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The Role of *A Brief Statement* Since 1932

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# The Role of *A Brief Statement* Since 1932

By CARL S. MEYER

THE year 1932 has been called the confessional high-water mark of the Missouri Synod because of the adoption of *A Brief Statement* in that year. Not only was it "Dr. Pieper's legacy of sound Scriptural teaching," but it was also, so it was maintained with evident exaggeration, the testimony of "a confessional unity of mind and heart embracing every pastor and congregation and enduring the test of searching examination by the 'norma normans' of Holy Scripture."<sup>1</sup>

It acquired a status almost equal to that of the great Confessions of the Lutheran Church in the course of the next 15 years, culminating in a reaffirmation in 1947 and a demand in 1959 that it be used as a basis for determining orthodoxy. It played a significant role in union negotiations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church and an even more significant role in the writings of the opponents of the union moves. A thorough examination of the role of *A Brief Statement* would require a recapitulation of the doctrinal developments within the Missouri Synod since 1932, a résumé of the union negotiations of the Missouri Synod, and a summary of the controversies revolving around these negotiations both within the Missouri Synod and within the Synodical Conference. Such a comprehensive overview will not be attempted at this time. The present sketch will merely try to

illustrate the generalizations made regarding the role of *A Brief Statement* since 1932.

## AS DOCTRINAL NORM

Although *A Brief Statement* was used as a doctrinal norm largely in connection with the "union documents" of the period (1932—62), it was also invoked in the questions raised by the *Statement* of the "Forty-Four" (1945) and in the discussions of the doctrine of the Word (1959 to 1961) within the Missouri Synod.

The 1945 *Statement* itself did not cite *A Brief Statement*. Nor did any of the essays in *Speaking the Truth in Love*, the explanatory articles to the 12 theses of the *Statement*. Both documents were subsequently withdrawn, not, however, retracted. The "Ten and Ten" (representatives of the "Forty-Four" and those who differed with them) agreed on the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* and stated: "We stand wholeheartedly with paragraph 2 of the Brief Statement."<sup>2</sup>

In defense of the traditional interpretation of Rom. 16:17, 18 *A Brief Statement* was cited. "Romans 16:17-18 is a clear

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<sup>2</sup> Letter of J. W. Behnken to the clergy of the Missouri Synod. The four-page letter itself is not dated. It refers to the meetings held from Sept. 23 to 26 and Nov. 12 to 14, 1946. From other sources it appears that the letter should have been dated Jan. 18, 1947. See Theo. Dierks, *Restoring Unity and Peace Within the Missouri Synod, 1881—1947*, n. p., n. d., p. 5.

Guidelines, n. p., n. d., which set down propositions for discussion, evidently by pastoral conferences, begins, "We agree with the Brief Statement, which says in Par. 2. . . ."

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace H. MacLaughlin, *A Former U. L. C. Pastor Looks at the Agreement*, n. p., n. d., p. 4.

passage and is, as such, correctly cited in our Confessions and in the *Brief Statement*, section 28.”<sup>3</sup> Petitions to the 1947 convention of the Synod asked for a specific application of this passage.<sup>4</sup>

The meaning and application of the passage, of course, involved the larger question of church union and concomitant questions, selective fellowship and prayer fellowship. In order that any use of the *Statement* or *Speaking the Truth in Love* might be forestalled Synod was asked to endorse the following propositions, which, it will be noted, make *A Brief Statement* normative:

1. In conformity with its position on church fellowship expressed in *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States*, paragraphs 28 and 29, Synod rejects as antiscritptural any assertion that there are details of doctrine which are not divisive of church fellowship though they conflict with or add to the teachings of Scripture and are persistently advocated.

2. In conformity with its position on unionism, which is defined in paragraph 28 of the *Brief Statement* as “church fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine,” Synod rejects as untenable any opinion that unionism does not take place unless those who participate in joint religious work or worship with persistent errorists explicitly deny the truth or approve of error by positive word or action, because such an opinion disregards the Scriptural truth basic to this teaching that every act

of church fellowship with persistent adherents of false doctrine is *in itself* forbidden by Scripture.

