election of grace is solely the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, and there is *in us* no cause for the sake of which God has elected us unto eternal life.” (Cf. Formula of Concord, Epitome, XI, 20; Ep. 1:4–5; Ti. 3:4–7).

“We reject the synergistic doctrine that in electing a person God has been ‘influenced by’ or has ‘taken into consideration’ or has ‘been guided by’ a person’s conduct. For a person’s (good) conduct denotes something which he ‘does or omits doing,’ in other words a work of the law; and when one refers to election unto salvation and the attainment of salvation we confess that ‘our best works are of no value whatever to that end’ (Cp. Pontoppidan, *Sandheten til gudfryktighet*, [*Truth unto Godliness*] Q, 325 (323.327); Epitome, Q. 215. 217). On the other hand, when one refers to damnation, then we confess that a person’s (evil) conduct is the cause of it. Ep. 2:4–5, 8–9; Mt. 22:5–8; 1 Co. 4:7; Jo. 3:27; 1:17.”

Paragraph 21 in “An Accounting” reads like this:

“According to Scripture it belongs to the essence of grace to be free; for if grace is not free, i.e. undeserved by any kind of merit whatsoever in the one who is favored by it, then ‘grace is no more grace’ (Ro. 11:6), and a person cannot then trust in the grace of God alone. Ro. 3:23–24,27–28; Ep. 2:8–10. We reject the synergistic doctrine that the election in Christ has not taken place in accordance with a free purpose of grace by God and that ‘salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.’ Ep. 1:11.” (Translated in *Grace for Grace*, Brief History of the Norwegian Synod, Lutheran Synod Book Company, Mankato, MN, 1943, pages 184–185).

It is naturally not my intention here to enter into any proof of the error in this charge or of the agreement of the doctrine which is attacked, with Scripture and the Symbols. It will, of course, become the primary subject for the synod’s discussions and judgments if the point of doctrine which I proposed above underlies the doctrinal discussions. I believe, however, that I ought to make the synod aware of simple facts which can serve to putting this accusation against the synod’s pastors in the right light.

It was in November 1885 that the sentence of removal from office for “false and soul-destroying” doctrine fell upon the subscribers of “An Accounting” from that private pastoral conference in Red Wing. We had heard that the Peace Committee inaugurated at the Minnesota District’s meeting, which consisted of the leading men from both sides, had reached agreement on a number of theses (28 in all) in which the essential points of difference in the doctrine of conversion were discussed. The fifth additional thesis reads like this: “Before regeneration God does not give a person a power which he now possesses as his own, organically united with him, so that he has free command and ability to use it, a power with which in full

freedom of choice he himself can now decide for his conversion. God does not give a person such a power before the very moment in which he regenerates him.”

In opposition to this thesis, Pastor Muus, who took part in the meeting of the Peace Committee in Zumbrota, set up the following counter-thesis: “A person who is being called by God is under the effect of God’s prefatory grace and by God’s grace receives then abilities and powers which he then has and can use with free command, and an ability of disposition to use them, the abilities and powers with which in full freedom of choice he himself can decide to convert himself to God.” This thesis was rejected unanimously by the members of the Peace Committee, also by his fellow believers. (See the Eastern District report, 1885, p. 36). At the 1885 Minnesota District meeting the fifth additional thesis mentioned was adopted by a vote of 94 for and 35 against, after Pastor Bockman had explained it on behalf of the Peace Committee. During the discussion Pastor Muus declared that the thesis contained false doctrine. In this cardinal point it therefore became evident that there was a basic difference of belief within the faction itself and that the great majority of them were in full agreement with those who in Red Wing sentenced the subscribers to “An Accounting” to removal from office, and with whom by the establishing of the seminary in Northfield they declared that they could no longer have any cooperation and fellowship of faith.

Furthermore, Professor Schmidt, who was recognized as one of the faction’s leaders, declared at the meeting of the Eastern District in June 1886:

I now have more good hope for peace than ever before. I believe there is a good wind blowing from our Lord and that there has not been the equal of the prospect we now have of being able to hold out our hands to each other. The colloquy in LaCrosse gave good hope that through continued discussions with each other about the doctrine, we can come to a good understanding. And already last year the doctrinal discussions at our synod’s district meetings, as well as the discussions in the meeting of the Church Council in Madison gave good hope for it ... My position with regard to the criticism of “An Accounting’s” third chapter, paragraphs 15 and 21 (the antitheses) is in so far as it is concerned, not the same as before, as I am not now so sure that the opposition party, at any rate in the future will acknowledge the doctrine which I have found expressed in it, etc. ... I would therefore not now be for such resolutions as they passed in Red Wing (Eastern District report for 1886, pages 71 and 73).

