

**COMMISSION ON CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS**

**Historical Background and Interpretation of Article VI.2  
of the Constitution of The Lutheran—Church Missouri Synod**

**Draft by Gerhard Bode  
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## **Introduction**

### *The Question under Investigation*

This study examines the historical background, source, original meaning, and some of the later interpretations of Article 6, Section 2 of the LCMS Constitution, especially the phrases: “Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as: ... taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession....”

### *The Scope of the Study*

The study treats the question from before the founding of the LCMS through the first forty years of the Synod’s history. Neither the research nor the findings for the study are complete; however, it is hoped that the material provided will be adequate to address some of the questions before the CCM.

### *The Purpose or Goal of the Study*

There are several purposes or goals to this project: 1) to assist the Commission on Constitutional Matters of the LCMS in interpreting Article 6, Section 2 in today’s context; 2) to explain the historical background and circumstances behind the inclusion of this part of Article 6 and the concerns it expresses in the LCMS Constitution; 3) to attempt to discern the original meaning of the words and phrases in the Article and the way they were understood in the Synod at the time of the drafting and adoption of the Constitution; and 4) to illustrate how this Article and the chief doctrinal and practical concerns expressed in it (especially unionism and syncretism) were understood and interpreted during approximately the first forty years of the Synod’s history, and especially by the founders of the Synod.

### *Methodology Employed*

This study employs a historical-theological method of inquiry and will examine and analyze both primary and secondary source materials in order to provide supporting evidence for the conclusions offered.

## **I. Current Statement of Article VI.2**

The LCMS Constitution Article 6, Section 2, begins as follows:

### Article VI. Conditions of Membership

Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod are the following:

1. Acceptance of the confessional basis of Article II.
2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as:
  - a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the church;
  - b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession;
  - c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities....<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Handbook of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2010 Edition*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010, 15.

## II. The First Constitution of the Missouri Synod and Article II. §3

When the Missouri Synod was organized in 1847 the founders adopted a constitution containing a series of conditions of membership which has been maintained with few changes to the present day. In the original constitution, the second article listed the conditions of membership.<sup>2</sup> In the original German text of the 1847 constitution, Article II began as follows:

Cap. II. Bedingungen, unter welchen der Anschluß an die Synode stattfinden und die Gemeinschaft mit derselben fort dauern kann.

§ 1. Das Bekenntnis zu der heiligen Schrift A. u. N. Testaments, als dem geschriebenen Worte Gottes und der einzigen Regel und Richtschnur des Glaubens und Lebens.

§ 2. Annahme der sämtlichen symbolischen Bücher der ev. luth. Kirche (als das sind: die drei ökumenischen Symbole, die ungeänderte Augsburgische Konfession, deren Apologie, die schmalkaldischen Artikel, der große und kleine Katechismus Lutheri und die Konkordienformel,) als der reinen und ungefälschten Erklärung und Darlegung des göttlichen Wortes.

§ 3. Lossagung von aller Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei, als da ist: Das Bedienen gemischter Gemeinden, als solcher, von Seiten der Diener der Kirche; Theilnahme an dem Gottesdienst und den Sacramentshandlungen falschgläubiger und gemischter Gemeinden, Theilnahme an allem falschgläubigen Traktaten= und Missionswesen, u.s.w.<sup>3</sup>

The following is a an attempt at a literal translation of this text:

Article II. Conditions under which joining the Synod can take place and fellowship with the same can continue.

§1. Confession of the Old and New Testaments of Holy Scripture as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and life.

§ 2. Acceptance of all of the symbolical books of the evangelical Lutheran church (namely: the three ecumenical creeds, the unaltered Augsburg Confession, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Large and Small Catechisms of Luther and the Formula of Concord), as the pure and unadulterated explanation and exposition of the divine Word.

§ 3. Renunciation of all mixing of churches and of faiths, such as there is: The serving of mixed congregations, as such, on the part of the ministers of the church; participation in the divine service and sacramental activities of heterodox

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<sup>2</sup> In 1920 the Synod reorganized its constitution, placing the conditions of membership in Article VI.

<sup>3</sup> *Die Verfassung der deutschen evangelisch= lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten*, St. Louis, 1847. A handwritten manuscript of the 1847 constitution, including Article II, is pictured in Jack D. Ferguson, "Constitutional Reasons for Forming a Synod: An Examination of the 1847 Constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 84.3 (Fall 2011), 20–21. The original document is in the archives at the Concordia Historical Institute.

and mixed congregations, participation in all heterodox tract and mission activities, etc.<sup>4</sup>

### III. The Placement of Article II. §3 in the Synod Constitution

The positioning of the clause renouncing “Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei” within the list of conditions for membership in the Synod is noteworthy, since it is the immediate context of the clause. The series of paragraphs begins with the confessional basis of the Synod: first, acceptance of the Scriptures as the written Word of God and as the only rule and norm of faith and life, and second, acceptance of the Lutheran Confessional writings as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God. Immediately following this doctrinal basis of the Synod is the renunciation of unionism and syncretism, the serving of mixed congregations, and the participation in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox or mixed congregations, heterodox tract and mission societies, etc. Subsequent to this clause is the pledge to use doctrinally pure church books, such as agenda, hymnals, catechisms, etc. The overarching concern expressed in this listing of conditions is the maintenance of pure Lutheran doctrine and practice. This pertains both to the individual level (congregations and pastors) and the corporate level (the Synod), which is an expression of the church’s unity.

What are the underlying reasons for the conditions? The drafters of the constitution are not explicit in their reasoning here, however certain factors are clear. First, the confessional basis sets down the doctrinal standard of the Synod. Subscription to the Confessions is unconditional. As C. F. W. Walther made clear, the object of this subscription is the doctrinal content of the confessions:

An unconditional subscription is the solemn declaration which the individual who wants to serve the Church makes under oath 1) that he accepts the doctrinal content of our Symbolical Books, because he recognizes the fact that it is in full agreement with Scripture and does not militate against Scripture in any point, whether that point be of major or minor importance; 2) that he therefore heartily believes in this divine truth and is determined to preach this doctrine without adulteration. Whatever position any doctrine may occupy in the doctrinal system of the Symbols, whatever the form may be in which it occurs, whether the subject be dealt with *ex professo* or only incidentally, an unconditional subscription refers to the whole content of the Symbols and does not allow the subscriber to make any mental reservation in any point. Nor will he exclude such doctrines as are discussed incidentally in support of other doctrines, because the fact that they are so used stamps them as irrevocable articles of faith and demands their joyful acceptance by everyone who subscribes to the Symbols.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Roy Suelflow translated Article II. §3 as follows: “Separation from all commixture of Church or faith, as, for example, serving of mixed congregations by a servant of the Church; taking part in the service and Sacraments of heretical or mixed congregations; taking part in any heretical tract distribution and mission projects, etc.” Cf. Gustave Polack, “Our First Synodical Constitution,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* XVI.1 (April 1943), 3. See also William W. Schumacher, “Unionism and Syncretism in the LCMS Constitution: Historical Context and Interpretive Development,” in *Witness & Worship in Pluralistic America*, edited by John F. Johnson. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 2003, 52.

<sup>5</sup> C. F. W. Walther, “Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the

The concern about the renunciation of unionism and syncretism is consistent with the unconditional nature of the confessional subscription required in the Synod. Members (congregations, pastors, et al.) pledge to hold to the confessional basis of the Synod; failure to keep the conditions automatically means a violation of the confessional basis.

True adherence to the confessional basis means the renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description. In turn, the renunciation of unionism and syncretism helps to safeguard the confessional basis, even as it flows out of it. The condition—as far as it pertains—ensures that the confessional basis is not violated. Unionistic or syncretistic activities and teachings would contravene the confessional basis and the subscription to it. The Synod could not engage in false unity because it is contrary to the Word of God, harms the consciences of the weak, and threatens the true Gospel in the church. In addition, such activity violates the unity of the pure confession of the Synod, as well as its trust. The conditions also ensure that the ordination vow of pastors is upheld. The concern here is perhaps less about unionism per se, and more about what unionism does, namely, it effects the intrusion of false teaching and practice into the church even while claiming to establish unity in the church. The examples listed in the Article VI.2 are public acts in the church, such as worship, preaching, administration of the sacraments, etc. Correspondingly, the act of confessional subscription taken by pastors at ordination, and the same by congregations in their own constitutions when joining the Synod, are public acts.

The conditions for membership, including the clause renouncing unionism and syncretism, also reflect some of the original reasons for forming the Synod, e.g., Article I. §2: “The preservation and furthering of the unity of the pure confession (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10) and to provide common defense against separatism and sectarianism (Rom. 16:17).” In addition, the clause corresponds with several of the functions of the Synod in Article IV, to cite only the first, “1. To stand guard over the purity and unity of doctrine within the synodical circle, and to oppose false doctrine.”<sup>6</sup>

#### **IV. Notes on Selected Words in the German Text of Article II. §3**

In order to understand as clearly as possible the original meaning of the words and the intention of the founders of the Synod regarding this article, it is useful to consider closely some of the key German words used in the text. Complete understanding of what the drafters of the constitution had in mind is impossible, however, a brief analysis of the language, and later, of the historical context, sheds some light on the question. Those words from the 1847 German text of Article II. §3 will be treated below which invite clarification or require further explanation.

- ***Lossagung***: Noun meaning “renunciation” or “withdrawal”; related to the verb *lossagen*, meaning “renounce,” “give up,” or “withdraw (from).”

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Symbolical Writings of Our Church: Essay Delivered at the Western District Convention in 1858,” translated and condensed by Alex Wm. C. Guebert. *Concordia Theological Monthly* XVIII (April 1947), 242.

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from the 1847 Synod constitution (cf. Polack, “Our First Synodical Constitution,” 2–3).

• ***Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei:***

- 1) A pair of compound nouns, the first of which is abbreviated by the hyphen and joined to the second by the conjunction *und*; the suffixed noun *Mengerei* is absent but assumed by the hyphen after *Kirchen*. If fully spelled out the phrase would read *Kirchenmengerei und Glaubensmengerei*.<sup>7</sup> However, the use of the hyphenated compound form emphasizes that the two nouns are a related pair, conveying a meaning different from one than if they were separated. The close relationship of the terms in the German phrase is not necessarily conveyed by the English translation “unionism and syncretism,” even while the translation is accurate.
- 2) *Kirchen* means “churches” and may refer to both local congregations as well as confessional bodies (such as Lutheran or Reformed). *Glauben* means “faith,” and, particularly in this context, the doctrine or content of the faith that is confessed.
- 3) The noun *Mengerei* is less common than the verb form *mengen*, meaning to “mix,” “mingle,” or “blend”; *Mengerei* is “mixing,” “mingling,” or “blending.”
- 4) The compound nouns *Kirchenmengerei* and *Glaubensmengerei* are very rare terms and do not have a long history of usage among Lutherans.<sup>8</sup> Likewise they are not terms appearing in modern German wordbooks. Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, the massive, classic dictionary of the German language, first published between 1847 and 1854, and further expanded between 1855 and 1863, has none of the words under consideration here (*Kirchenmengerei*, *Glaubensmengerei*, or even *Unionismus* or *Syncretismus*).<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the German/Latin wordbook of Kaspar von Stieler (1632–1707), a foundational source for the Grimm dictionary, does not contain the terms *Kirchenmengerei*, *Glaubensmengerei*, *Unionismus*, *Syncretismus*, *Religionsmengerei*, *Theilnahme*, or any words closely related to them. (Although an old word, *Syncretismus* likely does not appear in Stieler’s book because its origin is

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<sup>7</sup> A comparable example in English of two compounds sharing common base noun expressed only in the second compound form is “Altar and Pulpit Fellowship.” The force of the compound is clear here. Taken separately, “Altar Fellowship and Pulpit Fellowship” seems to denote two separate things, and does not carry the full sense intended, that the fellowship involves both altar and pulpit activities.

<sup>8</sup> The terms *Kirchenmengerei* and *Glaubensmengerei* (or *Unionismus*) do not appear in the German Bible, Luther’s writings, or the Lutheran Confessions. (The use of “unionism” as the English translation of *Kirchenmengerei* will be discussed below.) Luther and the Lutherans in the sixteenth century knew of syncretism, but used terms related to the Greek form of the word, rather than any form of *Glaubensmengerei*. As an example from the following century, Johann Georg Walch (1693–1775), writing the history of theological controversies among Lutherans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, did not use the terms *Kirchenmengerei*, *Glaubensmengerei*, or *Unionismus*. He did use the term *Syncretismus* at various points during his discussion of the Syncretistic Controversy in the seventeenth century. When speaking of Lutheran unity he used terms such as *Einigkeit* (unity) and *Vereinigung* (unification), sometimes with the adjective *geistliche* (religious). He also used the term *Indifferentismus* (indifference). (Cf. Walch, *Historische und Theologische Einleitung in die Religions= Streitigkeiten Der Evangelisch= Lutheranischen Kirchen, Von der Reformation an bis auf jetzige Zeiten*. Jena: Johann Meyers Witwe, 1733.)

<sup>9</sup> Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1890.

in Greek rather than in German.)<sup>10</sup> However, Johann Heinrich Campe's 1808 *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*, has this definition for *Glaubensmengerei*: "The attempt, the endeavor, to unite divergent religious opinions, as though whereby they are mixed with one another (syncretism)."<sup>11</sup> *Glaubensmengerei* was evidently an established German word by the time of the drafting of the Missouri Synod's constitution. (Certainly it was used in Synod publications after 1847.) *Kirchenmengerei* appears to be a younger word than *Glaubensmengerei*. Outside of the constitution and other Missouri Synod publications, *Kirchenmengerei* is found only in rare instances.<sup>12</sup>

- 5) *Kirchenmengerei*, then, indicates the mixing of churches, perhaps into a new church body, while *Glaubensmengerei* involves the mixing of faiths or beliefs; it may mean the combining or compromising of faiths or confessions, perhaps forming a new confession of faith. A standard definition of *Glaubensmengerei* is "syncretism." Although it has no equivalent in English, a fair translation of *Kirchenmengerei* may be "mixing of churches." *Kirchenmengerei* (later translated in the constitution as "unionism") assumes the relationship to the external church body, whether it is the local congregation or the (broader) confessional group with which it is identified (e.g., Lutheran, Reformed, Evangelical, etc.)<sup>13</sup> Taken together as a phrase *Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei* may be translated "the mixing of churches and of faiths."
- 6) At a certain point, the two parts of the compound *Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei* largely denote one problem and can essentially mean the same thing, like two sides of the same coin. *Kirchenmengerei* considers the external mixing of bodies, while *Glaubensmengerei* takes up the internal mixing of confessions or faiths. Put another way, unionism presumes syncretism, but syncretism does not necessarily presuppose unionism, because unionism involves the external or formal mixing of church bodies or confessions. If unionism in the local congregation is the concern, then the mixing of the confession in the local congregation (syncretism) is also a concern. Renunciation of unionism alone was insufficient for the founders of the Missouri Synod, because it presupposed syncretism. Renunciation of syncretism alone was

<sup>10</sup> Kaspar von Stieler, *Der teutschen Sprache Stammbaum und Fortwachs: oder, Teutscher Sprachschatz*. Nürnberg: J. Hoffmann, 1691 (reprinted, Hildesheim: G. Olm Verlag, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> "Glaubensmengerei: 'Das Versuch, die Bemühung, abweichende Glaubensmeinungen zu vereinigen, wodurch sie gleichsam unter einander gemengt werden (Syncretismus).'" Johann Heinrich Campe, *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache, Veranstatet und Herausgegeben von Joachim Heinrich Campe*. Braunschweig, 1808, 2, 392.