3. Because Scriptural principles governing church fellowship govern also public prayer and prayer fellowship, Synod rejects any assertion which condones public joint prayer with Christians who persistently advocate false doctrine.<sup>5</sup>

Significantly Synod resolved to continue a study of the questions with a “Whereas” which said, “It is imperative that we continue on the foundation of God’s Word, and God’s Word alone.” In debating this resolution it did not adopt an amendment that included the proposition, “The Confessions of the Church and also our *Brief Statement* are means through which the Missouri Synod speaks God’s Word faithfully.”<sup>6</sup> It must be said, however, that this sentence was not the crucial one in the rejection of the amendment. It can be noted, nevertheless, that *A Brief Statement* was placed on a par with the Lutheran Confessions.

In the more recent discussions within the Missouri Synod *A Brief Statement* has again been used in a normative fashion.<sup>7</sup>

#### AS A BASIS FOR UNION

*A Brief Statement* played a larger role in union negotiations in the period between 1932 and 1962 than it did even as a doctrinal norm within the Missouri Synod.

In 1935 the Cleveland convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod declared its “willingness to confer with other Lutheran bodies on problems of Lu-

<sup>3</sup> H. W. Romoser, “Notes on Rom. 16: 17, 18” (mimeographed; Oak Park, Ill., 1948), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Dierks, *Restoring Unity and Peace*, p. 6; Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1947, p. 402.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 401, 402. Also see Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1950, pp. 464—483.

<sup>6</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1947, p. 523.

<sup>7</sup> “Special Report,” *The Lutheran Witness*, LXXX (Dec. 26, 1961), 634.

theran union with a view towards effecting true unity on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions."<sup>8</sup> It also set up a committee of five, the Committee on Lutheran Church Union. Nothing was said in this resolution, pro or con, that *A Brief Statement* should be the basis for the conferences or any possible subsequent agreement.

The 1932 document, nevertheless, became the focus of the discussions between the six representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the five-member committee of the Missouri Synod. The *Minneapolis Theses* (1925) and the *Chicago Theses* (1928) also played a part in these deliberations. As a result of the negotiations *A Brief Statement* and the *Declaration of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church* were submitted to the 1938 convention of Synod.<sup>9</sup> After committee deliberation (Committee 16), public hearings, lengthy discussion on the floor of the convention, and nearly unanimous agreement, it was resolved

. . . that the *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod, together with the *Declaration* of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the provisions of this entire report of Committee No. 16 now being read and with the Synod's action thereupon, be regarded as the doctrinal basis for *future church-fellowship* between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church.<sup>10</sup>

The action of the 1932 convention in ac-

cepting *A Brief Statement* was thus transmuted by the 1938 convention into one of confessional significance.

This confessional significance was accentuated, too, in the negotiations of the Union Committee with the representatives of the ULCA. In the two meetings held by the two groups *A Brief Statement* was made the starting point for the discussions and the touchstone of agreement by the Missourians.<sup>11</sup> Although Synod had declared its willingness to continue the discussions,<sup>12</sup> the (Missouri) Union Committee was not ready to do so because of "the unwillingness of the United Lutheran Church of America commissioners to accept the paragraphs in the *Brief Statement* dealing with the doctrine of inspiration."<sup>13</sup> This seemed to them sufficient cause not even to extend an invitation to the ULCA men for future meetings. This action was approved by the 1941 convention of the Synod.<sup>14</sup>

In the intersynodical conferences which were organized as a result of the favorable prospects of union with the ALC *A Brief Statement* was made the subject of the discussions.<sup>15</sup> Guidelines for these conferences were prepared by the editorial committee of the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY. After a study of the *Minneapolis Theses* it was suggested that *A Brief Statement* should be taken up.