The same man gave the following testimony under oath during the Koshkonong lawsuit on July 9, 1886:

So long as the persons who have this belief do not urge it further and do not urge it to what the witness believes will be its natural consequence, acceptance of Calvinism, then this belief does not place such people outside the Norwegian Church, and thus both the parties mentioned above must be respected and be considered as Lutherans.

The Iowa District’s meeting took place in Austin (MN) on the 25<sup>th</sup> and following days in June 1886, and Pastor Muus’ appeal is dated July 8, 1886.

Also, after the discussions which took place in the Church Council between Professor Schmidt and his colleagues following his charge against them of false doctrine because of their subscription to “An Accounting,” section III, paragraphs 15 and 21, only one member found the charge grounded; the others, of which 3 in a separate vote, did not find it proven.

I have thought that I ought to make the synod aware of the above facts and expressions in order to substantiate: a) that some of them who have separated and established their own seminary because of alleged false doctrine in the others have declared themselves *agreed in several of the controverted doctrines of faith with those men from whom they have separated*; b) that at the same time their leaders in the doctrinal controversy have declared that the people from whom they have separated must be considered and be respected as *Lutherans*; c) that in an essential point of doctrine there *was mutual unity of faith between those who have separated themselves*, while some of them were *in unity of faith with those from whom they have separated for faith’s sake*, in the same point of doctrine.

In connection with this I thought it useful that the synod be made aware of the disunity of faith which also revealed itself within the same circle at the time when the controversy revolved around the doctrine of election. Namely, while some men among them considered election as an *act of judgment* by the Lord on *the last day*, others among them insisted that it was an act of God *before the foundation of the world* was laid, but, while some of them made only *those who endure in faith* the object of God's eternal decree of election, others extended it to *all believers*, others again, to *all people*. Only in this one thing were they all agreed, that in election God *took man's faith and conduct into consideration*.

Sometime after the Appeal had gone out, the Church Council drew up the following resolution on the occasion of the establishing of the private seminary: "The Church Council disapproves most earnestly of the breach of Christian and church order which a portion of the synod's members have committed by establishing a theological seminary in Northfield, Minnesota, in opposition to the synod's seminary in Madison, Wisconsin." It is true that four members did not vote, but that the matter did not find approval among them either, no doubt the talk about revolution showed sufficiently, and the fact that no one voted against it. The sinful and ruinous things in this controversy were pointed out in several articles in the *Kirketidende*. I have also testified against and admonished in letters to the best of my ability to Pastor Muus as well as to the seminary's teachers, Pastor Bockman and its directors, Professor Mohn and Pastors Bjorn and Kildahl. I consider it necessary that the synod take hold of this matter and come to a decision as quickly as possible, to which may God grant it his grace. For the synod to tolerate such a state of affairs long, is in my opinion suicide.

In the next several pages President Preus reports on the many aspects of the synod's work, discussing in some detail the effect of the controversy upon its work, and also noting that the work had been going on in spite of the controversy.

The Lutheran Church has suffered a great loss through the death of Dr. and Professor of Theology, C. F. W. Walther. In recognition of the large debt of gratitude in which our church body stands to the Missouri Synod and especially to the deceased, the instructor of the synod's pastors for many years, besides the undersigned, Professor Larsen and Pastors Mikkelsen and Juul,<sup>27</sup> in response to my appeal, were present at the burial of the deceased, and expressed our thanks for everything which God has done for our synod through the deceased and the Missouri Synod.

A brief paragraph reminds the convention of certain elections which will be held this year.

May the Lord through his Spirit lead the synod's discussions and bless them for the sake of Jesus Christ, so that God's precious truth may be preserved among us and through it we be upheld in faith unto eternal life!

Your humble co-laborer and fellow combatant in Christ Jesus.

H.A. Preus

<sup>27</sup> President Peder Laurentius Larsen of Luther College, Pastor Amund Mikkelsen of Our Savior's and Pastor Ole Juul of First Lutheran, both in Chicago.

## **22<sup>nd</sup> Regular Convention**

### **Our Savior Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota**

### **June 4–11, 1890**

Esteemed fathers and brothers in Christ Jesus! Grace, mercy and peace be with you in truth and in love from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father!