<sup>12</sup> One example is found in the *Monatschrift fuer die evangelische Kirche der Rheinprovinz und Westphalen*, edited by W. Krafft, (1850, p. 229), in which Krafft reports that *Kirchenmengerei* was rejected in a sermon at the Stuttgart *Kirchentag*.

<sup>13</sup> The Prussian Union would be an example of *Kirchenmengerei*, in which the Lutheran churches and the Reformed churches began a process of uniting in the Kingdom of Prussia in 1817; the result was to be one church: the Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union.

insufficient because the threat in American Lutheranism concerned also unionism. (More on that below...)

- 7) The terms *Kirchenmengerei* (as well as *Unionismus*) and *Glaubensmengerei* appear to have been coined in the nineteenth century by Lutherans reflecting the concerns of the Confessional Revival to describe the effects on German Lutheran churches from the Union movements at the time.<sup>14</sup>
- 8) In summary, the phrase *Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei* combines the ideas of the external or formal mixing of two or more church bodies (denominations or confessional bodies as well as local congregations) with the mixing of internal doctrines (faiths or confessions). For this reason, the English translation of these terms as “unionism and syncretism” is perhaps as accurate as can be expected.<sup>15</sup>

• **Als da ist:** This expression takes up the clause preceding it and signals the listing of examples of *Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei*.

• **Das Bedienen:** Noun form (gerund) of the verb *bedienen* with the definite article *das* meaning “the serving” or “doing the duty of (an office).”

• **Theilnahme:** (The more current spelling is *Teilnahme*.) The word is a common noun with a standard definition of “participation,” “taking part,” or “joining” in something.<sup>16</sup> The word can carry the additional sense of taking an active interest in something, sharing the feelings or emotions of another person, or having sympathy for another.<sup>17</sup> *Theilnahme* seems to presume an intentional interest and active taking part in an engagement—not an accidental or unintentional one.<sup>18</sup> It

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. also Schumacher, 52.

<sup>15</sup> For a brief discussion of Article II, §3, and of the term *Glaubensmengerei* in particular, cf. August R. Suellflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001, 214f.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., “*Theilnahme*: Participation.” Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Wörterbuch zur Erklärung und Verdeutschung der unserer Sprache aufgedrungenen fremden Ausdrücke. Ein Ergänzungsband zu Adelung’s und Campe’s Wörterbuch*. Braunschweig, 1813, 461. (The title page of the work identifies Campe as a “Doctor der Gottesgelehrtheit,” or a “Doctor of Divinity.”)

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Johann Heinrich Campe’s definition: “*Theilnahme*: the action of taking part in something; also the [noun] ‘*Theilnehmung*,’ which is now less common. The taking part [*Theilnahme*] in a business, a task, an undertaking, in war, in commerce, etc. The sharing [*Theilnahme*] of another’s good fortune or misfortune, joy, pain, etc. Sympathy with these circumstances, out of love, friendship. To show a person much sympathy [*Theilnahme*]. Her sympathy [*Theilnahme*] gladdens and comforts me.” [*Theilnahme*: “Die Handlung da man Theil an etwas nimmt; auch die Theilnehmung, welches jetzt weniger gebräuchlich ist. Die Theilnahme an einem Geschäft, an einer Arbeit, einer Unternehmung, am Kriege, am Handel, u.s.w. Die Theilnahme an Anderer Glück, Unglück, Freude, Schmerz, u.s.w. Die Mitempfindung dieser Zustände, aus Liebe, Freundschaft. Einem viele Theilnahme zeigen. Ihre Theilnahme freuet und tröstet mich.] (*Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache, Veranstatet und Herausgegeben von Joachim Heinrich Campe*. Braunschweig, 1810, 4, 806.) Grimm’s *Wörterbuch* gives a very similar, if not more extensive, set of definitions (vol. 21, 361).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, the definition offered by Moritz Heyne: “*Teilnahme*: The taking part/interest [in something], participation/support...” [*Teilnahme*, ... das Nehmen von Anteil, Beteiligung...”] Moritz Heyne, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig, 1895, Band 3, 951.

also can include the sense of having fellowship, association, or union with something.<sup>19</sup> As far as can be determined, in and of itself the word is not a technical theological or liturgical term. Given the context of the word in the Synod constitution, it appears that *Theilnahme* refers to at least an active participation or engagement in worship services, administration of the sacraments, etc.<sup>20</sup> Beyond that, the word does not offer much additional clarity as to the intended meaning of the drafters of the constitution.

- **Gottesdienst:** Noun; the common term for “divine service” or “worship service.”
- **Sacramentshandlungen:** An uncommon plural noun meaning, literally, the “actions or observances of the sacraments.” In the context of this article of the constitution the word clearly refers to the carrying out or administration of the sacraments in the church, likely in the setting of the worship service.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For example, the definition given Karl Ernst Georges: “Theilnahme, 1) in general, the taking part in something: fellowship with something (the alliance in a joint association in something, e.g., in war; in projects, councils,...) [Theilnahme, 1) im Allg., das Theilnehmen an etwas: societas alcjs rei (die Verbindung zy gemeinschaftlicher Theilnahme an etwas, z.B. am Krieg, belli: an Entwürfen, consilii:...)], Georges, *Deutsch=Lateinisches Handwörterbuch*, Leipzig: Hahn’sche Verlags=Buchhandlung, 1861, Band 2, 1295.

<sup>20</sup> The word *Theilnahme* occurs very frequently in the publications of the Missouri Synod during the nineteenth century. For instance, in the August 1, 1874 edition of *Der Lutheraner*, the word *Theilnahme* is used three times, in each case to denote some kind of participation in an activity: 1) A. C. Burgdorf, Director of the Latin school in St. Louis, discussed the participation of the children in the instruction at the school: “Solche Zöglinge, welche sich nicht auf den Eintritt in eine lateinische Schule vorbereiten wollen, werden, wenn ihre Eltern es wünschen, von der Theilnahme an dem Unterricht in der lateinischen Sprache entbunden” (117). [“Those pupils, who do not wish to prepare themselves for entrance into a Latin school, will, if their parents wish, be excused from participation [*Theilnahme*] in the instruction of the Latin language.”] 2) T. Johann Große announced the upcoming meeting of the Synodical Conference with the following request: “Einstimmig und mit Freuden erklärte sich die Synodal=conferenz bereit, an einem solchen Colloquium Theil zu nehmen, verwahrte sich aber dagegen, durch Theilnahme am Colloquium diejenigen Synodalkörper, deren Glieder sich auch daran betheiligen mögen, schon im Voraus für solche Körperschaften anzuerkennen, welche sich rückhaltslos zur Augustana bekennen” (120). [With one voice and with joy the Synodical Conference declares itself ready to take part in such a colloquium, however, owing to participation [*Theilnahme*] in the colloquium it advises those synod bodies whose members wish to take part, already in advance to acknowledge those bodies which hold unreservedly to the Augustana.”] 3) Finally, Große adds an additional comment: “Zeit und Ort des Colloquiums zu bestimmen, überläßt die Synodalconferenz dem General Council und beantragt zugleich, daß diejenigen Personen, welche zur Theilnahme an der beabsichtigten Konferenz erscheinen werden, selbst das dabei zu beobachtende Verfahren festsetzen” (120). [“The time and place of the colloquium the Synodical Conference leaves to the General Council and proposes at the same time that those persons who will be in participation (*Theilnahme*) at the planned conference, should themselves arrange for the necessary procedures.”] The August 15, 1874 issue of *Der Lutheraner* provides other examples of the usage of *Theilnahme*, one of which is the following: “Unter die Sprüche heiliger Schrift, welche von Vielen gemißbraucht werden, gehört auch der angeführte Spruch: “Tanzen hat seine Zeit.” Wenn weltlich gesinnte Christen wegen ihrer Theilnahme an weltlichem Tanzen gestraft werden, so geschieht es nicht selten, daß sie sich auf diesen Spruch berufen, um damit ihre Treiben zu rechtfertigen” (121). [“Among those passages in Holy Scripture which are misused by many belongs the following: ‘There is a time to dance’ (Eccl. 3:4). When worldly-minded Christians are punished on account of their participation [*Theilnahme*] in secular dancing, so it happens frequently that they appeal to this passage to justify their activity.”]

<sup>21</sup> In the spring of 1846, Theodor Brohm, one of the Saxon pastors serving in New York, wrote an article for *Der Lutheraner* which asked the question: Can a Lutheran Christian take part [*Theil nehmen*] with good

• **Falschgläubiger:** Adjective meaning “heterodox,” or pertaining to teachings or beliefs differing from those considered orthodox.

• **Traktaten= und Missionswesen:** A pair of compound nouns; the suffixed noun *Wesen* is presupposed by the hyphen after *Traktaten*. If fully spelled out the phrase would read *Traktatenwesen und Missionswesen*. The phrase refers to activities in the publishing and distributing of religious tracts and in mission work.

## V. The Drafting of the First Missouri Synod Constitution

This section will examine the origins of the Article in question within the context of the drafting of the Missouri Synod Constitution. To some extent, this will serve as a background and brief history of the text of the Article itself leading up to the adoption of the first constitution in 1847.<sup>22</sup>

The first constitution of the Missouri Synod underwent a series of conceptual developments, proposals, and drafts before its final approval and adoption at the founding Synod convention in 1847. Although the task was a joint project receiving input and counsel from representatives of both the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri and the Lutherans in Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio, the chief author of the text of the draft constitution appears to have been C. F. W. Walther, even while significant contributions to the basic concepts of the Synod were made by others such as Wilhelm Sihler.<sup>23</sup>

During the years preceding the founding of the Synod, Walther and others were compelled to clarify several key theological and church-political issues. This process not only settled some difficult questions regarding the nature of the church and the office of

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conscience in the administration of the sacraments [*Sacramentshandlungen*] which are done as prescribed by the latest *Church Agenda for the Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, etc.* of 1842? (Brohm’s answer in the article is no, because the agenda has formulas influenced by Rationalism and Reformed theology.) Cf. Theodor Brohm, “Kann ein lutherischer Christ mit gutem Gewissen an solchen Sacramentshandlungen Theil nehmen, die nach Vorschrift der neuesten ‘Kirchenagende für die evangelisch= lutherischen Gemeinden in Pennsylvania, New=York, Ohio etc.’ 1842 geschehen?” *Der Lutheraner* 2.16 (April 4, 1846) and 2.21 (13 June, 1846).

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed discussion of the founding of the Synod’s political organization and the drafting of its first constitution, cf. Carl S. Munding, *Government in the Missouri Synod: The Genesis of Decentralized Government in the Missouri Synod*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947.

<sup>23</sup> Sihler (1801–1885) emigrated to the U.S. in 1843 after answering F. C. D. Wyneken’s call for help with mission work on the American frontier. Having close contact with J. K. W. Löhe, Sihler was a leader among the Löhe missionaries in America and served pastorates in Ohio, and later in Fort Wayne. He was an influential founding member of the Missouri Synod and co-founder of the first seminary in Fort Wayne. He served as professor and president of the seminary and, after the pastoral seminary division moved to St. Louis in 1861, served as president of Concordia College in Fort Wayne. Sihler attributed much of the early organizational structure of the Synod, including the drafting of its constitution, to Walther. It is clear, however, that Sihler played a decisive role in formulation of the Synod’s first constitution. Cf. Wilhelm Sihler, *Lebenslauf von W. Sihler, als lutherischer Pastor u. s. w.*, New York: Lutherischen Verlags-Verein, 1880, Band II, 53. Cf. also Ludwig Fuerbringer, “Walther als Kirchenmann,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* VII.10 (October 1936), 723, and Theodore Laetsch, “Privileges and Obligations,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* XII.10 (October 1941), 721.

the holy ministry, but it also helped the Saxons and the other Lutheran leaders formulate a framework for organizing the Synod. At the Altenburg Debate in 1841, Walther had outlined some basic principles for the Saxon Lutherans' conception of the church and the office of the ministry. In his "Altenburg Theses" Walther presented the fundamental Lutheran understanding of what the true church is and how it stands in relation to heterodox bodies.<sup>24</sup> By 1843, Walther had drafted the *Gemeindeordnung*, or congregational constitution, for the Trinity Congregation in St. Louis, where he was pastor.<sup>25</sup> This document was influential not only for subsequent congregational constitutions within the Missouri Synod, but also for the Synod's first constitution in 1847.<sup>26</sup> (For instance, the foundations of the Synod's confessional basis [the present Article II] can be seen in paragraph 3 of Trinity's *Gemeindeordnung*.)<sup>27</sup>

Contacts between the Saxons in Missouri and the Lutherans in Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio began in late 1844.<sup>28</sup> Both groups were considering the possibility of founding a new synod. In August 1845, Walther expressed some his ideas about church structure and the basic principles for organizing a synod in a letter to J. A. Ernst.<sup>29</sup> In the letter Walther suggested an outline for the confessional basis to which the synod would pledge itself. In addition he included the following provisions:

2. I request that all syncretistic activity on the part of synod members be prohibited and banned by a special paragraph in the constitution.
3. That the chief function of the Synod should be the maintenance and furtherance and the guarding of the unity and the purity of Lutheran doctrine.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cf. "Altenburg Debate" and "Altenburg Theses" in *Lutheran Cyclopaedia: A Concise In-Home Reference for the Christian Family*. Edited by Erwin L. Lueker. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975, 377.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Gemeindeordnung für die deutsche evangelisch=lutherische Gemeinde ungeänderter Augsburgischer Confession in St. Louis, Mo., 1843*. The documents pertaining to this *Gemeindeordnung* are in the archives of the Concordia Historical Institute. The text of the document is also printed in Christian Otto Kraushaar's *Verfassungsformen der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas*. Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1911, 125–129.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Christoph Barnbrock, "Composing a Constitution in Context: Analytical Observations on the First Draft of the Missouri Synod's Constitution (1846)," *Concordia Journal* 27 (January 2001), 38–56.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Kraushaar, 126.

<sup>28</sup> The correspondence between Wilhelm Sihler and C. F. W. Walther began in late 1844. In addition, a group of the Löhe emissaries including J. C. Lochner and F. A. Craemer was sent to America in 1845 with a document containing instructions for their interactions with other Lutherans. The document, signed by Löhe and other German pastors, offers insights into their understanding of church fellowship and unity at the time. The "instructions" read, in part: "You are to enter into church-fellowship with all those who on their part adhere to the Lutheran Book of Concord with an equal fidelity. You are to unite therefore also with those members of the faith who have emigrated from Saxony and Prussia. However, your unity rests solely on the Concordia, and you are to enter into no relations that could prevent the Lutheran Church from penetrating all lands and conditions, all fields of spiritual life...." Quoted in "Rev. F. Lochner's Report on His First Contacts with the Saxons," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* VII. 3 (October 1934), 77.