<sup>11</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1938, pp. 184, 185.

<sup>12</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1938, p. 233.

<sup>13</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1941, p. 197.

<sup>14</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1941, p. 304; cf. p. 286.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g., *The Lutheran Witness*, LX (Feb. 4, 1941), 42; *ibid.*, LX (May 13, 1941), 172, 173.

<sup>8</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1935, p. 221.

<sup>9</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1938, pp. 178—185.

<sup>10</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1938, p. 231. Italics in the original. *The Lutheran Witness*, LVII (July 12, 1938), 233, 234, 236, 237, carried a report of this action by the convention.

Coming chiefly from the pen of the sainted Dr. Pieper, who was noted for the clarity of his doctrinal utterances, this document deserves to be studied again and again, and our own pastors, who have studied the document before, will benefit from repeated perusals of it as well as those of the American Lutheran Church.<sup>16</sup>

The ranking role of *A Brief Statement* in the agreement with the ALC was emphasized by proponents of the union. The editors of the *Lutheran Witness* found the "heart of the report" of the Committee on Church Union in 1938 "an agreement on both sides to accept the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod.*"<sup>17</sup> They emphasized the acceptance by the ALC of this document.<sup>18</sup> The ALC *Declaration* was needed because *A Brief Statement* was not an exhaustive statement on some points.<sup>19</sup> Even the *Mendota Resolutions* of the ALC (1942) and the *Pittsburgh Agreement* between the ALC and the ULCA (1939) did not negate the fact that Missouri had adopted *A Brief Statement* and the *Declaration* as a basis for fellowship.<sup>20</sup>

The locus *De Scriptura* caused the most serious apprehensions about the negotiations with the representatives of the ALC. The adoption of the *Pittsburgh Agree-*

*ment*<sup>21</sup> was decried; it was found unsatisfactory by the Union Committee of the Missouri Synod "because it contains loopholes for a denial of the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures."<sup>22</sup> Members of the ALC Commission held that the *Pittsburgh Agreement* was in harmony with the Scriptures and *A Brief Statement*.<sup>23</sup>

The *Pittsburgh Agreement* and the *Mendota Resolutions* became objects of attack because, it was said, they were contrary to the doctrine set forth in *A Brief Statement*. "The fact that the leaders of the A. L. C. here, too, have subscribed to the U. L. C. position shows that by reading the St. Louis Theses {*A Brief Statement*} 'in the light of the *Declaration* they have nullified the Theses,"<sup>24</sup> it was said specifically of the *Pittsburgh Agreement*. It must be noted, however, that the multidocumented basis for the agreement between the ALC and the Missouri Synod was the chief point of attack.<sup>25</sup>

#### AS THE PLATFORM OF THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE

The Norwegian Synod and the Wisconsin Synod of the Synodical Conference led the demand for one document, in oppo-

<sup>16</sup> *Concordia Theological Monthly*, X (January 1939), 62, 63, also reprinted separately and mailed to the clergy of the Missouri Synod with a covering letter from Dr. J. W. Behnken on Feb. 9, 1939.

<sup>17</sup> The Editors [M. S. Sommer and Theo. Graebner], "Lutheran Union: A Discussion," *The Lutheran Witness*, LIX (June 11, 1940), 201.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, LIX (June 25, 1940), 223 f.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, LIX (July 9, 1940), 239.

<sup>20</sup> R. R. Caemmerer, "Are the Lutheran Synods Drawing Closer Together?" *ibid.*, LXI (Dec. 22, 1942), 442, 443.

<sup>21</sup> *Mo. Synod, Reports and Memorials*, 1941, pp. 189, 190.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194, where the report of ALC Commissioners is cited: "We accept the *Pittsburgh Agreement* with a definite conviction that this agreement is in complete harmony with the *Declaration* and the *Brief Statement*."