It is an extremely great grace which the Lord of the Church shows us, that not only are we permitted to gather for the general synod meeting, but to gather in unity of the Spirit on the ground of truth after so harsh a battle and such severe trials. When we were gathered with one another three years ago we were in the midst of an already disruptive doctrinal controversy. Darkness, threatening skies surrounded us, powerful streams of water tumbled down against our church's house. Its fall was foreshadowed and the enemies rejoiced; but the Lord in his great mercy protected it and let it stand unshaken on the rocky ground of truth. Certainly we see with deep pain much destruction which the storm has caused. We are still feeling its aftershocks, but the darkest thunder clouds have passed. It is clearing up and the sun is beginning to shine on most places among us so that we can each do the work of our calling in greater peace and quiet, and here now counsel with one another about what can best serve the building up of our dear Lutheran Zion among us and encourage and strengthen one another to faithfulness in our work.

Is this not, dear brethren, a grace so great that we cannot fully thank and praise the Lord for it? Or, who are we that the Lord has done well toward us in this way? But then it also behooves us that we do not take the grace of God for granted, do not lay our hands in our lap in self-complacent repose, and boast of the truth preserved to us, but rightly use it diligently so that it can both set hearts free from everything there which wants to imprison them and hold them bound in ignominious slavery and through its life-giving power call forth a fresh, robust life in all aspects of the church's life. Because the Lord who says that "whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has," Mt. 13:12.

It is a great task which the Lord of the Church has given our synod in this country, a lofty goal to strive for: the founding, preservation and propagation of true Lutheranism among our countrymen here. More than anything else that happens through the synod being faithful in its confession and in the use of the Means of Grace through which the Lord works conversion and faith, and its not presuming to add anything to nor take anything from them. Surely a higher calling cannot be entrusted to our synod through which it can work for greater blessing for our people than through gathering them under the banner of true Lutheranism.

Very early the Lord himself led our young church body here into such associations, so that it became conscious of this lofty task and set it as the goal of its work. And it is by no means saying too much that it is attributed precisely to this circumstance that our synod's development has been so full of controversy, and that, doctrinal controversies entirely. They have also essentially revolved around the chief points of the Gospel. They have been a defense of the two great principles which the Lutheran Church has always acknowledged as its own and with which it stands or falls, the so-called Scripture Principle that the Bible as the Word of God is the only source and rule for faith and life, and the second, that the sinner is justified by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ.

Certainly, the Lutheran Scriptural Principle has not been denied directly by our opponents here. Nor has it therefore been put up as a subject of discussion at the public meetings between our church bodies. However, since it has been denied many times in fact and trodden under foot at discussions about other questions of doctrine, there has been no lack of our bringing it forward and making it pertinent in the discussion. In the next place, it is surely only through the unshaken insistence on this principle, or on "what is written," that by the grace of God our synod has succeeded in remaining with the old truth in the controverted points of doctrine. This insistence on the Scripture Principle must also be our watchword for the future, and that so much the more, since in the last year there has occurred an apostasy from the scriptural doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture not only within the Reformed church bodies but also within theological circles in the Lutheran Church.

These modish views which are certainly the next thing to a concession to science are in a deeper sense a fruit of a spreading doubt and unbelief, and will undermine the church and the faith which is committed to the saints. There is no doubt that they will rush like a tidal wave from Germany over Norway and also to our church in America, and that it therefore calls for us to be equipped against the assault.

In the meanwhile it seems as if for the present that the Lord will allow our synod a little more quiet time. This is not to be understood that there should be no further need of constant testimony and an undaunted fight to preserve unadulterated the precious truths on which the salvation of so many souls is dependent and on which the existence of the Lutheran Church among us is founded. Nor does it mean that for the sake of peace, in order to swear allegiance to fine-sounding unionistic plans which now are an unlutheran slogan of the spirit of the times, we should break from the truth or let the trumpet give uncertain sounds. No, we must preserve these truths of God's Word for which we have until now suffered and which the Lord in his grace has preserved for us as precious jewels of our church, with the same firmness, if not even greater maturity which I hope we have gained. But it ought to happen through discussions in general meetings, and they can now be held more *bona fide/in good faith* in all peacefulness without disturbing secret thoughts, and therefore with more view to a blessed outcome.