<sup>29</sup> Johann Adam Ernst (1815–1895), trained and sent to America by J. K. W. Löhe, was a pastor and member of the Ohio Synod, serving a congregation in Marysville, Ohio. Ernst was among the first of the "eastern Lutherans" to suggest to Walther and the Saxons the idea of forming a synod. Ernst would play a key role in dialogues prior to the organization of the Synod and would be one of its founding members.

<sup>30</sup> Translation adapted from *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, edited by Carl S. Meyer. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964, 143. Cf. also the original text of Walther's words: "Ich wünsche zweitens, daß nach der Konstitution alles synkretistische Wirken von seiten der Synodalen durch einen besonderen Paragraphen abgeschnitten und ausgeschlossen würde; 3.

It is clear that at this point Walther had in mind the idea of including some kind of rejection of syncretism in the constitution as well as the concern for the protection of the true unity of the church and its doctrine. Such a rejection of syncretism was imperative for the survival of the church. In the letter to Ernst, Walther continued:

Whoever freely and of his own accord has subscribed to the Confessions cannot possibly entertain any hopes, based on human reasoning, that any good can come of being yoke-fellows with those who are indifferent to plainly revealed truth. Unless a Lutheran synod be willing to receive into itself the seeds of dissolution, it must, by its very law and charter [*durch ihre Grundregeln ihren Gliedern*], exclude all possibility of such subtle syncretism [*Synkretisterei*]. Of what avail is a confession by words if the deeds contradict it? Nay, let us not take flesh for our arm. Let us be loyal to the truth, and not endeavor to advance the cause of God's kingdom by departing from our instructions. We cannot save souls nor preserve the Church, — that is the Lord's business; let us leave it to Him, and to Him alone. Of us, who are but stewards, nothing will be required except that we be faithful.... And let us not lose faith in God when He tells us, who are so few in number: 'The people are still too many who are with you.' It is sufficient that we have the trumpet of the Gospel in our hands and the torch of faith in the empty pitchers of our hearts.<sup>31</sup>

In Walther's view, this rejection of syncretism went hand in hand with acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions. A true Lutheran church cannot hold to the Confessions and at the same time maintain syncretistic teachings or practices.

In September 1845 representatives of the Lutherans from Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio met in Cleveland to discuss their future plans (none of the Saxon pastors from Missouri was present). At that meeting nine pastors, including Wilhelm Sihler and Johann Adam Ernst, signed a "Document of Separation" stating their withdrawal from the Ohio Synod and the reasons for it. The men perceived that the Ohio Synod held to a lax confessional position and engaged in unionistic practices, especially with regard to the sacraments.<sup>32</sup> The Ohio Synod's refusal to address the concerns of these pastors

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daß die Hauptwirksamkeit der Synode auf Erhaltung und Förderung und Bewachung der Einheit und Reinheit der lutherischen Lehre gerichtet werden möchte...." C. F. W. Walther to Pastor A. Ernst, August 21, 1845, in *Briefe von C. F. W. Walther an seine Freunde, Synodalgenossen und Familienglieder*, herausgegeben von L. Fürbringer, Erster Band. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915, 16.

<sup>31</sup> Walther to Ernst, cited in Theodore Graebner, "The Loehe Foundations," in *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century*. Edited by W. H. T. Dau. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922, 84–85. Cf. also *Briefe von C. F. W. Walther an seine Freunde, Synodalgenossen und Familienglieder*, 17–18.

<sup>32</sup> At the time, the Ohio Synod did not pledge its ordinands to the Lutheran Confessions. The official agenda of the Synod, in particular some of its formulas for the administration of the Lord's Supper and Confession and Absolution, were perceived to be Calvinistic. In addition, the Ohio Synod permitted its pastors to serve Reformed congregations, or joint Reformed-Lutheran congregations. At the same time, the signers of the "Document of Separation" protested the encroachment of English and the displacement of the German language in the Ohio Synod seminary in Columbus. The text of the "Document of Separation," including the names of the subscribers, is translated and printed in *Moving Frontiers*, 143–146. Sihler originally published the document in Pittsburgh in the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 21 (December 13, 1845). That the document and the concerns raised in it about unionistic practices in the Ohio Synod were a matter

caused them grief, yet they maintained that they were compelled to leave for the sake of their consciences.<sup>33</sup>

Officially, at this point, these men were not a part of any synod or church body. They desired to organize a new synod that would be truly Lutheran. In late 1845, Wilhelm Sihler had written an article published in the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* under the title “What are the Guiding Principles for Establishing Orthodox Synods of the Lutheran Church in this Country?”<sup>34</sup> In the article Sihler outlined the challenges of founding a Lutheran synod in America, among which were the prevalence of impure doctrine, false union, and “Kirchenmengerei.”<sup>35</sup>

Having established contact with the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri, representatives of the Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio group traveled to St. Louis in May 1846, to discuss the possibility of organizing a new synod.<sup>36</sup> At this meeting the joint parties, working for an entire week on the project, produced a draft of a synod constitution and made copies for distribution and review by both groups.<sup>37</sup> C. F. W. Walther also published the full text of the draft constitution in *Der Lutheraner*, the Lutheran newspaper in St. Louis of which

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of importance for Lutherans in America is demonstrated by that fact that the text was reprinted both by Walther in *Der Lutheraner* 2.11 (January 24, 1846), 42–43, and by Löhe in his *Kirchliche Mittheilungen aus und über Nord-Amerika* IV.2 (1846), 4–8.

<sup>33</sup> Writing in 1851, Sihler said, “God is my witness that my testimony against the Ohio Synod sprang from honest zeal for the honor of God and the welfare of the Church. If synod had received our first request with only some measure of good will, the whole situation to-day might be different.” (Quoted in Theodore Engelder, “Why Missouri Stood Alone,” in *Ebenezer*, 116.)

<sup>34</sup> Sihler, “Welches sind die leitenden Grundsätze zur Bildung rechtgläubiger Synoden der luth. Kirche in hiesigen Landen?” *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* VII (November 27, 1845), 153–155, and VII (December 18, 1845) 161. The article was published shortly afterwards, with Walther’s commendation, in *Der Lutheraner* II (December 13, 1845), 29; II (December 27, 1845), 33–34; and II (March 7, 1846), 55–56. In an editor’s note in Munding’s *Government in the Missouri Synod* (175), Gustave Polack suggests that Sihler’s article may reflect some kind of rough draft of a constitution written by the representatives of the Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio Lutherans at the September 1845 meeting in Cleveland. No draft document has been found; nevertheless, Sihler’s article provides an idea of his conception of a synod and its structure.

<sup>35</sup> The context of Sihler’s critique and an analysis of his concerns will be treated below.

<sup>36</sup> Representing the Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio pastors at this meeting were: W. Sihler, J. A. Ernst, and F. J. C. Lochner; for the Saxons in Missouri: J. F. Buenger, O. Fuerbringer, G. H. Loeber, E. G. W. Keyl, T. C. F. Gruber, and C. F. W. Walther. For F. J. C. Lochner’s description of the visit and the meetings, cf. “Rev. F. Lochner’s Report on His First Contacts with the Saxons,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* VII. 3 (October 1934), 77–81, and *Moving Frontiers*, 146–148.

<sup>37</sup> After the meeting in St. Louis, pastors Lochner and Craemer, and others who were still members of the Michigan Synod, attended the meetings of the Michigan Synod, which had resolved to draft its own constitution. Lochner, after consulting with his fellow Löhe emissaries, presented his copy of the draft constitution from the St. Louis meeting to the Michigan Synod for discussion. The members of the Michigan Synod reviewed the St. Louis draft by individual paragraph. However, Lochner reports that the draft was not well received: “In the debate on such paragraphs as confession [the confessional basis], the relation to heretical groups, serving mixed congregations, confessional ceremonies, etc., not only did the ignorance of some members become apparent, but also, more and more, the un-Lutheran, unionistic attitude of the synod. Finally the discussions were dropped....” It seems clear that many of the members of the Michigan Synod did not share the views of Lochner (and others from the Löhe group) concerning the confessional basis, unionistic practices, and heterodox teachings. At that meeting of the Michigan Synod, pastors Lochner, Craemer, and others presented their own declaration of separation from the Michigan Synod. (Cf. “Rev. F. Lochner’s Report on His First Contacts with the Saxons,” 81.)

he was the editor.<sup>38</sup> The draft constitution produced at this May 1846 meeting is important because it became the foundational document, with only minor revisions, for the constitution adopted by the Synod the following year.<sup>39</sup>

Article II of the 1846 draft reads, in part, as follows:

Cap. II. Bedingungen, unter welchen der Anschluß an die Synode stattfinden und die Gemeinschaft mit derselben fort dauern kann.

...

§ 3. Lossagung von aller Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei, als da ist: Das Bedienen gemischter Gemeinden, als solcher, \*) von Seiten der Diener der Kirche; Theilnahme an dem Gottesdienst und den Sacramentshandlungen falschgläubiger und gemischter Gemeinden, Theilnahme an allem falschgläubigen Traktaten= und Missionswesen, u.s.w.

\*) Das sind also solche, die aus Lutheranern und Reformierten oder sogenannten Evangelischen (Unirten, Protestanten) zusammengesetzt sind und nicht selten von sogenannten lutherischen Predigern bedient werden, die also dann natürlich doppelartig, d. i. den Lutherischen lutherisch und den Reformirten reformirt sein müssen.<sup>40</sup>

In the text of §3, the symbol \*) marks a footnote to provide an explanation of the term “gemischter Gemeinden” (mixed congregations). The following is a translation of Art. II §3 with its footnote from the 1846 draft:

§ 3. Renunciation of all mixing of churches and of faiths, such as there is: The serving of mixed congregations, as such,\*) on the part of the ministers of the church; participation in the divine service and sacramental activities of heterodox and mixed congregations, participation in all heterodox tract and mission activities, etc.

\*) This refers to those [mixed congregations], which are made up of Lutherans and Reformed or so-called Evangelicals (United, Protestant) and are often served by so-called Lutheran preachers, who thus are then naturally agreeable [to both

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Der Lutheraner* 3.1 (September 5, 1846), 2–6. The draft constitution was also published as a separate document in St. Louis: *Die Verfassung der deutschen evangelisch= lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten*, St. Louis: Weber & Ohlshausen, 1846.

<sup>39</sup> Gustave Polack has provided side-by-side English translations of both the May 1846 draft constitution and the 1847 constitution adopted by the Synod. The texts reveal no differences between the two documents with regard to Article II. §3, however Polack’s translation of the 1846 draft does not include the footnote discussed below. (Cf. Gustave Polack, “Our First Synodical Constitution,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* XVI.1 [April 1943], 1–18.)

<sup>40</sup> *Die Verfassung der deutschen evangelisch= lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten*, St. Louis: Weber & Ohlshausen, 1846, 5. Cf. also *Der Lutheraner* 3.1 (September 5, 1846), 3.

sides], i.e. they must be Lutheran to the Lutherans and Reformed to the Reformed.<sup>41</sup>

This footnote was not included in the constitution adopted by the Synod in 1847. Apparently it was placed in the draft to explain what was intended by the term “mixed congregations” and considered unnecessary after the clarification had been made. It is helpful for the present consideration to know what the drafters understood to be “mixed” or unionistic congregations and pastors who serve such congregations. Such “mixed” congregations were fairly common in early nineteenth-century America, often comprised of German emigrants with Lutheran or Reformed backgrounds. Various reasons led them to form united congregations, among them doctrinal indifference and lack of pastors. In some cases the congregations might subscribe both to the Augsburg Confession and the Reformed Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>42</sup>

The two groups of Lutherans met again in Fort Wayne in July 1846. This meeting allowed additional representatives of the Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio Lutherans to meet the Saxons from Missouri and to participate in the discussions regarding the draft constitution and the proposed organization of a synod. The meeting produced no significant changes to §3 of Article II of the draft constitution.

On April 26, 1847, twelve pastors representing fifteen German Lutheran congregations from Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan met in Chicago and formally founded the new Synod. At this first convention the constitution was approved and adopted.

At this point it is necessary to point out an additional feature of the constitution that has some bearing on the question of *Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei* and the serving of mixed congregations by pastors. Article V. §12 of the 1847 constitution, under the chapter on “Execution of Synodical Business,” discusses the request by congregations for pastors. In particular, Article V. §12 takes up the case of mixed congregations requesting a pastor from the Synod. This article had its origin in the May 1846 draft constitution and remained largely unchanged in the 1847 text. Article V. §12 of 1847 reads as follows:

12. In case Lutheran congregations without a preacher apply to the Synod for one, Synod is to take earnest care that they be provided with true shepherds as soon as possible, by suggesting to these congregations candidates for the vacant pastorate. Should, however, the petitioning congregation till then be mixed [*gemischte*], i.e., consisting of Lutherans, Reformed and so-called Evangelical or United [*Unierten*], certainly their request will not be declined immediately. On the contrary, the honor of God, Christian honesty and sincerity and the true love of the neighbor require

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<sup>41</sup> For a brief discussion of this footnote, and of the term *Gemischter Gemeinden* in particular, cf. August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther*, 215.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. also Schumacher, 55. A number of congregations that later joined the Missouri Synod originated as union congregations, e.g., St. Paul’s in Des Peres, and Immanuel in Olivette, Missouri, as well as F. C. D. Wyneken’s congregation, St. Paul’s, in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

that such a congregation can be served by a preacher of the Synod only under the following conditions:

- a. if [the congregation] declares that it will submit itself unconditionally to the Word of God, as only the Lutheran Church does;
- b. if [the congregation] in accordance with this, and after previous instruction, confesses the one true Scriptural doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, particularly that of the holy Sacraments and of the Office of the Keys; and rejects the contrary doctrine as unscriptural;
- c. if those people who were formerly not Lutheran will subscribe to this, that when they receive the Lord's Supper from the hand of a servant of the Lutheran Church, that thereby they publicly enter into fellowship [*Gemeinschaft*] with the Lutheran Church and thereby cease to be Reformed, so-called Evangelicals or United [*Uniert*], and so forth.<sup>43</sup>

Article V. §12 of the 1847 constitution is noteworthy because it gives an indication of what the drafters considered to be the proper approach, under specific circumstances, to dealing with mixed or “union” congregations. In a sense, it provides one example of activity that was not considered *Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei* and would not signify a violation of Article II. §3. Several concerns are evident in this example, among them that the Synod desired not to tarnish the “honor of God” and to fulfill its Christian calling to honesty, sincerity, and genuine love for neighbor. And, importantly, the Synod was intent on assisting those congregations seeking a pastor, even if they were not Lutheran, and also ensuring that those congregations would be turned to

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<sup>43</sup> Translation adapted from Polack, “Our First Synodical Constitution,” 10–11. The original German text reads as follows:

§ 12. Falls predigerlose lutherische Gemeinden die Synode um Prediger angehen, so hat dieselbe ernstliche Sorge zu tragen, daß erstere sobald als möglich mit treuen Hirten versorgt werden, indem die Synode diesen Gemeinden Kandidaten für das vakante Pfarramt vorschlägt. Sollte jedoch die bittstellende Gem. eine bis dahin gemischte, d. h. aus Lutheranern, Reformierten und sogenannten Evangelischen oder Unierten bestehende sein, so wird sie zwar mit ihrem Gesuche nicht ohne weiteres zurückgewiesen; doch es erfordert die Ehre Gottes, die christliche Aufrichtigkeit und Lauterkeit und die wahre Liebe des Nächsten, daß eine solche Gem. nur unter folgenden Bedingungen von einem Prediger der Synode bedient werden kann:

- a) Wenn sie erklärt, sich dem Worte Gottes, wie allein die lutherische Kirche tut, unbedingt unterwerfen zu wollen;
- b) wem sie sich demzufolge nach vorhergegangener Belehrung zu der allein schriftgetreuen Lehre der ev.=luth. Kirche, namentlich von den heiligen Sakramenten und dem Amte der Schlüssel bekennt, und die Gegenlehre als schriftwidrig verwirft;
- c) wenn die vormalig Nicht=Lutherischen der Erklärung beipflichten, daß sie durch das Empfangen des heiligen Abendmahls aus der Hand eines Dieners der luth. Kirche öffentlich in die Gemeinschaft der luth. Kirche eintreten und hiermit aufhören, Reformierte, sogenannte Evangelische oder Unierte oder dergl. zu sein.