<sup>23</sup> [W. M. Oesch], "A. L. C. and U. L. C. 'Agreement,'" *The Crucible*, I (March-April 1939), 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Mo. Synod, Reports and Memorials*, 1941, 199—203.

sition to the 1938 resolutions of the Missouri Synod. "A double set of documents" as a basis for union would permit avenues of divergencies, a statement of the Norwegian Synod declared.<sup>26</sup> Resolutions in the 1949 convention of the Synodical Conference asked the Missouri Synod "earnestly to consider the advisability of bringing about the framing of one document of agreement."<sup>27</sup> In the discussions on these resolutions it was stated (by Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker) that "the synods of the Synodical Conference have expressed their unity of faith by an unreserved acceptance of the Brief Statement."<sup>28</sup> The allegation, it seems, was not challenged.

In 1943 the Norwegian Synod requested the Missouri Synod to revoke the 1938 "St. Louis Articles of Union" and, according to its resolution, "thus let the 'Brief Statement' stand unqualified and unsullied as our clear and joint confession." In a "whereas" of the resolution it declared that it accepted *A Brief Statement* "un-

reservedly."<sup>29</sup> Later the Wisconsin Synod, too, stated that it based a protest against Missouri Synod's "rising tide of unionism and its attendant evils of indifference to Biblical truth and undermining of confessional Lutheranism," on the stand it had taken on *A Brief Statement*.<sup>30</sup>

The Missouri Synod convention of 1941 recognized the need for one document as a basis for agreement between church bodies. It still found *A Brief Statement* satisfactory, although it conceded that some clarification of this document was needed. The report stated:

In calling for one document, we do not mean to dispense with any doctrinal statements made in our *Brief Statement* — for we believe that it correctly expresses the doctrinal position of our Synod — but we consider that for the sake of clarification under the present circumstances, some statements need to be more sharply defined or amplified.<sup>31</sup>

The prominence given *A Brief Statement* in the conversations with synods within and without the Synodical Conference after 1941 emphasized its near-confessional status. A resolution of one Missouri Synod pastoral conference asked that it be retained as "our clear Scriptural Confession."<sup>32</sup> It was said: "The synods of the Synodical Conference have always confessed the doctrinal position that was written down in the *Brief Statement of the*

<sup>26</sup> In a letter to J. W. Behnken by an official committee, Nov. 2, 1938, Norwegian Synod of the Am. Ev. Luth. Church, *Report*, 1939, pp. 16 f. See especially C. M. Gullerud, "The Importance of the Doctrine of Verbal Inspiration of the Bible," Norwegian Synod of the Am. Ev. Luth. Church, *Report*, 1942, pp. 32 to 40. *A Letter to the Pastors and Professors of the Missouri Synod* from a committee appointed by the President of the Norwegian Synod (Mankato, Minn., 1939), pp. 8—11. W. M. Oesch endorsed the Norwegian Synod position in *The Crucible*, I (March-April 1939), passim.

<sup>27</sup> Synodical Conference, *Proceedings*, 1940, p. 89; Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1941, p. 198.

<sup>28</sup> Synodical Conference, *Proceedings*, 1940, p. 90.

<sup>29</sup> Norwegian Synod of the Am. Ev. Luth. Church, *Report*, 1943, insert sheet, printed separately, to be inserted between pp. 68 and 69,

resolution omitted from printed *Report* by oversight; Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1944, p. 256; Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1944, p. 241.

<sup>30</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1950, p. 521.

<sup>31</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1941, p. 302.

<sup>32</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1944, p. 251.

*Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod of 1932.*"<sup>33</sup>

In 1947 the Centennial convention of the Missouri Synod reaffirmed its loyalty to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and explicitly declared that "the *Brief Statement* correctly expresses its doctrinal position."<sup>34</sup> It incorporated the document in the official *Proceedings* of the convention in order to underscore its subscription.<sup>35</sup> The Union Committee was instructed in 1947 to use the "*Brief Statement* and such other documents already in existence," in future negotiations with other Lutheran bodies.<sup>36</sup>

The actions of the 1947 convention were not merely sentimental gestures which looked back to earlier days and reaffirmed a historical continuity with the past and enshrined an emblem. They came, in part, as a result of memorials from congregations which feared deviation from the old Missouri doctrinal stand and therefore asked that Synod "adhere unwaveringly to its Scriptural position of the past one hundred years as set forth in its *Brief Statement*."<sup>37</sup>

Thereafter some members of the Missouri Synod regarded it as "the official confession of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod"<sup>38</sup> and as "a correct expression of Synod's doctrinal position."<sup>39</sup> Some called it "a faithful confession of the teach-

ings of Holy Scripture and the Missouri Synod" and coupled it with the historical Confessions of the Lutheran Church.<sup>40</sup>

#### AS RELATED TO THE "DOCTRINAL AFFIRMATION"

The mistrust aroused by the *Doctrinal Affirmation* of 1944 was one factor in enhancing the prestige of *A Brief Statement*. The *Doctrinal Affirmation* was prepared as a result of the demand for one document as a basis for union negotiations.<sup>41</sup> The framework for the document was *A Brief Statement*.<sup>42</sup> "This new document," the Union Committee of the Norwegian Synod said ". . . combined too many of the weaknesses of the 'Declaration' with the strong points of the 'Brief Statement.'"<sup>43</sup> Since it was abandoned,<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1953, p. 366.

<sup>41</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1947, p. 378.

<sup>42</sup> The negotiation committee of the Missouri Synod and the ALC stated that "the subcommittees responsible for this draft considered their task to consist chiefly in inserting into the framework of the Brief Statement the additional truths and clarifications contained in the other documents mentioned." *Doctrinal Affirmation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States and of the American Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n. d. [1944]), p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Union Committee of the Norwegian Synod, *Our Relations with The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod (s. l., 1954)*, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> *The Lutheran Witness*, LXV (Nov. 5, 1946), 378. The official report of the Committee on Doctrinal Unity stated: "Since the Doctrinal Affirmation and its 'Clarifications' have been eliminated by the American Lutheran Church as a basis of doctrinal unity between itself and our Synod, no action is required by our Synod with regard to these documents, either by way of accepting them or of rejecting them." Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1947, p. 382.

<sup>33</sup> *100 Questions and Answers for Lutherans of the Synodical Conference (1954)* (Chicago: Chicago Area Church Councils, 1954), p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1947, p. 476.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 476—492.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 510.

<sup>37</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1947, p. 389.

<sup>38</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1950, p. 447; see p. 481, "according to its own confession in the *Brief Statement*."

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 487; also on p. 490.

it may be enough to note only one comparison of it with *A Brief Statement*.

At times, contrary to the express direction of our Synod, it dispenses with certain doctrinal statements of the Brief Statement; at times it merely takes certain ambiguous phrases from the Declaration and inserts them into the Brief Statement; at times it expressly upholds the false teaching of our opponents. In short, instead of defining the truth of Scripture more sharply over against its denial, it blunts the testimony of the Brief Statement and thus makes room for its denial.<sup>45</sup>

The reader, incidentally, will not fail to have noticed that "the truth of Scripture" and the "testimony of the Brief Statement were virtually equated." He will have noted more particularly how closely the *Affirmation* was related to *A Brief Statement*.

#### AS COMPARED WITH THE "COMMON CONFSSION"

If the mistrust aroused by the *Doctrinal Affirmation* bolstered the position of *A Brief Statement*, the discussions which centered in the *Common Confession* (1949) served to establish *A Brief Statement* in a still firmer quasi-confessional position. It was used as a touchstone to gauge the orthodoxy of Part I of the *Common Confession*,<sup>46</sup> as it was being used to test the correctness of other writings within Synod.<sup>47</sup> A paragraph from the *Common Confession* is refuted with "over against

<sup>45</sup> Theo. Dierks, *An Examination of the Proposed Doctrinal Affirmation*, n. p., n. d., p. 61. See p. 3 also.