That which interfered with the synod developing quietly and thriving, and the controversy which has split congregations is, however, for the most part at an end. A cleansing has taken place within the synod and much that has been alien has been laid aside. We have become fewer, but it is not the majority which did it.<sup>28</sup> We are united in the one true faith and faith is the victory which overcomes the world. May we also all be united in Christ Jesus by a vigorous faith! May God preserve among us unity of Spirit in the bond of peace so that it is not disturbed by any new controversy and disunity through which Satan seeks to separate hearts from one another and destroy God's kingdom! Then shall we also all as one, with so much greater earnestness, zeal and sacrifice use the calm and peace which God has now given our church body to work for the solution of the problems and produce a church which also in practice better meets the requirements of a true Lutheran Church.

The Lord asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" When Peter answers each time that the Lord knows that he loves him, the Lord says to him, "Feed my lambs! Feed my sheep! Feed my sheep!" John 21:15-17. After we have been especially taken up for a while with *watching* the flock, the Lord is now crying to the congregations and pastors, "'feed my lambs! feed my sheep!' Now show that you really love me by taking proper care of the flock and carefully tending it, the old as well as the young." And how much is there not for each of us to do!

If we become more closely acquainted with conditions in each of our congregations then we can do nothing else than become aware of how much apathy and indifference for one's own and others' salvation, for God's Word and God's work prevails in many places, how many shortcomings and weaknesses are showing, yes, public sins prevailing to the offence of God's children and of them who are on the outside, and that, without trying to counteract the sin properly and removing the offense through Christian church discipline. Misuse, we find, has crept in and good church ordinances such as (private) confession and meetings of the congregation have gone out of use or are very much neglected. A worldly mind is taking the upper hand, a love of the world and covetousness among the older people, vanity and self-conceit among the younger generation. What the district presidents call attention to in this regard in their reports is primarily neglect of the Lord's Supper and the precarious condition of the congregations' schools.

However, these dark sides of the picture should not make us despondent and disheartened, and that so much more as bright sides of the picture also reveal themselves. Thus, in individual places in the Minnesota District a greater zeal and sacrifice for congregational schools is appearing. It must also be acknowledged that through the controversy which was so sad in many respects, many members of congregations have been brought not only to a more diligent and thorough consideration of the Word of God but also to greater earnestness and zeal in their Christianity. Church attendance therefore is reported in several places as

<sup>28</sup> Fifty-thousand souls, 200 congregations and 55 pastors left the synod as a result of the Election Controversy (*Built on the Rock*, p. 31).

better, and taken on the whole, as very good. There are naturally also individual congregations where we must thank God that the situation taken as a whole is decent. Likewise it has certainly pleasantly surprised many of us to see the self-sacrifice through which the synod's joint institutions and large building projects have been supported in the last year. Perhaps the motives for those contributions have not always been pure, but many people have, however, given their contributions out of love for Christ and his church with liberal hands and willing hearts. The many Lutheran academies which are built in various places within our church body dare bear witness to that.

At the same time as these brighter sides of church life among us must gladden our hearts and fill them with thanks and praise of the Lord from whom the blessings upon our feeble work have come, so must they be to us a powerful stimulus and appeal to feeding the Lord's flock with proper fearlessness and renewed zeal and love, and each in our situation working to the building of the kingdom of God among us.

The discussion of the topic which the Church Council has proposed to the synod at this meeting, namely, "The Dangers for True Christianity Which Accompany the Spirit of the Times," will give us abundant opportunity to ponder more exactly both the shortcomings which are to be found in the synod and the damage from which it suffers, as also the means and the ways by which they can be remedied. If there was anything which I should hold forth in particular as of importance for our synod's sound growth, then it is that we work with all our might to *adequate service of the congregations*, so that it is possible for the pastors to exercise the necessary care of souls besides the other duties which are incumbent upon them. To this belongs in part a dividing up of the many altogether-too-large pastoral calls and in part the training for the holy ministry of suitable, God-fearing young men who are willing to give themselves up to the Lord's service and to endure hardship for his sake, who has loved them unto death. We have unfortunately had to have the experience that those are rare exceptions among our youth. The greater share of them choose another career instead. Whether it is fear of the cross and love for the world which prompts them to this, I do not know. But I do know that if they were properly animated by faith and the fear of God, then the love of Christ would also compel them to present themselves to the Lord for service in the Gospel during the present need.