(*Verfassung der deutschen evangelisch= lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten*, [1847], in Kraushaar, 334–335.)

the true teaching of God's Word and embrace the Lutheran confession.<sup>44</sup> Further examples of how this distinction was understood in the Synod will be discussed below.

## VI. Subsequent Changes to Article II. §3

In the years following the adoption of the constitution very few changes were made to Article II. §3. However, the Synod passed at least one amendment to the constitution that had some bearing on the article. In 1850 the Synod ratified an amendment detailing the consequences for congregations or their pastors who violated Article II of the constitution:

If Article II—paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6—regarding the conditions of membership is acted contrary to by congregations pledged to the Synod or by their preachers, then, after prior fruitless admonition, nothing other than expulsion can result, whereupon the expelled member loses all share in the property of the Synod, its educational institutions, etc. The same thing also happens to those who, for whatever reason, separate themselves from the Synod.<sup>45</sup>

The 1853 Synod convention adopted a revised constitution, in large part to address the pressures of the Synod's dramatic growth. In the following year the new constitution and its accompanying changes to the structure of the Synod were put into effect. The original Article II of the Synod constitution was reproduced virtually without alteration into the new, revised constitution.<sup>46</sup> For the next several decades, the text of Article II remained unchanged.<sup>47</sup>

In 1917 the Synod officially adopted a revised edition of its constitution, which also appeared in an English translation.<sup>48</sup> The new constitution was ratified in 1920. The

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<sup>44</sup> This also reflects Walther's view in Altenburg Thesis VII that, "Even heterodox companies are not to be dissolved, but reformed."

<sup>45</sup> "Zusätze zur Constitution," in *Vierter Synodal=Bericht der deutschen Ev.= Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. Staaten vom Jahre 1850*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1876, 126.

<sup>46</sup> The revised constitution was first adopted by the Synod in 1853 and originally appeared in *Der Lutheraner IX* (June 21, 1853) 145–151. It later appeared in booklet form as *Die Neue Verfassung oder Constitution der deutschen evangelisch-lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. Staaten*. St. Louis: Druckerei der evang.= lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. St., 1855. Cf. also Kraushaar, 346. An English translation of the 1854 revised constitution is found in *Moving Frontiers*, 149–161.

<sup>47</sup> The first Synod Handbook was published in 1873 (*Synodal=Handbuch der deutschen ev.=luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. St.*, St. Louis: Martin C. Barthel, 1873). This and the subsequent Handbooks over several decades show no changes to Article II.

<sup>48</sup> The process of revising and adopting the new constitution took some time. The new constitution was put into effect in 1920, although the final "official" English translation of the constitution appeared in Synod's periodicals after the 1923 convention. The 1924 *Handbook* includes the final wording. The officially adopted German form was printed in *Einunddreißiger Synodalbericht der Evangelisch= Lutheraner Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten, ... 1920*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1920, 82–97. The revised form of the article (now Article VI.2) reflected the new formatting, however, the wording of the German text remained unchanged from the 1847 constitution.

The English translation of the new constitution went through several revisions. In 1917 the text of Article VI. 2 read:

translation marked the most significant revision of Article II to date. The paragraphs that had formerly comprised Article II in the old constitution had been recast as the new Article VI (in its latest form), which began as follows:

Article VI. — Conditions of Membership. Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in Synod are: —

1. Acceptance of the confessional basis of Article II.
2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as—
  - a. Serving congregations of mixed confessions, as such, by ministers of the Church;
  - b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession;
  - c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities.<sup>49</sup>

Several things may be noted with regard to the English translation of (the new) Article VI.2:<sup>50</sup>

1. *aller Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei* is translated as “unionism and syncretism of every description.”
  - a. The adjective *aller* (all) modifying *Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei* is omitted in favor of the adjectival phrase “of every description” following the compound noun. This change may indicate more clearly that the original sense of the German adjective *all-*, was intended distributively rather than collectively, or at least interpreted that way by the translators. In other words, the original sense of the adjective

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2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as,
    - a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the Church;
    - b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of such of mixed confession;
    - c. Joining the heterodox in missionary efforts or in the publishing and distribution of literature.

(*Proceedings of the Thirtieth Convention of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States,...* 1917, 44.)

In 1920, the text read:

2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as,
  - a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the Church;
  - b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession;
  - c. Joining the heterodox in missionary efforts or in the publishing and distribution of literature.

(*Proceedings of the Thirtieth-First Convention of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States,...* 1920, 32.)

<sup>49</sup> *Constitution and By-Laws of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924, 3. In the same year a German edition of the Handbook was published as well.

<sup>50</sup> Synod President Pfothenauer appointed a committee to draft a new Synod constitution. Its members were Ludwig Fuerbringer, John H. C. Fritz, and J. W. Boehne. Apparently the new constitution was drafted in German and later translated into English. Who produced the English translation is unknown, however, it might have been the work of the committee. The 1924 text shows a third version of the English translation. How the final form was achieved is unclear.

*all-* referred perhaps not to the collective whole, i.e., “all” of “church and faith mixing,” but rather “any or every kind of church and faith mixing.” That clarification should explain the wording “of every description” in the text; it is not an addition to or modification of the sense of the German text, but rather it is simply its translation. It might be asserted that the translation adds a certain extra force not immediately apparent in the German text. Perhaps the translators wanted to be very clear about the description of unionism and syncretism, and the Synod agreed.

- b. *Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei* is translated as “unionism and syncretism.” This is the first time these English terms enter the Synod constitution, even though *Unionismus* and *Syncretismus* were German terms likely familiar to the drafters. As noted above, English offers no good translation of the German phrase; the best might be something like “the mixing of churches and faiths,” however, that neither conveys the full sense of the words for the founders nor their entire concerns. As has been noted, “syncretism” is a fairly standard translation of *Glaubensmengerei*. *Kirchenmengerei* is more difficult to translate. The English term “unionism” (even from its German equivalent: *Unionismus*) was much more familiar to members of the Synod by the early twentieth century, and was likely chosen for that reason. Certainly the founders were very familiar with the Union movement and unionistic practices. The concerns about unionism and syncretism by the founders of the Synod will be treated in more detail below.

2. *gemischter Gemeinden*, used twice in the German text, is translated in both instances as “congregations of mixed confession.” A literal translation of the original German is “of mixed congregations.” It is likely that the translator simply sought to clarify the meaning of the phrase by indicating that what was mixed was the doctrinal or confessional basis of the congregations in question. This seems to be supported by the footnote in the 1846 draft constitution (discussed above), which identified the meaning of the *gemischter Gemeinden* as those congregations which were made up of a mixture of Lutherans and Reformed or Evangelicals (Union or Protestant). The concern seems to have been the same at the time of the translation of the Article into English.

One attempt to amend Article VI.2 occurred at the Synod convention in 1920. In an unprinted memorial, a pastoral conference suggested that the words “renunciation of all lodgery—die Lossagung von allem Logenwesen” should be inserted in Article VI.2. By resolution the Synod declared that it included the “ungodly lodgery” in the words “unionism and syncretism of every description” as stated in Article VI.2.<sup>51</sup>

Apart from minor alterations in formatting and punctuation, this 1924 English translation of Article VI.1–2 remains the same in the current *Handbook* of the Synod. In the opinion of the author of this study, the English translation of the Article is a very

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. 1920 *Proceedings*, 47.

faithful rendering of the German text; at least it is perhaps the best translation of the German meaning into the English language that can be expected.

## **VII. The Historical Background and the Concern about Unionism and Syncretism**

The concern of Lutherans about the mixing of churches and doctrines goes back to the sixteenth century. While the external mingling of churches or confessional bodies was perhaps less a problem in the early period, certainly syncretism was a relatively familiar concern to Luther and other Lutheran reformers. Without question Walther and the other theologians in the Missouri Synod also would have been familiar with the seventeenth-century Syncretistic Controversy and the disruptions it caused among Lutherans at that time.<sup>52</sup> This paper will not examine in any great detail the writings of Luther, the Lutheran Confessions, or the seventeenth-century Lutheran dogmaticians on the question of “unionism and syncretism.”<sup>53</sup> Certainly the founders of the Synod strove to confess the true teachings of the Scripture and to maintain what the Lutheran Confessions taught on any matters related to doctrine and the church. Nevertheless, the challenges they faced caused them to take firm stands on questions concerning relationships with other churches and the potential blending of doctrines they entailed.

### **A. The Union Movement in the German Lands**

The Union Movement in Germany had a profound impact on those Lutherans who emigrated to America and founded the Missouri Synod. The influence of the Enlightenment and Rationalism caused some theologians (Lutheran and Reformed alike) in the German lands to deliberate on what really was the true heritage of the Reformation and what were the essential articles of the evangelical faith and life. The result of this effort was a newly found emphasis on a common faith and mutual love which encouraged the union of both the Lutheran and Reformed churches. This “reawakening” of religion and reassessment of the Reformation’s impact coincided with the revival of what was perceived to be the true Christian fear of God and love of the church in the years following the devastation and disruption of the Napoleonic wars. In these circumstances, many in the German lands felt a desire for Christian concord and unity.

This movement toward closer alliances involved both the external unification of churches long separated by confessional divides, as well as the internal blending of

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<sup>52</sup> The Syncretistic Controversy refers to a series of conflicts in the seventeenth century related to the attempts by some Lutheran theologians to forge confessional unity between the Lutheran and Reformed churches in the hope of an eventual reunion with the Roman church. One of the goals of the proponents of this effort was to find common ground in the councils and doctrines of the early church and to achieve consensus through a distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental articles of faith. Opponents charged that the attempt was actually a mixing or blending of doctrines, resulting in a false unity and a loss of the true teachings of the Scripture. (Cf. also “Der Calixtinische Synkretismus,” *Lehre und Wehre* 23 (1877) 8–15, 55–57, 76–89, 116–119. This article by an unidentified author discusses the differences and similarities between the “syncretism” in the seventeenth century and “unionism” in the nineteenth century.)

<sup>53</sup> For a sense of how the early Missouri Synod theologians understood Luther, the Confessions, and the Lutheran dogmaticians in support of their position on unionism and syncretism, cf. e.g., Walther’s *Kirche und Amt* (especially Thesis VIII); *The True Visible Church* (especially Thesis XXI, C); *The Form of a Christian Congregation* (especially § 32); the Baier-Walther *Compendium Theologiae Positivae* (III.665–672 on syncretism), and Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics* (III.419–427).

doctrines. In many cases what was decided upon as the doctrinal foundation were the most basic Christian, creedal teachings. The other “non-essential” doctrines were often set aside, regarded as remnants of old doctrinal controversies now overcome through goodwill and love, under the influence of indifference. (Doctrinal differences were obscured as confessional consciences declined.)

The desire for unity was expressed most dramatically and with great effect through the program of unionizing churches throughout the German lands, the most significant being in the largest of the German territories, Prussia.<sup>54</sup> (The beginning of the “Prussian Union” church was celebrated as part of the festivities commemorating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 1817.) In almost every case, these unions brought Lutheran and Reformed churches into one united church, sometimes called an “Evangelical” church. Use of a “union” agenda was often required in worship services. In many instances these ecclesiastical unions were initiated—and enforced, if needed—by the state, often with the cooperation of church leaders. The purpose, in part, was to engineer greater political unity and national solidarity through the unification of religion within the state.

Reaction to the Union movement was strong in both Lutheran and Reformed circles. On the part of Lutherans, the Confessional Revival maintained that true unity in the church was based on the truth of God’s Word alone. Representatives of the Confessional Revival coined the term “Unionism” to identify not only the Union movement in the German lands, but also its effects. They saw grave dangers in the secular government’s effort to merge the Lutheran and Reformed churches into a union. First, they stressed that the government had no role in determining the content and practice of faith; such was a violation of God’s two kingdoms. The second danger was even more serious in that the union movement—with its compromising of doctrine—attacked the truth of God’s Word and threatened the Gospel. Confronted by these problems, the Confessional Revival movement sought to restore true doctrine and practice to the Lutheran church through fidelity to the Scriptures and a revitalized adherence to the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions, as well as to the theology of Luther and the Lutheran orthodox theologians. Only in this way, it was believed, could the Lutheran church be preserved.

### **B. American Lutheranism and the General Synod**

In the American landscape the situation was slightly different for Lutherans in the early nineteenth century. Many who had immigrated to America in the previous centuries had become Americanized, especially in the years following the founding of the Republic. Free from government intrusion, Lutherans saw possibilities for the church in this new country that were not found in Europe. Some Lutheran church leaders, also influenced by Pietism, Rationalism, and doctrinal indifference, saw an opportunity for the

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<sup>54</sup> For example, the churches in the territory of Nassau were united by a general synod in August 1817. A month later, Friedrich Wilhelm III, the Calvinist King of Prussia, began his drive to forge the new “Evangelical Church of Prussia.” Additional union churches were organized in Rhineland-Palatinate (1818), Hanau and Fulda (1818), Anhalt-Bernberg (1820), Waldeck, Pyrmont, and Baden (1821), Hesse (1818–1823), and Dessau (1827). Pressures toward unification were strong in other German territories.