<sup>46</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1950, pp. 442—454; *100 Questions and Answers*, passim.

<sup>47</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1950, pp. 472, 475—497; Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1953, p. 366. Appointment to a suggested "Commission on Scriptural Peace in Doc-

this our *Brief Statement* confesses."<sup>48</sup> It is said (the memorial is quoted in part):

WHEREAS, the "Common Confession" makes no mention of the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod*, the official confession of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, which confession not only in keeping with the Constitution of the Missouri Synod, Art. III, Sec. I, presents the true saving doctrine of God's Word, but also in definite unmistakable language points out and rejects all errors contrary to the true doctrine; . . . therefore be it Resolved, . . .

3. That in the revision of the "Common Confession" the correct teaching of Rom. 16:17, as stated in Synod's Constitution (Art. III, Sec. I) and as stated in the *Brief Statement*, Par. 28, be maintained as part of the "Common Confession"; . . .<sup>49</sup>

This illustrates the regard in which *A Brief Statement* was held.

The demands that the use of Rom. 16:17, 18 in *A Brief Statement* be declared the official interpretation of Synod<sup>50</sup> were met with the adoption of a resolution which said:

We reaffirm, as Scripturally correct, the use of Rom. 16:17 in the Constitution of Synod, the synodical Catechism, and the *Brief Statement*.<sup>51</sup>

trine and Practice" (which did not materialize) was to be made contingent on a promise "to uphold the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* without reservations whatsoever." *Ibid.*, p. 353. See also Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1956, pp. 512 and 520, for another example. Additional evidence can be multiplied.

<sup>48</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1950, p. 443.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 487—496.

<sup>51</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1950, p. 656; cf. pp. 655—658.



Examples could be multiplied to illustrate the contention that *A Brief Statement* was regarded as normative. In 1953, to cite one example, in response to a direct request for assurance of its doctrinal position, the Missouri Synod pointed to its acceptance and reaffirmation of *A Brief Statement* in 1932 and 1947 as sufficient.<sup>52</sup>

The reaffirmation of *A Brief Statement* by the Missouri Synod in 1947 caused the Norwegian Synod of the Synodical Conference to express its joy in 1948. It opined that this document as a union document

- a. states the doctrines at issue clearly, definitely, and correctly;
- b. includes the antitheses, with the same clearness, definiteness, and correctness;
- c. lays down the correct principles in the question of unionism.

Nevertheless, it found that the Missouri Synod violated "the spirit and letter of the *Brief Statement*" by various acts of unionism.<sup>53</sup>

The issue of unionism or fellowship was concomitant with the question of the correct interpretation of Rom. 16:17. The definition of "unionism" in *A Brief Statement* was held up as the correct definition. The Synodical Conference Committee on Intersynodical Relations reported in 1950: "We are convinced that Scripture's answer to this question [What is unionism?] is fully expressed in the pertinent paragraph of the *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod."<sup>54</sup> This paragraph became basic for the exposition of unionism presented to

the Synodical Conference by this committee<sup>55</sup> and endorsed by the Synodical Conference convention in 1950, which declared that the committee's discussion "on the basis of section 28 of the *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod is a correct exposition of the teaching of God's Word on the subject."<sup>56</sup> The Wisconsin Synod voiced its wish in 1951 that the Missouri Synod conform to these resolutions and "to the position in regard to practice as it is set forth in the *Brief Statement*."<sup>57</sup>

The lack of clarity in the *Common Confession* in its definition of unionism, in the opinion of members of the Wisconsin Synod and of the Norwegian Synod, caused them to emphasize the approach used by *A Brief Statement* to this question. In its resolutions which repudiated the *Common Confession* the Wisconsin Synod asked the Synodical Conference "to request the Missouri Synod to repeal the *Common Confession* and to return to the clarity and decisiveness in setting forth the Scriptural and historical doctrinal position of the Synodical Conference for which the *Brief Statement* sets an excellent precedent."<sup>58</sup> The Norwegian Synod, in rejecting Part I of the *Common Confession*, wanted the Missouri Synod to continue union negotiations with the American Lutheran Church only "on the basis of a full acceptance of the '*Brief Statement*.'" It reminded the Missouri Synod that it (the Missouri Synod) had declared that *A Brief Statement* "correctly expressed" its doctrinal position and that it did not mean to dispense

<sup>52</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1953, pp. 564, 565.