Next, that we provide for the establishment of *Christian schools for the children* where it can be done with good conscience, which are either used alongside of the English district-school, or also take its place. Only in this way are we complying with the Lord's command, "Feed my lambs!" The fact that it has not happened so far, in most places has its reason in covetousness and lack of recognition from the congregations' side, and in negligence and weakness from our, the pastors', side. The Lord has blessed our people in temporal things just as richly as other nations among whom such congregational schools flourish. There is presently going through the American people an effort for not only anglicizing the immigrants of foreign tongues but also grafting into them the "American spirit" as it is called. If they succeed through legislation in using the public/common school for this objective in this way, as they wish, then it will be even more difficult for our congregations to maintain their modest religious schools, and then how are we going to counteract the "American spirit" which is destructive of true and sound Christianity? The instinct for self-preservation bids us as Christian congregations also here to stand watch against encroachment on the part of the state.

Finally, I want to hold forth the importance of *frequent meetings of the congregations* being held for discussion not merely of the congregations' temporal affairs, but chiefly of the spiritual, and of the Word of God. The members of our congregations here are to grow up to *him* who is the Head and become men in Christ, rich in knowledge and understanding. They are not merely to manage their own house and care for their own and their neighbor's salvation, but as a royal people they are also to take part in the government of the church in the congregation.

In these ways we will better carry out the Lord's command when he cries to us, "Feed my sheep!"

## **23<sup>rd</sup> Regular Convention**

### **Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Chicago, Illinois**

### **June 16–23, 1893**

To the esteemed Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod of America.

It is my duty as president to give a report concerning the state of the synod since the last general convention. However, before I provide the actual report I wish to preface it with more general thoughts concerning the synod.

“A true witness delivers souls,” the Holy Ghost says (Pr. 14:25). In order to save our souls God has sent his only-begotten Son to the earth. In order to deliver them from sin, death and judgment, Jesus Christ has sacrificed himself on the accursed tree, become the propitiation for the sins of the whole world and completed our redemption.

Through the Gospel of the Cross, through the Gospel of salvation in Christ, the Holy Ghost works saving faith in the crucified Savior in the contrite sinner, makes him a disciple of Jesus, and preserves him in faith unto a blessed end. To be hearers of this life-giving Word, to be witnesses of salvation in Christ, to be his instrument and co-laborer for saving souls, Christ calls all his disciples, all Christians who become spiritual priests through regeneration.

Thus, when our orthodox Lutheran congregations in this country formed a synod forty years ago the chief purpose for this association of churches was “to deliver souls” to the glory of God. Through all its teaching and practice, through its resolutions, agencies and institutions it was to have the salvation of souls in mind and thus be “a faithful witness.” Our synod wanted to be a witness of Christ. It wanted to give a clear and distinct sound on its trumpet. Through its testimony it wanted to work and help toward every individual congregation in it being faithful in the laying down of the testimony and every individual Christian in the congregation, lay or learned, becoming “a faithful witness,” who through teaching and life showed himself a faithful witness who delivers souls.

Now, has the Norwegian Synod also been and shown itself as such a faithful witness in the almost half-century it has existed in this country? In spite of all the imperfections, shortcomings and weaknesses which have held it back and still hold it back, we dare, to the praise of the grace of God, answer “Yes” to this question. At the synod's preliminary meeting in Muskego in 1852, over toward the Grundtvigian leaven which was smuggled in in the draft of the constitution, it showed that it was its earnest intent to hold fast to the Lutheran Scripture Principle and to make Scripture the sole source, rule and guide for its doctrine and life. It wanted to do that because with all the orthodox fathers it believed that Scripture is the inspired Word of God and therefore clear, powerful and complete, “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” (2 Ti. 3:16), a complete rule and guide.

During its later development this strict adherence of the Synod to the Scripture Principle soon brought it into controversy with false Lutheran church bodies which to be sure formerly professed the same principle but did not set about earnestly to carry it through in practice. But through it the synod has received grace from God to remain with the truth which God revealed, not only in the controversies concerning the preaching of laymen, slavery and Sunday, but above all concerning the Gospel, absolution and justification. And here, we will always remember with thanks to God the faithful help and support which the Lord gave us in the older, much experienced, Missouri Synod.

When the Synod fought so long and hard for this article concerning a poor sinner's justification by the grace of God alone through faith in Jesus Christ, without wanting to yield a hand's breadth, this article of faith by which the Lutheran Church stands or falls, this so-called Material Principle, then the reason was surely also this, that here above all it involved preserving the doctrine and faith pure and unadulterated which alone could give the poor sinner comfort and peace in life and death, consequently, to save souls.