Protestant churches to unite in a way previously impossible. One prominent example, Samuel Simon Schmucker (1799–1873), leader of the General Synod (founded in 1820), wanted Lutherans to have a voice that would be fraternal toward other Protestants.<sup>55</sup> In 1838, he appealed for an “apostolic Protestant union,” an ecumenical proposal for all Protestants in America to join together in working for the promotion of Christianity. In particular Schmucker believed this approach would mean greater effectiveness in reaching out to the ever-growing number of immigrants in America, many of whom were affiliated with no church. In keeping with this spirit, in 1839 the Foreign Mission Society of the General Synod proposed a union with the German Reformed Church in America.<sup>56</sup>

The General Synod engaged in relationships with several non-Lutheran churches at several levels. This included the exchanging of delegates with other church bodies, altar and pulpit fellowship, and joint participation in tract societies, mission societies, Sunday School unions, etc. For example, in the 1820s and 1830s the Synod received as advisory members pastors from the Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and German Reformed churches. In return, pastors of the General Synod were received as advisory members (delegates) of the Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and German Reformed churches. The Lord’s Supper was celebrated jointly by the Lutherans and others at some of these gatherings. At the same time Lutherans from the General Synod preached in Methodist and Reformed congregations. Consideration was given to a joint hymnal project between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. In 1845 the General Synod in its convention officially sanctioned the celebration of the Lord’s Supper with other churches, as well as the exchanging of members: “[The Synod] cordially approves of the practice, which has hitherto prevailed in our churches and those of the Presbyterian church, of mutually inviting the ministry to sit as advisory members in ecclesiastical bodies; of inviting communicants in regular standing in either church [Lutheran and Reformed], to partake of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper in the other, and of the dismission of church-members, at their own request, from the churches of the one to those of the other denominations.” Likewise ministers in good standing were authorized to pass from one body to the other upon application and receipt of a certificate of ministerial standing.<sup>57</sup>

Schmucker’s vision of “American Lutheranism” was one that saw a form of Lutheranism based on the Augsburg Confession as the foundation and key to greater Protestant unity in America. However, his *Definite Synodical Platform* of 1855 included the “American Recension of the Augsburg Confession,” which deleted “errors” from the Augustana and defended their recension.<sup>58</sup> The document proposed that this document be the new standard of faith, a new confession, for the General Synod. This move was an

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<sup>55</sup> The delegates at the founding meeting of the General Synod could agree only that the Synod would be Lutheran in name, and they made no identification at all with the historic Lutheran confessions.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Adolph Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*. Two vols. New York, 1898, I.332.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States Convened in Philadelphia, May 16, 1845*. Baltimore: Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1845, 30. For further discussion of the unionistic activities of the General Synod, cf. Bente, 48–58.

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin Kurtz (1795–1865) also had a role in the drafting and was a champion of the *Definite Synodical Platform*. He was a pastor in Maryland and president of the General Synod for a time. He too was a strong exponent of the General Synod’s “American Lutheranism.”

attempt decisively to halt the increasing influence of the Confessional Revival among the Lutherans in the General Synod.

Lutherans recently emigrated from the German lands often saw the position of the General Synod to be un-Lutheran, and quickly saw commonalities—especially with regard to doctrine and practice—between it and the union churches in Germany. Many of these Lutheran immigrants were influenced by the Confessional Revival to some degree or another and they often decried the situation in the American churches as similar to that which they had fled in Europe. Their chief goal was to maintain a pure confession of faith and preserve the Lutheran church, and opposition to unionism in American churches was the natural result.

Some Lutherans in America were influenced in their views of the church by Friedrich Schleiermacher,<sup>59</sup> for whom the church was, above all, a fellowship, or *Gemeinschaft*, of believers. If the church was essentially an association of people, it was based on common piety or ethics. Whereas Luther had derived his understanding of fellowship from what the church is, namely a *koinonia* called together by the Holy Spirit, Schleiermacher derived his understanding of the church from what fellowship is—a community of like-minded believers voluntarily acting together. This view would not necessarily regard the church as a community (*Gemeinde*) of saints under one Head, Christ. For Walther and others in the early history of the Synod, the understanding of fellowship and unity was derived from what the church is. Schleiermacher's understanding of the church held sway among many in American Lutheranism at the time (as it still does today). In short, the General Synod had a different basis for its understanding of fellowship and unity (church as an association related to religion or piety), whereas the Missouri Synod saw the basis for fellowship and unity as the understanding of church as the congregation [*Gemeinde*] of saints, believers in Christ, among whom the Word of God is purely preached and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution (Augsburg Confession VII). Certainly this fundamental difference in the understanding of the church impacted the question of relationships among Lutherans in America at the time. It was predicated upon the different interpretations of both the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as differing understandings of what it meant to hold to the Scriptures and the Confessions as a Lutheran church.

### **C. Wyneken and the General Synod**

In 1843 Friedrich Conrad Dieterich Wyneken published his influential booklet *Die Noth der Deutschen Lutheraner in Nordamerika* (*The Distress of German Lutherans in North America*).<sup>60</sup> In addition to raising the alarm about the critical need for pastors

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<sup>59</sup> Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was a Reformed pastor and professor at the University of Berlin. He was one of the most influential figures in liberal protestant theology in the nineteenth century.

<sup>60</sup> F. C. D. Wyneken, *Die Noth der deutschen Lutheraner in Nordamerika: Ihren Glaubensgenossen in der Heimath an's Herz gelegt*. (Besonderer Abdruck aus der *Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche*, herausgegeben von Professor D. Adolf von Harless, Februarheft 1843) Erlangen: Theodor Bläsing, 1843. The work was also published in the United States the following year: *Die Noth der deutschen Lutheraner in Nordamerika*, edited by Friedrich Schmidt. Pittsburgh: Druckerei der Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, 1844.

and missionaries for service among German immigrants on the American frontier, Wyneken also decried the poor conditions of the churches in America. Associated at the time with the General Synod,<sup>61</sup> Wyneken criticized the indifference in doctrine and practice he observed in the Synod as well as increasing influences of unionism and revivalism within it. The message struck a cord in Germany and several theological journals there attacked the General Synod for encouraging the union of Lutheran and Reformed churches in America. Although intended, of course, for Lutheran audiences in Germany, Wyneken's booklet was also published in the United States in 1844 and soon gained the attention of—as well as a determined response from—the leaders of the General Synod.

In 1845 Wyneken was an elected delegate to the General Synod convention. Arriving several days after the convention had begun, Wyneken found that the Synod already had passed a resolution requesting one of its committees to defend the General Synod against the accusations made by Wyneken in his booklet.<sup>62</sup> The Synod maintained that the accusations of unionism, heterodox doctrine, and erring practice were false and that Wyneken had deliberately instigated the issue. In response, Wyneken, on the last day of the meeting, proposed to the convention another resolution. He suggested that the General Synod send the official writings of the Synod—including the works of its theologians Schmucker and Kurtz, copies of its newspapers, theological journals, and other books in which the doctrine and practice of the Synod were presented—to Lutheran theologians and journal editors in Germany for their scrutiny and so confirm the orthodoxy of the Synod before the Lutheran Church there. The General Synod, not wanting to deal with Wyneken's proposal, tabled it. Wyneken then offered a second proposal: that the General Synod publicly condemn all the forementioned official writings, including the works of Dr. Schmucker and Dr. Kurtz, and renounce them as heretical and aberrant teachings.<sup>63</sup>

In order to defend itself against those questioning its theological position, the leaders of the General Synod drafted a letter to the Evangelical (Union) churches in Germany. The letter, signed by Schmucker, Kurtz, and other theologians, informed the

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Cf. also *The Distress of the German Lutherans in North America*, translated by S. Edgar Schmidt, edited by Rudolph Rehmer. Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1986.

<sup>61</sup> Wyneken was a member of the new Evangelical Synod of the West, which was part of the greater General Synod.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States Convened in Philadelphia, May 16, 1845*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> The minutes of the General Synod meeting do not record Wyneken's proposals. However, the official journal *Hirtenstimme* reported that "Pastor Wyneken of Baltimore spoke out on a number of occasions against the doctrine, practices, books and newspapers of the Lutheran Church and threatened to give evidence of the same." It added that, when Wyneken made his first proposal of sending printed materials to the Germans for scrutiny, Schmucker, Kurtz, and the others, "listened good-naturedly to this funny notion and tabled it" (Theodore Engelder, "Why Missouri Stood Alone," *Ebenezer*, 113). In addition, Wyneken himself published a description of the events at the Synod meeting in the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung VII* (1845), 92. (Cf. Johann Christoph Wilhelm Lindemann, *A Biographical Sketch of the Honorable American Evangelist Friedrich Conrad Dieterich Wyneken*. Translated by James P. Lanning. Fort Wayne: Walther Library, Concordia Theological Seminary, 1995, 20–21.) Cf. also Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847–1947*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947, 62–63.

Germans that, in effect, the General Synod stood on common ground with the Union Church of Germany. The leaders of the General Synod considered this relationship with the German churches so important that several of the leaders, including Schmucker, Kurtz, and Morris, traveled to Germany to deliver the letter in person.<sup>64</sup>

Walther printed portions of this 1845 letter from the General Synod to the Evangelical churches in Germany in *Der Lutheraner*.<sup>65</sup> Walther argued that the letter was significant because it was an official acknowledgement from the General Synod itself that the Synod was sloughing off—if not abandoning—both the Lutheran doctrine and the Lutheran church. Walther even used *Sperrdrucke* (spaced typeface) in *Der Lutheraner* for parts of the letter to highlight key things for his readers. The impact of this letter was likely dramatic on most of the faithful readers of *Der Lutheraner* as they read the General Synod's official description of itself, and in the words of its leaders:

As to our doctrinal views, we confess without disguise, indeed, confess it loudly and openly, that the great majority of us are not Old Lutherans in the sense of a small party, which in Germany bears this name. We are convinced that, if the great Luther were still living, he himself would not be one of them.... In most of our church-principles we stand on common ground with the Union Church of Germany. The distinctive views which separate the Old Lutherans and the Reformed Church we do not consider essential; and the tendency of the so-called old Lutheran party seems to us to be behind our age... The great Luther made progress throughout his life, and at the end of his career considered his work unfinished.... The peculiar view of Luther on the bodily presence of the Lord in the Lord's Supper has long ago been abandoned by the great majority of our ministers, though some few of the older German teachers and laymen still adhere to it. Regarding the nature and meaning of the presence of the Lord in the Supper, liberty is allowed as in the Evangelical [Union] Church of Germany. The majority of our preachers believe in a peculiar presence and in a peculiar blessing of the Lord, but of a spiritual nature only.... Nevertheless, we are Evangelical Lutheran.... We believe that we may, as honest men, still call ourselves Lutherans.... Instead of organizing a separate Evangelical Church, as it exists in Germany, ministers coming to America should unite with the General Synod. They must, however, not come with the purpose of remodeling the American Lutheran Church according to European standards, which would but lead to failure, strife, and separations.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The letter was published in Germany in the *Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche* XI.4. Löhe also published a report on the General Synod's letter, noting the visit of the General Synod leaders to Germany. Löhe added that the letter intended to defend the Synod against the accusation of laxity (*Laxheit*) in doctrine and confession, but failed to accomplish its objective and rather confirmed the perception about the unionistic tendencies in the Synod (*Kirchliche Mittheilungen aus und über Nord=amerika* 6 [1846], 48).

<sup>65</sup> *Der Lutheraner* II.11 (January 24, 1846), 43–44. Friedrich Bente translates portions of the letter in his *American Lutheranism, Volume II*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919, 59–60.

<sup>66</sup> Excerpts from 1845 Union letter translated by Bente, in *American Lutheranism, Volume II*, 59–60. See also Spaeth, I.333.

The timing of the General Synod letter and of Walther's reprinting it in *Der Lutheraner* is important. The letter was dated and signed on November 10 (Luther's birthday), 1845. Walther printed excerpts from the letter on January 24, 1846. Immediately preceding this letter, in the same issue of *Der Lutheraner*, Walther printed the news of another group of Lutheran pastors leaving the Ohio Synod, including Wilhelm Sihler and J. A. Ernst, in September 1845. After the scene at the May 1845 General Synod convention, F. C. D. Wyneken had withdrawn from the General Synod, and had participated in the September 1845 meeting with Sihler, Ernst, et al., in Cleveland.<sup>67</sup> The point in detailing this history here is that, to some extent, the issue of unionism and syncretism within other Lutheran synods in America (especially the General Synod and Ohio Synod) raised serious questions among the Lutherans who would found the Synod in 1847. Without doubt, the problem of unionism and syncretism in the German churches, as well as the immediate concern in American synods, made the repudiation of unionism and syncretism in the new Missouri Synod a matter not only of great importance, but also of urgency.

Clearly the founders of the Missouri Synod were troubled about unionism and syncretism both at the synod (or denominational) level, as well as at the level of the individual congregation. The influence of the unionistic and syncretistic positions of other synods in America had their greatest impact, at least at time of the Missouri Synod's founding in 1847, at the congregational level. The founders had to confront problems with unionistic teachings and practices in local congregations. Only later would the problem be more prominently evident at the synod level as various Lutheran synods in America—including the Missouri Synod—began exploring possibilities for fellowship and union.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> After his withdrawal from the General Synod, Wyneken wrote a letter to Löhe recounting his conflict at the General Synod convention:

I should have been happy if, by the acceptance of the second proposal, my character would have been branded in Germany as that of a liar and defamer. However, since the General Synod rejected both proposals, I again had to repeat publicly that she is harboring and nurturing false doctrine. As an honest man and a Christian, I wished to declare war against her, although it may seem silly to her since I am only one insignificant individual. I desired to tell her in advance that I would do all in my power to oppose her influence, especially that I would warn against her, so that the few in Germany who are on the side of the truth do not bother with her."

On Wyneken's letter Loehe remarked: "Wyneken is herewith beginning a war which he may carry on with the deepest peace of soul, a war in which all true children of the Lutheran Church will have to join him." (Cf. Georg J. Fritschel, *Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte und Lehrstellung der ev.=luth. Synode von Iowa u. a. Staaten*. Chicago: Wartburg Press, n.d., 44; citation in translation from Baepler, 61–62.)