<sup>53</sup> As given in Synodical Conference, *Proceedings*, 1948, pp. 147—149.

<sup>54</sup> Synodical Conference, *Proceedings*, 1950, p. 128.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128—130.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>57</sup> Synodical Conference, *Proceedings*, 1952, p. 158.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

with any doctrinal statement made therein. *A Brief Statement*, the Norwegian Synod emphasized, "was accepted unanimously by all the constituent groups of the Synodical Conference."<sup>59</sup> The *Common Confession* was not.

Speaking for the Wisconsin Synod, Edmund C. Reim compared the *Common Confession* with *A Brief Statement*. He found that on the doctrine of election the latter "was clear on the subject," while the former "does not measure up to that high standard." On the inspiration of Holy Scriptures the former "cannot be said to measure up to the high standards of the *Brief Statement*." The articles on justification, conversion, and the last things suffer, in his judgment, when compared with *A Brief Statement*. His conclusion is conclusive and inclusive: "The high level of the *Brief Statement* has not been maintained."<sup>60</sup>

The opposition to the *Common Confession* within the Wisconsin Synod was set forth by a series of tracts<sup>61</sup> and more particularly in the doctrinal essay at the 1954 Synodical Conference convention by E. H. Wendland, "The Inadequacy of the 'Common Confession' as a Settlement of

<sup>59</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1953, p. 321. Cf. pp. 320, 321.

<sup>60</sup> Edmund C. Reim, *Where Do We Stand? An Outline of the Wisconsin Synod Position* Published by Authority of the Committee on Tracts of the Wisconsin Synod (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1950), pp. 45, 46, 47.

<sup>61</sup> Issued by the Conference of Presidents, The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1954, s. l. See especially tract No. 3, *Every Sinner Declared Righteous*; tract No. 4, *Not By My Own Reason Or Strength*; tract No. 5, *If The Trumpet Give An Uncertain Sound*; tract No. 6, *Chosen By Grace From Eternity*; tract No. 8, *Antichrist*.

Past Differences."<sup>62</sup> Repeatedly the essayist goes back to *A Brief Statement* to prove his contention. "Why not simply remain with the wording of the *Brief Statement*?" he asks.<sup>63</sup> He ends his essay:

We are deeply indebted to the strong, confessional voice of Missouri, which once showed our Synod the way. That voice has been adequately set forth in the words of the *Brief Statement*. May that be our COMMON CONFSSION! *[sic]*<sup>64</sup>

Members of the Norwegian Synod, too, opposed the *Common Confession* because, they believed, it was at variance with *A Brief Statement*. At this same 1954 convention of the Synodical Conference Norman A. Madson, in presenting "The Norwegian Synod's Reasons for Rejecting the 'Common Confession,'"<sup>65</sup> said:

. . . we object to the *Common Confession* because it has been brought about by a violation of Missouri's own declaration re the *Brief Statement* at its 1941 convention. . . . So far from *sharply defining* and amplifying the *Brief Statement*, the *Common Confession* has done the very opposite. . . .<sup>66</sup>

The Union Committee of the Norwegian Synod declared: "To settle this point [on inspiration] properly, the Missouri Synod must require an unconditional and unqualified acceptance of the whole section in the '*Brief Statement*' which deals with Scripture."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Synodical Conference, *Proceedings*, 1954, pp. 17—38.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51—56.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52. Italics in the original.