That it is also this chief article, this material principle of the church which forms the deep rift between our synod and the United Church in spite of its formal profession of it, became clear as day during the doctrinal controversy of the last years concerning election and conversion which our synod has had to wage against the Anti-Missourians whose shibboleth, as you know, was, “that people’s attitude must in one or another respect be the cause of their conversion and election” and that people’s conversion and salvation do not depend on God alone, but also on man. It has also become apparent during the controversy that only by mutilating the Scripture Principle in a rationalistic way have our opponents been able to fall into such an error which is destructive of the very essence of Christianity.

Where synergistic leaven has come in, there it is sure that it traces back to a denial of Scripture as the only rule and guide for faith. This denial of or break with the Scripture Principle has its deeper foundation in the fact that a person does not live in acknowledgement of Scripture as the sole source for faith and the life of faith. But this lack in turn reveals that in actuality a person does not hold fast to and carry through on the conviction that all Scripture is inspired by God. Where this Scripture Principle is thus fixed for a person’s entire mindset and life of faith, there a person will search Scripture as the only source from which a vital faith and a true life of faith can alone spring and be nourished, and there a person will also bow to Scripture as the only perfect norm and rule because it is the Word of the living God, the Lord’s speaking to the children of men.

By the merger of the anti-Missourians with the United Church, whose grandiose aim was the unification of the several so-called Norwegian Lutheran church bodies into *one* Lutheran Church, they have also naturally taken their doctrinal position, and with it also these errors of theirs.

If by the grace of God the Norwegian Synod also in the future will remain faithful to its lofty task: *to be a faithful witness for delivering souls*, then it will never be able to enter into any union of churches with a church body which will not purify itself of such gross errors, even if a person wants to attempt to build the union over a many-sided, deep ditch which was supposed to cover over differences of belief.

And how is the synod doing now? Has it also been and shown itself a faithful witness who delivers souls, on this score? We answer here also: To the praise of the grace of God, yes, we have tried to be, but to our shame we have to add: We have been far from what we should have been. But the proclamation of the truth not only gives enlightenment and instruction for a proper Christian life and the ability to live it, but it is also itself a part of such a life. Likewise the struggle for the good confession which I just discussed is a part of the life of a faithful witness, and that, an essential part. Where a church body, congregation, or a Christian is lacking this part, there the essentials for being a faithful witness for delivering souls are lacking because it is only the truth which makes free. However, contending for the truth is not the entire witness which is to be presented. It is, as I said, only one part of the life of a faithful witness. Christ says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven,” Mt. 5:16.

A faithful witness will also try to deliver souls by striving to live a life of love in the fear of God and in holiness. A church body, a congregation will therefore demonstrate itself a faithful witness through agencies for the furtherance of the kingdom of God, for the relief and remedy of temporal and spiritual need, as well as by practicing Christian discipline, just as the individual member in the same regard will proclaim the death of him who led him from darkness into his marvelous light, through a life of self-denial and sacrifice.

Then, unfortunately, we must humbly confess to our shame that extremely much is neglected, little is done as it ought to be, and that the synod and its individual members taken in their entirety have far from demonstrated themselves as the faithful witnesses the Lord could expect them to be according to the grace of which he has allowed them to partake.

Here, however, attention can be called to how our synod’s circumstances at the beginning in certain respects resembled those of the Church at its founding. Just as then, the first pastors worked more as evangelists for spreading the kingdom of God than as pastors for the individuals or with building up and strengthening the newly founded congregations, so did the first beginnings and activity here through the

years have to be a work of missions in order to gather the Norwegian Lutherans into congregations so that they should not be carried off by the sects or lost in worldliness.

However, here too we can well call attention to some evidence, without self-praise, to the glory of God alone. It has been our custom at our synod meetings to spend a considerable amount of time on discussions partly about doctrine, partly about such matters as have purely practical aims in view. From the beginning its efforts have been directed toward the founding and developing of schools of higher learning, above all for the training of pastors and teachers, after that, also of Christian youth for other positions in life. We dare say that not a little has been done in that direction in proportion to the economic conditions in many congregations. Much has been done for missions among immigrants and countrymen, here and in Australia, as well as among Jews, Negroes, (American) Indians, and other heathen, even if with far less zeal and vigor than is required where the salvation of so many souls is concerned. Likewise, the synod has been interested in orphaned children and has provided them both a spiritual and a physical home. Further, from its beginning the synod has striven to enlighten them and their teachers about the general and special Christian duties which are incumbent upon them, and has encouraged them through visitations and visits in the congregations by the president and others to a diligent discharge of these duties.