<sup>68</sup> In his article on unionism and syncretism in the Synod's constitution, Will Schumacher stresses the fact that the context focused upon in the constitution here was the local congregation, and that the concern was about mixed congregations and syncretistic activity in them. He asserts that, "the Missouri Synod's founders were less worried about the long-term danger of 'union' denominations than they were about 'mixed' congregations which often called Lutheran pastors" (Schumacher, 56; emphasis original). He goes on to suggest a development of the Synod's understanding on this point, and sees a shift from a congregational to denominational focus (56–57). Schumacher may be correct that, "The application of this section of the constitution to events and settings not directly connected with the ministry of a particular local congregation came somewhat later, as a logical extension of the original meaning" (57). However, the present author believes that both the broader "denominational" (or confessional) and local congregational contexts were of equal concern to the drafters of the constitution, and while a refocusing more closely on the denominational question likely occurred later, that does not mean that the concern was absent at the

### **D. Sihler and the Guiding Principles for Establishing Orthodox Synods of the Lutheran Church (1845)**

In December 1845, Wilhelm Sihler published an article in *Der Lutheraner* which gives important insights into his thinking about the state of the Lutheran church in America. In the article entitled, “What are the Guiding Principles for Establishing Orthodox Synods of the Lutheran Church in this Country?” Sihler described the conditions of the Lutheran churches in America and tackled the problem of organizing a true Lutheran synod in a country where, in contrast to the German lands, the separation of church and state was the norm. Clearly it would be impossible to transplant an ecclesiastical structure into the American landscape as it had been established by the governments in Germany. Lutherans in America faced numerous challenges, Sihler observed, among them the temptation to enter a “Vereinigung (Union)” with the Reformed under the pressures of modernity (including “Liebes=Union” or the union on the basis of mutual love) and doctrinal indifference. Due to the ignorance of some Lutherans false teaching had entered the churches, Lutherans were unable to defend their own doctrines and the “Wahrheit zur Seligkeit” (truth unto salvation) was being abandoned. Sihler noted especially the influence of Reformed theology on the Lutheran doctrines of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, in which cases the Lutheran teaching was often diminished or lost.<sup>69</sup> He added that nearly half of the Lutherans in America, and almost all the English-speaking Lutherans belonged to the “so-called” Lutheran General Synod. Sihler explained that while its origins were in a church which had once held fast to the true teachings of the Lutheran Confessions, and once had the true teaching on the sacraments and the Office of the Keys, it had now fallen away and had taken up the impure teaching of the Reformed and the Methodists. At the same time the General Synod had yielded wholeheartedly to the movement toward the false union (*der falschen*

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time of the Synod’s founding. While the local congregation may have been the place where the mixing of churches and faiths was most evident, it was inextricably linked to the broader problem of the mixing of church bodies and doctrines (such as the Lutheran with the Reformed). By the mid twentieth century, questions of the mixing of confessions and doctrines in the local congregation were perhaps not as urgent as they had been a century earlier. Certainly by the mid twentieth century, the question of denominational fellowship was a major interest of the Synod. It is natural that writers in the Synod would focus on the denominational context in the later period. However, that fact does not suggest that the drafters of the constitution were not concerned about the “denominational” context, such as it was, in the mid-nineteenth century. The threat of unionism, broadly viewed, was the mixing of differing confessions—such as the Lutheran confession with the Reformed confession—to produce something new. The threat these Lutherans had faced in the German lands was the loss of their Lutheran doctrine and practice by means of a forced unity with the Reformed church, resulting in a new “Union” or “Evangelical” Church that was neither truly Lutheran nor truly Reformed. In addition to the problem of “mixed” congregations in American Lutheranism was the fact that Lutheran pastors often found themselves as members a Synod that had no clear confessional basis and actively sought unity with non-Lutheran churches on bases other than agreement in doctrine (e.g., the General Synod). Part of the reasoning for this assertion lies also in the original words of the constitution itself. “Kirchen=mengerei” refers not simply to congregations (*Gemeinde*) but to churches holding to a particular confession, including those that are regarded as heterodox or heretical.

<sup>69</sup> In particular, Sihler was concerned about the language used in the distribution formula for the Lord’s Supper. The Ohio Synod authorized a formula which included in the words of institution the phrase, “Christus spricht” (“Christ said [this is my body...].”). This same phrase was used in the Prussian Union agenda in an attempt to find common ground between Lutheran and Reformed teachings on the Lord’s Supper.

*Union*) so prevalent at the time. Sihler minced no words: in this falsehood Satan himself poses as an “angel of light.” This temptation, Sihler maintained, “our church” must resist by the grace of God and as the bearer of the pure Word and Sacraments it must shake itself out if its slumber and against this threat it must keep watch. He noted that some Lutheran synods, not connected to the General Synod, profess publicly to hold to the Lutheran Confessions, yet do not practice in accord with that teaching, instead using Reformed or Evangelical formulas for the administration of the sacraments. Sihler asserted that the problem with these churches was the failure to adhere to Lutheran doctrine and practice:

Again, a part of these synods pledges itself outwardly to the entire confessions of the Lutheran church, yet does not require firm subscription to them at ordination, adheres to a Reformed and United formula for the administration of the Lord’s Supper, distributes also the Lord’s Supper without discretion to Reformed and Evangelicals and thus promotes the shameful unionism and church mixing [*Unirereri und Kirchenmengerei*] of our day. But the worst thing is that they [the unionistic synods] reject the earnest pleas of some of their members for correction of the problem and for the preservation and aid of the church even in the most desperate state, and thus in any case will remain in confessional indifference and indolence.<sup>70</sup>

Sihler’s influence in the conception of the synod polity and the dangers facing a true Lutheran church in America is significant. His concerns about unionism and syncretism are echoed in Article II. §3, and elsewhere in the constitution.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Sihler, “Welches sind die leitenden Grundsätze zur Bildung rechtgläubiger Synoden der luth. Kirche in hiesigen Landen?” in *Der Lutheraner* II.8 (December 13, 1845) 29. [“Wiederum ein Theil dieser Synoden bekennt sich zwar äußerlich zu sämtlichen Symbolen der lutherischen Kirche, verpflichtet aber sich nicht auf sie als feste Ordnung bei Ertheilung der Ordination, hält eine reformirte und unirte Formel bei der Austheilung des heil. Abendmahls fest, bedient hie und da auch Reformirte und Evangelische mit dem heil. Abendmahl und fördert also die schändliche Unirerei und Kirchenmengerei unserer Tage. Was aber das Schlimmste ist, sie wies die dringenden Bitten einzelner ihrer Glieder um Abhülfe auch nur des schreiendsten Nothstandes zur Erhaltung und Förderung der Kirche zurück und will also auf alle Weise in der confessionellen Gleichgültigkeit und Schlawheit verharren.”]

<sup>71</sup> The 1846 draft constitution includes a section at the end entitled “Erläuterungen,” or explanations of certain articles of the constitution. In this section, an explanation is given for Article V. §14, which states that the Synod stands in accord with Augsburg Confession Article VII, that uniformity in ceremonies is not essential. However, the Synod noted that it deemed uniformity in ceremonies wholesome and useful, lest the weak stumble, so that the appearance of innovation may be avoided, and because of the situation in American Lutheranism, in which the Reformed influence on ceremonies was pronounced. This article, and the lengthy explanation appended to the 1846 draft (which was also printed in *Der Lutheraner* 3.2 [September 19, 1846], 9) seems to reflect closely the sentiments of Sihler in his article on the guiding principles for the establishment of a synod. (Cf. “[Erläuterung zu] Cap. V. §14 ‘gedrungen wird’ (3),” *Die Verfassung der deutschen evangelisch= lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten* 1846, 12–13.)

## VIII. Walther on Unionism and Syncretism

A brief survey of selected writings of C. F. W. Walther on the topics related to unionism and syncretism will be considered as part of this study. The purpose here is to show the consistency of Walther's thinking on this question from the founding of the Synod throughout his career. In addition, Walther's views on this question may in some way be regarded as representative of the Synod during the first forty years of its history.

### A. *Kirche und Amt* (1852)

Developed on the basis of his theses presented at the Altenburg Debate in 1841, Walther drew up nine theses on the church in 1851 to refute the attacks of J. A. A. Grabau.<sup>72</sup> The Missouri Synod approved Walther's theses on *Kirche und Amt* as "the voice of our church on the question of church and office."<sup>73</sup>

The eighth of Walther's theses "On the Church" (*Von der Kirche*) includes a discussion of the relationship of Christians and the Christian church to heterodox churches or sects, and considerations for fellowship or separation:

#### Thesis VIII

Although God gathers for Himself a holy church of elect also there where His Word is not taught in its perfect purity and the sacraments are not administered altogether according to the institution of Jesus Christ, if only God's Word and the sacraments are not denied entirely but both remain in their essential parts, nevertheless, every believer must, at the peril of losing his salvation, flee all false teachers, avoid all heterodox congregations or sects, and acknowledge and adhere to orthodox congregations and their orthodox pastors wherever such may be found.

- A. Also in heterodox and heretical churches are children of God, and also there the true church is made manifest by the pure Word and the sacraments that still remain.
- B. Every believer for the sake of his salvation must flee all false teachers and avoid all heterodox congregations or sects.
- C. Every Christian for the sake of his salvation is in duty bound to acknowledge and adhere to orthodox congregations and orthodox pastors, wherever he can find such.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Grabau (1804–1879) was the head of the Buffalo Synod who opposed Walther and the Missouri Synod on the doctrines of the church and the ministry. Grabau maintained that the proper organization for a Lutheran synod should include pastoral supremacy and a centralized form of government.

<sup>73</sup> "Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt," as Walther entitled his exposition of the theses in book form in 1852.

<sup>74</sup> Walther, C. F. W. *Church and Ministry (Kirche und Amt): Witnesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry*. Translated by J. T. Mueller. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963, 20–21; cf. also 101–148.

#### [VIII. Thesis.

Ogleich Gott sich da, wo Gottes Wort nicht ganz rein gepredigt wird und die heil. Sacramente nicht völlig der Einsetzung Jesu Christi gemäß verwaltet werden, eine heilige Kirche der Auserwählten sammelt, wenn da Gottes Wort und Sacrament nicht gar verleugnet wird, sondern beides wesentlich bleibt; so ist doch ein jeder bei seiner Seligkeit verbunden, alle falschen Lehrer zu fliehen und alle irrgläubigen Gemeinden oder Secten zu meiden und sich hingegen zu den

Walther maintains in this thesis that children of God may be found in churches that are heterodox or even heretical, and also that the true church remains there in the pure preaching of God's Word and administration of the sacrament. Nevertheless, Walther emphasizes that Christians must, for the sake of their own salvation, flee [*fliehen*] from all false prophets and avoid [*meiden*] fellowship [*Gemeinschaft*] with heterodox congregations or sects. At the same time Christians, for the sake of their salvation, are obliged to acknowledge orthodox congregations and remain with their orthodox preachers. Walther explains in his exposition of the thesis, that this teaching is the command of God, who "in His holy Word commands us to flee and avoid false teachers and their false worship."<sup>75</sup> True confession of faith in Christ and rejection of the perversion of God's Word is essential: "Hence, every Christian is in duty bound, at the peril of losing his salvation, publicly to renounce [*loszusagen*]<sup>76</sup> those who, as he knows, pervert Christ's Word and publicly to acknowledge and adhere to those who, he knows, publicly witness to Christ and His truth."<sup>77</sup> Walther also stresses that, "God's Word also declares very emphatically that a Christian should have fellowship [*Gemeinschaft*] with those who confess the true faith and beware of causing divisions and schisms, be it by word or deed."<sup>78</sup>

Even while the immediate purpose of writing *Kirche und Amt* was to refute the arguments of Grabau, this summary of Walther's position (and in effect that of the Synod) may be seen, at least in part, as a further explanation of what was intended in Article II. §3 of the 1847 Constitution. The fact that the Synod in convention endorsed Walther's theses on *Kirche und Amt* just a few years after the constitution was adopted is another matter to be considered. Walther provides a theological analysis of the question of fellowship with heterodox or heretical congregations, even while he does not describe in detail the situation in American Lutheranism. In addition, a survey of the German text of *Kirche und Amt* does not reveal use of the key words in Article II. §3 (e.g., *Kirchen- und Glaubensmengerei*, *Theilnahme*, etc.; *loszusagen* is the exception, as noted).

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rechtgläubigen Gemeinden und ihren rechtgläubigen Predigern zu bekennen und resp. zu halten, wo er solche findet.

- A. Auch in irrgläubigen, ketzerischen Gemeinden gibt es Kinder Gottes, auch da wird die wahre Kirche an dem darin noch übrig gebliebenen reinen Wort und Sacrament offenbar.
- B. Ein jeder ist bei seiner Seligkeit verbunden, alle falschen Propheten zu fliehen und die Gemeinschaft mit irrgläubigen Gemeinden oder Sekten zu meiden.
- C. Ein jeder Christ ist bei seiner Seligkeit verbunden, sich zu den rechtgläubigen Gemeinden und ihren rechtgläubigen Predigern zu bekennen und resp. zu halten, wo er solche findet.]

(Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt. Eine Sammlung von Zeugnissen über diese Frage aus den Bekenntnißschriften der evangelisch=lutherischen Kirche und aus den Privatschriften rechtgläubiger Lehrer derselben*. Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1852, xiv; 103–178.)

<sup>75</sup> Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 114. Walther has an extensive list of Scripture passages supporting this teaching, including Dt 13:1–3, Mt 7:15, Mt 24:23–24, Acts 20:30–31, and Rom 16:17–18.

<sup>76</sup> This is an infinitive form of the verb related to the noun [*Lossagung*] used in Article II. §3 of the 1847 Constitution.

<sup>77</sup> Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 137.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* Walther again offers a series of Scripture texts in support of this teaching, e.g., 1 Cor 1:10–13, Eph 4:3–6, and 1 Jn 2:19.

***B. The Right Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State (1863)***

In 1862 Walther outlined the practical application of the doctrines of the church and ministry in an essay delivered at the Western District Convention. The following year he published the work in book form.<sup>79</sup> In the book Walther takes the foundational doctrines of the church and office of the ministry set down in *Kirche und Amt* and explains how these teachings are implemented at the congregational level. Walther offers an entire agenda of duties and responsibilities of a congregation, including its proper conduct in relationships with orthodox congregations as well as with heterodox churches and unbelievers.

In Paragraph §32 of the book, Walther explains why congregations and individual members should avoid union with heterodox churches:

§ 32

Lastly, the congregation shall also see to it that neither the congregation nor individual church members enter into any church union [*kirchliche Vereinigung*] with unbelievers or heterodox communions [*mit Un= oder Irrgläubigen*] and so become guilty of religious unionism in matters of faith and church [*Glaubens=, Kirchen= und Religionsmengerei*].... Note. Here should be added common worship with the heterodox, serving as sponsors in heterodox churches, yielding church buildings to heterodox communions, participating in unionistic societies [*Theilnahme an religionsmengerischen Vereinen*] to obtain church objectives, and the like.<sup>80</sup>

In the proceeding pages, Walther cites references from the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, Luther, and other theologians in support of this teaching. In this discussion, Walther includes lengthy citations from Lutheran orthodox theologians concerning the various cases, e.g., when it is permissible (or impermissible) for Christians to attend the worship services of unbelievers or heretics, or whether or not to receive heterodox communions or false teachers in Lutheran churches.<sup>81</sup>

The doctrine and guidelines for practice that Walther presents in *The Right Form* are consistent with those found in Article II. §3 of the 1847 Synod constitution. Although he does not state it explicitly, Walther seems to indicate that the book reflects both the Synod and its polity in the carrying out of its responsibilities and mission:

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<sup>79</sup> Walther, *Die Rechte Gestalt einer vom Staate unabhängigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Ortsgemeinde*. St. Louis: August Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1863.

<sup>80</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*. Translated by John Theodore Mueller. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961, 136. Cf. Walther, *Die Rechte Gestalt*, 150: ["Endlich soll die Gemeinde auch auffsehen, daß weder sie als Gemeinde, noch ein einzelnes Glied kirchliche Vereinigung mit Un= oder Irrgläubigen eingehe und sich so der Glaubens=, Kirchen= und Religionsmengerei schuldig mache.... Anm. Hieher gehört gemeinschaftlicher Gottesdienst mit Andersgläubigen, das Pathenstehen in irrgläubigen Kirchen, das Ueberlassen der kirchlichen Gebäude an Irrgläubige, Theilnahme an religionsmengerischen Vereinen zu Erreichung kirchlicher Zwecke u. dergl."].