<sup>67</sup> Union Committee on the Norwegian Synod, *Our Relations With The Lutheran Church* — *Missouri Synod*, p. 16.

The defenders of the *Common Confession* and the Missouri Synod position did not rely on *A Brief Statement*. They were more intent on operating with the Scripture passages themselves that dealt with specific doctrines and with ascertaining the correct meaning of the *Common Confession*.<sup>68</sup> The "inaccuracies" with which the Wisconsin Synod was charged in its use of the *Brief Statement* were pointed out.<sup>69</sup>

Within the Missouri Synod there were concerted efforts before the 1956 convention of that church body to have the *Common Confession* set aside.<sup>70</sup> In one instance *A Brief Statement* was cited as a norm,<sup>71</sup> and in another it was asked that this document alone be made the basis for any union.<sup>72</sup> The 1956 convention of the Missouri Synod did resolve not to use the *Common Confession* "as a functioning union document," without, however, thereby implying that the document contained anything "in conflict with the Sacred Scrip-

<sup>68</sup> E. g., *A Fraternal Word* on the questions in controversy between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1953), passim.

<sup>69</sup> Theodore F. Nickel and Arnold H. Grumm, *A Fraternal Reply* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1954), passim.

<sup>70</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1956, pp. 369, 370, 380—383, 396—398.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398: "To reject the *Common Confession* because it does not define and safeguard the Scripture doctrine clearly taught in the *Brief Statement* and because it does not forbid the teaching of doctrines specifically rejected by the *Brief Statement*."

<sup>72</sup> The heading of the memorial is, *ibid.*, p. 380, "To Reject the Common Confession and Reinstate the Brief Statement as a Basis for Lutheran Unity."

tures and the Lutheran Confessions."<sup>73</sup> The resolutions did not mention *A Brief Statement*.

Another resolution, however, clearly placed *A Brief Statement* on the same plane with the Lutheran Confessions:

*Resolved*, that we reject any and every interpretation of documents approved by Synod which would be in disagreement with the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Brief Statement.<sup>74</sup>

#### AS A DISPUTED SYMBOL

In 1959 the Missouri Synod was asked to pass a formal resolution making it mandatory that all pastors, teachers, and professors of every rank be required "to subscribe to the *Brief Statement* as well as to the General Confessions and Particular Symbols."<sup>75</sup> A mimeographed copy of the 8,000-word document was prepared for the delegates,<sup>76</sup> since the question of its binding force was before the convention. Resolution 9, without specifying *A Brief Statement*, although it is the statement on doctrine formally adopted by Synod that is cited in the preamble, reaffirmed that "every doctrinal statement of a confessional nature adopted by Synod as a true exposition of the Holy Scriptures is to be regarded as public doctrine (*publica doctrina*) in Synod."<sup>77</sup>

The resolution raised more questions than it answered. At the Counselors' Conference in 1960 Arthur C. Repp read an essay on "Scripture, Confessions, and Doc-

<sup>73</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1956, p. 504.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 546.

<sup>75</sup> Mo. Synod, *Reports and Memorials*, 1959, p. 507.

<sup>76</sup> Mo. Synod, *Proceedings*, 1959, p. 83.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

trinal Statements,"<sup>78</sup> in which he pointed out the need for clarification of the scope of Resolution 9. He suggests a renewed study of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions rather than a return to state-

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<sup>78</sup> *A Symposium of Essays and Addresses given at the Counselors Conference, Valparaiso, Ind., Sept. 7—14, 1960* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1960), pp. 100—112.

ments that served their purpose for their day.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111. See Harold W. Romoser, "The State of the Church in Respect to the Brief Statement," *The Faithful Word*, 1 (December 1961), 45—51, for a somewhat different view. In this same publication, p. 60, Resolution 1 of the State of the Church Conference appears. It purposes to raise *A Brief Statement* to confessional status for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

St. Louis, Mo.