But precisely in this area we have been much in arrears. Much has been neglected here of the witness which ought to have been given in and outside of the congregations, or it has been done in great weakness, to the detriment of the salvation of souls. And for this we ought all, synod and congregations and every individual Christian, repent and ask God for grace to correct this so that the Lord shall not need to remove the candlestick from its place and hand us over to darkness and errors because of our unthankful ness.

The first thing I want to mention here is the Norwegian-English parochial school in the old form, or, as a boarding school. There has been no lack of laying its importance and necessity upon the hearts of the congregation through discussions and addresses, but what good has it done? In most places none. And I believe that in most instances the blame is as much the pastors' as the congregations'. This is perhaps the last time that I speak to our synod from this platform.<sup>29</sup> Let my last word to the congregations and pastors then be: Strive with all your powers toward establishing regular parochial schools! Set about seriously to give the children a Christian education! The growth of the Lutheran Church, yes, its existence depends on it to a considerable degree, because the future belongs to the coming generations. And the eternal salvation of how many thousands of children may not depend on it? And to what accountability do we not expose ourselves by continued indolence and indifference in this matter!

In connection with this I also want to mention the diligent use of the Word of God in the home, the neglect of which is certainly most often the cause of many a fall, and of the small progress we complain about. The Word of God is and remains, however, the cure-all for every spiritual defect and imperfection because it not only gives us light and makes the simple wise, but it strengthens faith, gives the heart comfort and joy and thereby makes it zealous to every good work. The same thing applies with respect to the diligent use of absolution and the Sacrament of the Altar, which last, in many places is neglected to a considerable degree, especially by the youth.

The means which the Word of God points out to us for the preservation and internal growth of the congregation is church discipline. It is of course only one of the ways appointed by the Lord for applying the Word of God. Both in the synod and in many congregations the proper practice of evangelical church discipline has been discussed. Its great importance for the sound development of the congregations and the salvation of souls has been held forth, and the congregations, with their pastors, have been earnestly admonished not to neglect this duty of love toward the brethren. Unfortunately, there are altogether too many facts substantiating the fact that in many congregations it has been neglected, at any rate in its final step. What can be said about the State Church because of laws, locale, and the extent and size of the congregations as an excuse for such neglect, cannot apply in a church free of the state. And since the pastors' parishes are confined within reasonable boundaries it ought also be better in this matter.

<sup>29</sup> It was, in fact, the last address Preus was to give to the synod; he died a year later, July 2, 1894, at the age of 69.

However, I am not going to detain myself longer on this side of things. Every enlightened and conscientious Christian will easily recognize other shortcomings and neglect which certainly are found here and there. We have in this Word of God the powerful means through which all shortcomings can be remedied, all negligence be corrected with the help of God. On the other hand, it can be beneficial to take this opportunity to dwell a little on some of the temptations and dangers which threaten our church body, and of the struggle through which it most certainly will have to go. May our dear synod also prove itself a faithful witness to the delivering of souls in the face of them!

At this moment an extremely dangerous current is flowing through the various church bodies nearly everywhere in the world. It is a current which even if not always intended by its leaders and their followers, yet, however, by the instigator, Satan, the tempter, aims at nothing less than emancipating from the absolute, divine authority by the rejection of the doctrine of God's Word concerning the inspiration of Scripture, that is, that all Scripture is inspired by God and is therefore the Word of God. As you know, at the present time not one theological seminary is to be found in "Lutheran" Germany which holds on the old Lutheran doctrine of inspiration. Similarly, unfortunately, it is discussed among leading theologians in the church of our dear fatherland as a theory abandoned long ago by everyone capable of forming an opinion. It is true, a clear testimony on the other side is heard in Germany from one or another old-Lutheran pastor, just as in Norway there surely are also found many among the older clergy who do not want to be along in this apostasy from the Lutheran Church but who hold fast to its doctrine in this chief point.

And this current is not only flowing through the Lutheran Church, but also in the various Reformed church bodies in England, Scotland and America large crowds are being carried along with it under the direction of several of their most prominent teachers. Newspapers and periodicals in this country have been full of reports of their errors and of the proceedings before the various ecclesiastical tribunals, and Norwegian newspapers have appealed to the authority of those bright will-of-the-wisps over against the old Lutheranism. We see that the error is advancing upon us right into our life and the spiritual atmosphere which surrounds the people of our churches on all sides is full of its poisonous germs.