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Walther, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, 138–142.

In conclusion, the reader might be reminded that this work offers no untried new experiment in church polity, but that it represents a church organization which is in existence here for twenty-four years already and in which by God's grace a not inconsiderable, annually increasing number of congregations, firmly united in one faith and confession and also outwardly joined in works of [Christian] love, have been edified with richest blessings and are being edified today.<sup>82</sup>

### **C. *The True Visible Church* (1866)**

At the Synod convention in 1866, Walther began a lengthy series of doctrinal essays entitled "The True Visible Church of God Upon Earth."<sup>83</sup> The series was a further development and expansion of the doctrine of the church originating in the Altenburg Theses of 1841.

Thesis XXI is particularly interesting because it connects the doctrine of the Lutheran Church—following from the Scripture and summarized and expounded by the Lutheran Confessions—with the renunciation of church fellowship with those rejecting its confession:

Thesis XXI

- A. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is sure that the doctrine set forth in its Confessions is the pure divine truth, because it agrees with the written Word of God on all points....
- B. The Evangelical Lutheran Church demands of all its members, especially of all its ministers, that they acknowledge its Confessions without reservation and show their willingness to be obligated to them....
- C. The Evangelical Lutheran Church rejects every fraternal or ecclesiastical fellowship [*Gemeinschaft*] with such as reject its Confession, either in whole or in part....<sup>84</sup>

Thesis XXI emphasizes the connection between the position on unionism and syncretism and the Synod's confessional basis, especially as it is outlined in the 1847 constitution. In short, because the Synod (as a Lutheran church) and its members (pastors and congregations) hold to the Scripture as the written Word of God and only rule and norm for faith and life (Article I), and because they hold to the Lutheran Confessions as

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<sup>82</sup> Walther, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, viii. Cf. Walther, *Die Rechte Gestalt*, iv.

<sup>83</sup> Published in book form in 1867 under the title: *Die Evangelisch= Lutherische Kirche die Wahre Sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden*. St. Louis: August Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1867. The book was published in English as *The True Visible Church*, translated by John Theodore Mueller. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961. Walther began the series of essays at the Synod convention in St. Louis in 1866 and continued it at various district conventions through 1871. The original lectures commenting on the theses have been translated and published in: C. F. W. Walther, *Essays for the Church, Volume I, 1857–1879*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992, 88–201.

<sup>84</sup> Walther, *The True Visible Church*, 121–131. Walther, *Die Evangelisch= Lutherische Kirche...* 138–146: "A. Die ev.= luth. Kirche ist gewiß, daß die in ihren Symbolen enthaltene Lehre die pur lautere göttliche Wahrheit sei, weil dieselbe mit dem geschriebenen Worte Gottes in all Puncten übereinstimmt.... B. Die ev.= luth. Kirche verlangt von ihren Gliedern und insonderheit von ihren Lehrern, daß auch sie sich zu ihren Symbolen ohne Rückhalt bekennen und darauf verpflichten lassen.... C. Die ev.= luth. Kirche verwirft jede brüderliche und kirchliche Gemeinschaft mit denen, die ihr Bekenntniß, sei es ganz oder theilweise, verwerfen."

the true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God (Article II), therefore it cannot enter into any ecclesiastical fellowship that would either threaten that confessional basis or would give a false impression of agreement and give offense to the weak in the faith (Article III). This relationship between the first three articles of the Synod's constitution (certainly the relationship extends to Article IV as well) finds a certain correspondence and articulation in Walther's Thesis XXI of *The True Visible Church*.

#### **D. Later Essays on "The True Visible Church"**

In his exposition of Thesis V of "The True Visible Church" at the Western District Convention in May 1867, Walther gave a lengthy citation from Baier's *Compendium Theologiae Positivae* as an example of the proper attitude toward unionism. This citation was from Baier's exposition of the doctrine of the church, and in particular, his discussion of syncretism:<sup>85</sup>

Here indeed it is certain that the unlearned who through invincible ignorance are so given to certain errors that nevertheless by God's grace they retain the saving faith might be tolerated as weak brethren, were they known to us. But in this connection we speak of the dissenting part in view of the public ministry and the doctrine of faith and life, as it is publicly proclaimed, as also in view of the sacraments as they are administered, namely, corruptly....

Such toleration of errors, first, is in opposition to the Scripture passages which command us to preserve the whole Christian doctrine free from error (2 Thess. 2:15), to keep the good thing committed unto us (2 Tim. 1:14), that is, to keep it intact, uncurtailed and unadulterated, and to continue in the things which we have learned (2 Tim. 3:14). But the doctrine will not be kept pure if opposing errors are tolerated at the same time and in an equal manner or are permitted to become mingled with it. Secondly, such toleration is in opposition to the duty of *reproving* imposed upon faithful teachers by God, through which [errors] are rebuked and condemned (cf. Titus 1:9, 13; 2 Tim. 4:2; 3:16), to which correspond the examples of Christ (Matt. 5:12ff.; 16:6) and of Paul (Gal. 1:6). Thirdly, such toleration is very dangerous, for those errors and corruptions, unless they are restrained, assailed, and condemned, will spread ever more widely; the truth of the doctrine is rendered doubtful and suspicious, or at least it is regarded as a matter of indifference; and finally those that err are confirmed, and the deceivers are given a chance to infect ever more [people].

But toleration of erring persons, since it pertains not merely to the unlearned, but to the entire communion, and therefore at the same time to the very public ministry and the heretical teachers, is in opposition to the commands to convince, rebuke,

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<sup>85</sup> Johann Wilhelm Baier (1647–1695) was a Lutheran theologian from the period of Orthodoxy. His chief work, his Latin dogmatics, had been used in some form at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis prior to Walther's own edition of the work, perhaps because it was readily available in print.

and avoid false teachers and propagators of errors (Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 6:14, 17; Gal. 1:8; 5:12; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Tim. 6:3; Titus 3:10).<sup>86</sup>

Walther then offers his own comments on Baier's teaching. Noteworthy is Walther's equation of unionism with syncretism:

This quotation teaches us the proper attitude toward unionism, which was known as "syncretism" during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is very important that we not have brotherly communion (*Gemeinschaft*) with individual weak members of the sects. For it is not a question of whether such a person has faith or not, which would be an "accident," but it is a question of having the pure Word (*reine Predigt*) and properly administered sacraments (*rechte Sacramente*).<sup>87</sup>

In discussion of Thesis VI of "The True Visible Church" at the Central District Convention in August 1867, Walther suggests the proper stance toward heterodox churches and gives an example of how to regard them:

Leaving heterodox communions is simply obedience to God, who hates the mixing of religious beliefs [*Glaubensmengerei*]. But in the process one must not pass judgment on the hearts of those who remain behind. The unionistic old General Synod is an example of how such people draw wrong conclusions. It believes that because we must say, "There are true Christians among the Methodists, Presbyterians, etc.," therefore we should practice altar fellowship with these communions and that we should practice other types of church fellowship [*kirchliche Gemeinschaft*] with them. That, however, is going too far. Those who do not join me in professing pure doctrine are not my brothers in faith. By calling their communion a sect, however, I am not condemning the children of God whom I cannot identify because they are hidden among the sects [*Rotten und Secten*]. For we do steadfastly maintain that there are children of God among them; we just don't know who they are.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Citation from Walther, *Essays for the Church, Volume I, 1857–1879*, 122–123. Emphasis original. Cf. Johann Wilhelm Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae, Adjectis Notis Amplioribus...* Edited by C. F. W. Walther. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1879, 671.

<sup>87</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Essays for the Church, Volume I, 1857–1879*, 123.

<sup>88</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Essays for the Church, Volume I, 1857–1879*, 128. Similarly, at the Western District Convention in 1870 Walther presented theses on communion fellowship, in which he asserted (Thesis XIII): "The more unionism and syncretism [*der Unionismus und die Religionsmengerei*] are the sin and corruption of our time, the more the loyalty of the orthodox church now demands that the Lord's Supper not be misused as a means of external union without the internal unity of faith." ["Thesis 13. Je mehr der Unionismus und die Religionsmengerei die Sünde und das Verderben unserer Zeit ist, desto mehr fordert es jetzt die Treue der rechtgläubigen Kirche, das heilige Abendmahl nicht zu einem Mittel einer äußerlichen Union ohne innerliche Glaubenseinigkeit zu mißbrauchen." Cf. "Thesen über Abendmahlsgemeinschaften mit Andersgläubigen," in *Fünfzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Westlichen Districts der deutschen evang.= luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. Staaten Anno Domini 1870*. St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. St. 1870, 71.

### E. Walther's Edition of Baier's *Compendium* (1879)

In 1879 Walther completed his expansion of the dogmatics textbook by Johann Wilhelm Baier.<sup>89</sup> In the discussion of the doctrine of the church, Baier lists three factors opposing the unity of the church: schism, syncretism, and the antichrist. Regarding syncretism, the following definition and explanation is presented:

[The second factor] opposing ecclesiastical unity is *syncretism*, or the uniting in fraternal and ecclesiastical concord of contrasting parts of religion, despite the disagreement, so that there are tolerated, either errors of doctrine, in part disagreeing [heterodox], or at least the erring persons themselves within the ecclesiastical fellowship, as brothers in Christ and coheirs of eternal life; nevertheless toleration of both is wrong.<sup>90</sup>

Walther's presentation of Baier is in agreement with what he previously had asserted regarding the question of fellowship with heterodox churches, unionism, and syncretism.

### F. Walther on Syncretism

In his foreword to *Lehre und Wehre*, 1868, Walther discussed at length syncretism and the problems associated with it.<sup>91</sup> Walther maintained that, besides manifest unbelief, "syncretism is the chief blight within baptized Christendom."<sup>92</sup> He continued, "we define *syncretism* as every kind of mixing of religion [*Religionsmengerei*]." Especially since the Lutheran dogmaticians of the seventeenth century, "the term syncretism has acquired the meaning of the mixing of religions [*Religionsmengerei*], or of an external ecclesiastical union without inner unity in faith, doctrine, and confession." Walther provided citations from Baier's *Compendium* to articulate further the distinctions necessary for a proper

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<sup>89</sup> Johann Wilhelm Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae, Adjectis Notis Amplioribus...* Edited by C. F. W. Walther. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1879, 3 volumes and an index. Lacking the time to produce his own dogmatics text, Walther greatly expanded the work of Baier, inserting citations from Luther and the Lutheran dogmaticians. The work was chiefly intended to serve as a textbook for seminarians and a theological reference work for pastors.

<sup>90</sup> Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, III.665, ["Opponitur 2. Unitati ecclesiasticae *syncretismus*, seu partium religion dissidentium, non obstante dissidio, in concordiam fraternam et ecclesiasticam coalition, ita ut tolerentur *vel* errors doctrinae in parte dissentiente, *vel* saltem personae ipsae errantes intra societatem ecclesiasticam, tanquam fratres in Christo et cohaeredes vitae aeternae; quae tamen tolerantia *utraque vitiosa* est."] Baier also presents the axiom: In all things [articles of faith] consensus is required for true ecclesiastical peace." ["In omnibus illis [articulis fidei] requiritur consensus ad legitimam pacem ecclesiasticam."] (666).

<sup>91</sup> C. F. W. Walther, "Vorwort zum Vierzehnten Jahrgang," *Lehre und Wehre* XIV (1868), 1–4, 33–39, 65–70. Cf. also "Dr. Walther's Foreword for Volume XIV of 'Lehre und Wehre,' 1868," translated by Alex. Wm. C. Guebert. *Concordia Theological Monthly* XVII.7 (July 1946), 481–499. Walther may have been writing, in part, in response to the disappointing meeting the previous year between the Missouri and Iowa Synods. In hopes of healing the rift between the two synods, a colloquy was held in Milwaukee in November of 1867, with Walther and Sihler participating as the chief representatives of Missouri. In the end, the discussions were unsuccessful, in spite of concessions made on both sides, in large part because of the failure to reach full agreement on doctrine. (Cf. Gerhard Sigmund Ottersberg, "The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa and Other States, 1854–1904." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1949, 629–639.)

<sup>92</sup> "Dr. Walther's Foreword for Volume XIV of 'Lehre und Wehre,' 1868," 482.

understanding of syncretism. When people disagree with each other in religion, Baier says:

This refers to the “doctrine of the Christian faith and morals; however, not exclusively those parts of Christian doctrine are thereby understood which every man must know if he is to retain his faith and salvation, but the whole Christian doctrine in all its parts (which either form the foundation of faith or have a necessary connection therewith) or in all fundamental articles, irrespective of whether their relation to the foundation is positive and direct, or conversely, indirect and negative. For agreement is necessary in *all* of them, and as long as dissension exists in any one of them, there will be no true peace in the Church. If, however, the dissension arises in regard to *adiaphora* or in regard to *questions* which, while pertaining to faith, are subsidiary (*daneben entstanden*; lit., originated on the side), we must admit that in spite of the existing dissension a true and God-pleasing union can be effected. It may, however, come to pass, and at time does, that one party imposes its ceremonies or opinions upon the other as necessary. In that case it is better to preserve one’s Christian liberty than to strengthen the dissenting party in its false opinion by accepting a premature peace.”<sup>93</sup>

True unity among parties is the goal, even while it may be difficult to achieve. Again Walther cites Baier: “For where religious dissension between the parties has been eliminated and a consensus in pure doctrine has been established, unity, or agreement of the parties, is not syncretism but true, God-pleasing Christian unity.”<sup>94</sup>

Toleration of either erring doctrine or erring persons is sinful, observes Baier. First, toleration of error is wrong because such toleration militates “against all those passages in the Bible which command us to keep the whole Christian doctrine free from falsification... Doctrine, however, is not retained in its purity when opposing falsifications are tolerated at the same time or when men permit them to be mingled [*beimische*] with pure doctrine.”<sup>95</sup> Second, such toleration of doctrinal error contends against “the office of ‘rebuking’ whereby false doctrines are reprovved and condemned, a duty which God has imposed upon all faithful teachers...”<sup>96</sup> Finally, Baier asserts “such toleration is very *dangerous*, because when such errors and falsifications are left unchecked, unchallenged, and uncondemned, they spread farther and farther, make true doctrine appear doubtful and suspicious or give it the stamp of an indifferent opinion, strengthen the erring in their errors, and open the way for deceivers to deceive still more men.”<sup>97</sup> In the same way, toleration of erring persons is sinful, according to Baier, “since it includes not only more simple-minded individuals but likewise whole organizations, and hence the public ministry and heterodox teachers,” contradicting the words of

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 482–483 (emphasis original).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 483. Baier provides Scripture passages in support of these teachings, which are not including in this summary.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 484.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid (emphasis original).

Scripture, “which command us to rebuke false teachers and champions of error and to avoid them...”<sup>98</sup>

Walther points out that the Lutheran orthodox theologians correctly taught a threefold distinction of syncretism: an absorptive, a temperative, and a conservative syncretism.