That with the denial of the inspiration of Scripture the Scripture Principle also falls, is obvious, because in that way Scripture is subjected to the judgment of reason and the propositions of men take the place of the divine articles of faith. The foundation of Christianity and of Scripture, which is precisely the prophets and apostles, with Christ as the Chief Cornerstone, is then undermined, justification by grace alone becomes a problem, uncertainty and doubt spun instead of divine certainty of faith, and with that, comfort and peace are deprived the sinner. This is going to be set forth and developed further through our doctrinal discussions, as well as the question of the inspiration of Scripture itself, which has of course been the subject of thorough discussions at the synod meetings these last years. The synod has thereby already shown what weight it places on this doctrine of Scripture. But if there is any point where it is worth standing firm, it is here. May our Synod then remain faithful to its past on this point! Together with the remaining orthodox Lutheran synods, may it stand as a dam, as a faithful witness for the saving of souls against this stream of unbelief which threatens to inundate Christianity!

The danger which there was for a time for hasty union efforts, I believe, has been considerably diminished by the attempt which the United Church has made for building church fellowship on a unionistic foundation of disunited elements. However, the danger is always present since the times are pregnant with unionistic tendencies, and they are pleasing to the flesh. This, however, must not hinder us from the work which is well pleasing to God of attaining unity in faith through gently convincing them who gainsay, at the same time as we guard ourselves well against all kinds of unionistic principles, for example, through pulpit exchange or joint church work with people who believe otherwise.

Until recent times the church in this country has been able to rejoice in the enjoyment of the freedom authorized by the nation's constitution. The signs of the times do not bode well for the future. From a twofold point of view there is danger to fear of mixing of state and church to the harm of both.

In several states people have been trying to force school laws through through which the natural authority of the parents and the religious freedom authorized by the constitution would be violated and the existence of Christian parochial schools exposed to danger. In some states the governor's veto has

prevented carrying out of these laws, in other states an impassioned school fight has swept them out. But all danger is not thereby removed. The enemy is not sleeping but merely waiting for a favorable opportunity.

Again, there are far-reaching societies which in well-meant religious interests are working partly for getting a profession of Christ and of the Bible added to the constitution of the United States, and partly for getting a so-called non-sectarian moral instruction introduced into the public school.

On the other hand the Catholic Church is reaching out its arms for the spoil. Its efforts for getting the public school into its clutches are generally known. In the teeth of the constitution, it obtains by underhanded means where it can, state funds for its church schools and is striving to come into possession of political power in order, when the time has come, to use it in the service of the papal church. Woe to the Protestant community if it should succeed! because even now the papal church thirsts after the blood of "heretics." Over against these dangers the synod has to be at its post and warn the people, and that so much more as the Lutheran Church has both the right understanding of the relation in which state and church stand to each other and the right weapons for combating the papal church.

Furthermore the synod has to face the secret societies and other associations more or less contending against the Gospel which exert their powers in order to make proselytes, especially among church members. For many of these societies which carry "compassion" as a banner, surely the most crass selfishness is the leading principle, and insofar as life insurance is allied with them, it is as a rule the hazard which entices people to them. Participation in them feeds on distrust of God's fatherly care, just as a rule, it springs from such mistrust. Christians, who stay away from such societies in confidence in God's support are ridiculed and condemned for "Honor and Righteousness," as a circular from the New York Insurance Company recently shows.

Actually, the same distrust in the Lord's guidance and care is on the one hand, just as on the other hand, the ever increasing inclination to amusements, is the cause of all the schemes by means of which people obtain money for religious purposes. The apostle says, "Our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual" 2 Co. 10:4. We pastors are most responsible where irregularities in this matter take place.

Last but not least, the synod wants to be a faithful witness also over against the growing worldliness, the pursuit of riches and addiction to sensual pleasures. Our times are materialistic. People want to have something to look at, something they can grasp and feel. The older generation among us which is now dying off, was, because of an habitual lifestyle and habits from the fatherland and its isolation here, not exposed in the same degree to many of these temptations as the younger generation which is journeying outside in the midst of an unbelieving humanity for whom the world's goods and pleasures are its all. Here is the greatest danger for the church's temporal usefulness, that is, that the church becomes of the same form and of the same mind as the world which "lies in the wicked one." But if that happens, then it is written, "But if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is therefore good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men," Mt. 5:13.