*Absorptive* syncretism obtains when both dissenting parties surrender their distinctive differences and on the basis of articles of agreement accept a third position; *temperative* syncretism exists when the dissenting parties on both sides mutually yield some ground in some points but tolerated each other in those points which continue to be in dispute (this goal was aimed at in the well-known Interim<sup>99</sup>); *conservative* syncretism obtains when the dissenting parties unite in one church body in spite of the existing dissensions and declare the points of dissension to be *open questions* among them.<sup>100</sup>

Walther continues his foreword with a lengthy discourse on conservative syncretism, emphasizing its special bearing on the current situation among American Lutherans.<sup>101</sup>

As part of his analysis, Walther clearly and decidedly rejects the “modern theory” of open questions:

[The theory is rejected] because it is syncretistic, unionistic, indifferentistic [*synkretistische, unionistische, indifferentistische*] and violates the majesty of God. *We cannot consider nor treat any doctrine that is clearly taught in God’s Word or that contradicts some clear Word of God as an open question, even though it may seem to be or actually is only a subordinate doctrine or one that may lie on the periphery, far removed from the heart of the doctrine of salvation.*<sup>102</sup>

Of such importance was refuting the theory of open questions to Walther at this time, he published a separate, lengthy article in *Lehre und Wehre* on the subject.<sup>103</sup>

By the early twentieth century, the understanding in the Synod of what constituted unionism and syncretism seems to have modified slightly, although not out of sync with

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> This is likely a reference to the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims of 1548, which sought provisional agreement in religious matters between the Lutherans and the Catholics during the Schmalkaldic War.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 484–485 (emphasis original).

<sup>101</sup> Walther asserts that the Iowa Synod was the chief representative of the open questions theory in American Lutheranism, noting that its conventions had declared the doctrines of the church, the ministry, and eschatology to be open questions, preferring to regard them as “exegetical controversial questions and as theological problems” (“Dr. Walther’s Foreword for Volume XIV of ‘Lehre und Wehre,’ 1868,” 493).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 494 (emphasis original).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. C. F. W. Walther, “Die falschen Stützen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,” *Lehre und Wehre* XIV (1868), 100–114, 129–141, 161–169, 201–211, 233–240, 297–305. This article was translated and republished as “The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions,” translated by William Arndt and Alex Wm. C. Guebert, in *Concordia Theological Monthly* X (1939), 254–262, 351–357, 415–420, 507–513, 587–595, 656–666, 752–759, 827–834.

Wather's understanding. A full discussion of this development is outside the scope of this paper. However, one example is found in the theses presented at the Minnesota and Dakota District convention in 1909, "What is the situation in our Synod regarding the mixing of religion and faith [*Religions= und Glaubensmengerei*]?" The presenter emphasized that *Glaubensmengerei* included both false teaching and practice that was contrary to the Scriptures. He offered examples of "unionism, syncretism, and the mixing of faiths within the congregation" [*Unionismus, Synkretismus, Glaubensmengerei innerhalb der Gemeinde*]. In addition to pulpit and altar fellowship with heterodox bodies, to be avoided were ceremonies bound to a false confession, for example those practices of the Reformed that reflected their doctrine of the Lord's Supper, such as the breaking of the bread as part of the celebration of the Supper as well as the reception by the communicant of the host in the hand rather than the mouth. The presenter stressed that what held for the local congregation in terms of unionism and syncretism held also for the Synod itself.<sup>104</sup>

### **IX. Special Circumstances Not Constituting "Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei"**

In its 1847 constitution, the Synod included an article, as part of its discussion of the placement of candidates, ordinations, and calls. In particular, Article V. §12 took up the case of mixed congregations requesting a pastor from the Synod. As noted above, this article is noteworthy because it gives an indication of what the drafters of the constitution considered as the correct approach to relating to mixed or "union" congregations in specific cases. In short, the article permitted a pastor of the Synod to serve a mixed or union congregation under certain conditions, namely, that the congregation would submit itself to the Word of God, that it would confess the Lutheran doctrine and reject falsehood, and finally, the first two conditions fulfilled, that members of the congregations not formerly Lutheran would cease to be Reformed or Unionists and, upon receiving the Lord's Supper in the Lutheran church, enter into fellowship with it. As noted above, a number of pastors in the early history of the Missouri Synod served congregations that were not members of the Synod, some of which were union congregations.<sup>105</sup>

The issue of pulpit fellowship was clearly and extensively discussed in the Synod during the 1860s and 1870s, in part because similar discussions were taking place among other Lutheran synods at the time. As far as the Missouri Synod was concerned, pulpit fellowship between church bodies disagreeing on doctrine—either officially sanctioned at the synod level or done without sanction at the congregational level—constituted unionism. Scripture was clear in its prohibition against the compromise of the truth of God's Word, as it was also clear against unionism, doctrinal indifference, and giving offense to the weak or uninformed. On the other hand, the Synod recognized that special

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. H. Bügel, "Wie steht es in unserer Synode in bezug auf Religions= und Glaubensmengerei?" *Neunzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Minnesota- und Dakota-Distrikts der Deutschen Ev.= Lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, vesammelt zu Minneapolis, Minn., vom 23. bis zum 29 Juni 1909*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1909, 23–30.

<sup>105</sup> For example, the first pastoral candidate trained at the Log Cabin College in Perry County, J. A. F. W. Mueller, served at least two "mixed" congregations in Missouri.

circumstances might arise when Lutheran pastors were requested to preach in congregations with which the Synod was not in fellowship. What conditions must be fulfilled in order to avoid unionism and syncretism? As has been noted, the Synod addressed this question in its constitution in 1847. Nevertheless further discussions of the question continued over the years.

In an 1868 article in *Lehre und Wehre*, Walther commented on the need for Lutheran pastors to of bear witness to the Gospel to those who are willing to hear it, even if they were in heterodox congregations:

It need hardly be said that an orthodox teacher certainly may preach the Word of God in its clearness and truth also to the congregation of a heterodox teacher without sinning against the Word and will of God and without violating his office as a servant of the orthodox Church—if only he has been properly invited by those who have a right to do so.

If Christ has a full right to rule also among His enemies, why shall not His servant render testimony in God’s name for the truth, bearing witness with a free, courageous spirit, announcing the truth as it lives and moves in his heart, and do this without circumlocutions or cowardly reticence—so long as he does not speak uninvited into the flock of another and so long as he clearly sets forth his position as one definitely committed to the truth of God, an enemy of all false doctrine and unionism [*Glaubensvermischung*]?

There might be conditions under which he must even consider it a sacred duty so to take advantage of a rightful opportunity to make known the fullness of the Gospel to weak, misguided lambs of Christ, who in ignorance or by some act of divine Providence have become joined to a heretical organization. In other words, it may in such a case be his duty at least through the positive setting forth of the sound Gospel regarding some article of the faith to bring such people to the conviction that their attitude toward the Scriptures is a false one. Such a one, actuated by the motives as described, will permit the clear voice of the heavenly Shepherd to be heard in a misguided flock, though he will by no means grant admission unto his own flock to the teachers of religious error.<sup>106</sup>

Walther goes on to warn of the dangers of such pulpit exchanges because of the tendency of them to be affected by unionism, syncretism, and indifferentism. In spite of the difficulty, Lutheran pastors may, in such pulpit exchanges, faithfully bear witness to God’s Word and its truth.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> C. F. W. Walther, “Etwas über Kanzel- und Altargemeinschaft zwischen Lutherischen und Reformierten,” *Lehre und Wehre* XIV.8 (August 1868), 253–254. Translation from Theodore Graebner, and Paul E. Kretzmann, *Toward Lutheran Union*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943, 179–180.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

At the Central District convention in Cleveland in 1870, Rev. Ph. Fleischmann, pastor in Fort Wayne, presented an essay on the subject “Pulpit Fellowship.”<sup>108</sup> Thesis 12 reads as follows:

On the other hand it must not appear objectionable to a Lutheran minister to proclaim the Gospel in the pulpits of churches of another denomination so long as the conditions under which and the manner in which this is done are not objectionable.

This is demanded by Mark 16:15: “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” A Lutheran should accept every opportunity that offers itself to spread the true Gospel. This, however, does not mean that he is to force himself upon other congregations or sneak into them. He must respect the call of other preachers, as Luther says in his interpretation of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Psalm regarding this same matter: “Unto each is assigned his portion of the people in which no one else or a stranger shall without his knowledge or permission teach the members, whether privately or publicly.... And this must be upheld that no matter how pious and upright a preacher may be, he has no right to preach to or secretly to instruct the people of a Roman or heretical parish without the pastor’s knowledge and consent. It is not within his calling.

Three things should be noted by a Lutheran preacher under this thesis: 1. He must not give his own congregation reason for the suspicion that he agrees with preachers of other denominations in their doctrine. 2. He must have the strength and fortitude to confess the truth also in a strange pulpit. 3. He must possess the wisdom and courage at the proper time and after due instruction in the fundamental saving truths to point out the errors of the heterodox church.

If it is asked, accordingly, whether it is contrary to the conscience of a Lutheran minister upon invitation to preach in a strange church, the answer is: No, Christ has preached in the synagogs, the Apostles in the temples of idols, and we should be glad to preach in the Pope’s palace if given permission. It would be a sin to reject offhand an offer that we preach the Gospel also to others.

In his *Americanisch=Lutherische Pastoraltheologie* (1872), Walther takes a similar stance:

Of course, it can happen without injury to the conscience, that an orthodox [pastor] may also, if requested, preach God’s Word to a heterodox or fundamentally mixed

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<sup>108</sup> “Verhandlungen über die von Herrn Pastor Ph. Fleischmann verabfaßten Thesen: ‘Ueber Kanzelgemeinschaft.’ *Fünfzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Mittleren Districts der deutschen evang.= luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. Staaten, im Jahre 1870 gehalten zu Cleveland, O.* St. Louis: 1870, 14–43. Rev. Fleischmann was pastor in Allen County, Indiana. Also present at the convention were Wilhelm Sihler, F.C. D. Wyneken, Heinrich Schwan (President of the Missouri Synod), and C. F. W. Walther.

congregation [*gemischten Gemeinde*], however, it may not happen that he become its pastor, as such then administer the Lord's Supper to its members. For in doing so not only would the orthodox [pastor] himself enter into the fellowship a false confession [*in die Gemeinschaft falschen Glaubens eintreten*], but he would also be putting, to an extent, the divine seal [of approval] on the false confession through the Sacrament, contrary to 2 Cor 6:14ff., 1 Cor 1:10, Rom 16:17, 2 John 10:11, Rom 4:11.<sup>109</sup>

Writing in 1943, Theodore Graebner and P. E. Kretzmann related the following story, which seems to support Walther's position:

The Rev. Julius Friedrich tells of his experience with Dr. Walther.... When a student, Rev. Friedrich, while on vacation at his home on a farm in Lake Co., Ill., was asked by a Congregationalist minister and his church council to conduct services in their church. Student Friedrich declined. On his return to St. Louis he made a report to Professor Walther and, to his surprise, was given a severe 'calling down.' Crestfallen, he said, 'Then I should have preached the distinctive doctrines separating us from the Congregationalists?' Walther answered: 'No; you should have preached the simple doctrine of salvation, for example, the doctrine of the means of grace.'<sup>110</sup>

It appears that Walther and others in the Synod at the time stressed the importance of proclaiming the Gospel to anyone who was willing to listen, even from the pulpit in congregations with which it was not in fellowship, albeit under certain circumstances. Over time the reproof of error must follow and with it must come the true teaching of God's Word. The Lord's Supper was not to be celebrated in such congregations until the communicants had been instructed and were committed to Lutheran teaching and practice. The services in these congregations were to be Lutheran services in their liturgy, hymns and prayers. All this was in keeping with the recognition that Christians were in these congregations—believers who needed to hear the preaching of God's Word.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The founders of the Missouri Synod took very seriously the question of the unity of the true Christian church. They knew the one church is the body of Christ, and they knew the true church was founded on the Word of God. The founders of the Synod also took very seriously the question of the church's doctrine—the true testimony of the Scriptures. There could not be disagreeing doctrines in the one, true church and for that reason they handled carefully questions of unity in the church and fellowship with those who embraced a confession contrary to their own.

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<sup>109</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Americanisch=Lutherische Pastoraltheologie*. St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. Staaten, 1872, 48–49.

<sup>110</sup> Graebner, Theodore and Paul E. Kretzmann, *Toward Lutheran Union*, 180.

Clearly the founders of the Synod were not afraid of union or fellowship with others; they actively sought it out and forged it in the organization of the Synod in 1847. For decades afterwards, they continued to strive for unity among the various Lutheran churches. What they sought to avoid, however, was union at the expense of pure doctrine and practice in keeping with that doctrine (union does not necessarily mean true unity). They regarded unionism and syncretism as serious threats to the church and its teaching, as well as to the faith and life of its members. In the German lands, unionism normally entailed coercion from the secular government, and although that was not a chief concern in the United States, it was nevertheless part of what was to be renounced. Perhaps the greatest threat of unionism and syncretism was the forging of “unity” on the basis of something other than pure doctrine. Syncretism aided this process, along with doctrinal indifference. Such “unity” was not true unity in the church because it was not grounded in what the church truly is, namely the body of believers in Christ among whom the Word of God is purely preached and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution. The founders consistently maintained that false unity was contrary to God’s Word, that it harmed the consciences of the weak, and threatened the preaching of the true Gospel in the church.

The chief problem with *Kirchen= und Glaubensmengerei* was not simply that it was rationalistic or indifferentistic, but that it was theologically wrong. It was against God’s Word and against the Lutheran Confessional writings. God’s will precedes and underlies the Law. The presupposition of the Synod’s founders was that it is God’s will that Christians keep pure God’s teaching. In other words, the reason for including Article II. §3/VI.2 in the constitution was that behind the concern, behind the condition, is God’s Law. If the intention or motivation for involvement with other churches is to forge union on the basis of something other than agreement in doctrine, then the word to that involvement is: Avoid the erring brother so that we don’t compromise the true teaching of God’s Word. If the intention is to bear witness to the truth of God’s Word and the Gospel, then we endeavor to reach those who teach contrary to that Word so that we might have a positive influence. Nevertheless, the teaching of God’s Word must never be compromised.

Renunciation of the mixing of churches and mixing of doctrines is called for at the level of the local congregation given the prevalence of mixed congregations in America in the mid-nineteenth century. However, such renunciation is not limited only to the level of the local congregation, but necessarily stems from a broader confessional context. The problem with focusing chiefly on the local level is that it obscures the fact that the unionism and syncretism at that level stem from the unionism and syncretism at the confessional level. There might not be any Prussian Union in America, but there was a drive to forge ecclesiastical unity across traditional confessional lines. This in turn would effect the individual congregations.

So how did the Synod respond to the problem, at least in the first forty years after its founding? It strove to bear witness to the truth of God’s Word and to establish true unity where possible. If true unity could not be attained, the Synod, to some extent, used the same approach with other Lutheran or non-Lutheran groups that it used within itself.

It relied on the power of God's Word and of convincing. Refuting false teachings and practices might be necessary, but it was God's Word to which the appeal was made. This effort was born out of sincere conviction that Christians, as the body of Christ, are called to proclaim God's Word, to teaching and practice in accord with God's Word, and to a persuasion based on and informed by God's Word.