THE DECLINE OF ETHICAL PIETISM IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD: 1920-1960

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of New York Theological Seminary,
New York, in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

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April 1970

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INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF SUBJECT

The Missouri Synod[1] has long been recognized as one of the largest and most aggressive synodical units of Lutherans in America. Since its organization in 1847 under the orthodox leadership of Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the Synod has grown very rapidly in numbers and expansion in territory. It has gained prominence in American Lutheranism through its confessional zeal, its vast network of schools and numbers of publications, its rapid transition to the English language, its pioneering activities in mass communications, and its great energies devoted to missions and benevolences.[2]

Growth during the Twentieth Century has been phenomenal. No other major Protestant group in America has grown so quickly. In 1917 the Missouri Synod passed the one million mark in membership; in 1953 it exceeded two million. At the close of 1960 the baptized membership had reached 2,605,177. Between

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[1]The word "synod" in American Lutheranism has been used in three ways: (1) least frequently it is used to identify an ecclesiastical meeting; (2) most frequently the name has been used to identify the ongoing organized church body, as for instance, "the Missouri Synod;" (3) in the Lutheran Church in America, however, the word refers to the geographical subdivions which in other Lutheran church bodies are called "districts." (Robert C. Wiederaenders and Walter G. Tillmanns, The Synods of American Lutheranism, [St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Print Shop, 1968], p. vii.)

[2]Abdel Ross Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), p. 209.

1935 and 1960 the church body had more than doubled its size, and at the present time it embraces almost one-third of all the Lutherans in the land.[3]

Despite such positive statistical gains, the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has always had a somewhat enigmatic character. Other major Lutheran groupings have had little sympathy for its rigid insistence upon purity of doctrine and its subsequent opposition to concerns for wider Lutheran unity. Other Protestant traditions have also been repelled by Missouri's doctrinal strictness and what was felt to be a deliberate isolation from the mainstream of American Christendom.[4] At

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[3]Thomas Coates and Erwin L. Lueker, "Four Decades of Expansion, 1920-1960," in Moving Frontiers, ed. by Carl S. Meyer, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 386.

[4]In the July 22, 1926 issue of the Christian Century the following description of the Missouri Synod appeared: "' The Missouri Lutheran Church has its strength in the Middle West, and its large theological seminary is in St. Louis, Mo. It represents a distinctively American development in Lutheranism for which there is practically no parallel in Europe. It has isolated itself from other churches with an effectiveness which may be equaled by the Southern Baptists, but is not surpassed by any other body. Its discipline is iron, and it enforces a conformity to a theology which may best be described as an ossified seventeenth century orthodoxy. Its conception of salvation is highly magical, and the instruments of redemption are the Sacraments and "pure doctrine." Like Catholicism it perpetuates itself through the parochial school. The rigid discipline of the Church seems to be under the control of the theological seminary faculty, which has become a kind of corporate pope. Curiously enough anti-Catholic feeling runs very high in the denomination, which is, in many of its characteristics, more closely akin to Catholicism than any other

the present time the Missouri Synod still has no official affiliation with the Lutheran World Federation, the National Council of Churches, or the World Council of Churches.

Factors such as these make the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod a fascinating subject for analysis. The reasons for a stringent orthodoxy and an anti-ecumenical isolation require some careful examination. Such ultra-conservative attitudes have often been accompanied by severe ethical pronouncements. These strict rules for governing personal morality also need to be subjected to a systematic investigation.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The ethical concerns of the Missouri Synod have been marked by selectivity rather than absolute consistency. As might be expected, such selective standards for Christian conduct have not gone unchallenged.

It will be the aim of this thesis to study some of the

Protestant body, not excepting Anglicanism. The denomination has had a remarkable growth in America and numbers almost a million communicants. It has the missionary energy which unqualified denominational zeal always supplies. Its social influence upon American life is very slight, and its ministers are prevented by the many restrictions which hedge them about from assuming positive social leadership in the various communities in which they labor. The Church is almost as rigid and unbending as Rome, and it consciously isolates itself from the other portions of American Protestantism.'" Cited by Theodore Graebner, The Problem of Lutheran Union and Other Essays, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), pp. 119-120.

institutional peculiarities which have influenced this church body to insist upon adherence to certain principles governing amusement and entertainment. Previous attempts at analysis have often been marked by oversimplification. The Missouri Synod's ethical stance has largely been interpreted as a resistance to the dynamic of change demanded by the process of Americanization.[5] This viewpoint has tended to overlook some other important historical antecedents which will be traced in this study.

It is hoped that this analysis will serve both as a challenge and as a corrective to certain prior assumptions that have largely been taken for granted. It is also an attempt to examine and arrange more precisely some of the voluminous material that is pertinent to this discussion.

METHOD OF TREATMENT AND ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM

The major scope of this study is limited essentially to the forty-year period between 1920 and 1960. There are valid reasons for such a limitation. It is generally acknowledged that the Missouri Synod of 1920 was basically no different from the monolithic institution of 1865. Even though new factors were introduced into the life of the church during the period between the Civil War and World War I, a real ferment for change did not take place until after 1920.[6] A

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[5]Everette Meier and Herbert T. Mayer, "The Process of Americanization" in op. cit., ed. by Carl S. Meyer, p. 344.

[6]Ibid., p. 345.

terminal point of 1960 is dictated by the revolutionary nature of the 1960's themselves. In this decade the Missouri Synod finally evidenced interest in Lutheran unity by joining in 1967 with the other major American Lutheran bodies in establishing the Lutheran Council in the United States of America. Two years later the Synod formally declared pulpit and altar fellowship with The American Lutheran Church. This period needs to be studied separately, and therefore would exceed the intended scope of this examination.

Because the phenomenon of American Lutheranism cannot be understood without an appreciation for the European heritage, a section of introductory material is devoted to a brief discussion of Pietism and its influences upon the ethical attitudes of some of the founding fathers of the Missouri Synod. To omit this would be to ignore the true beginnings of this story.

The powerful influence of Lutheran Orthodoxy is also examined. Although the Saxon immigrants adopted a congregational polity soon after their arrival in the New World, their pastoral leaders exerted a continuing authoritarian influence in matters of doctrine and life. This led ultimately to a kind of thought-control which stifled much independent thinking.

World War I is generally regarded as a major turning-point in the Synod's history. While changes in the period between the two world wars were hardly revolutionary, they

signaled a gradual weakening in the tradition-directedness of the past. A major weapon in warding off Americanization had been the German language. Many feared that a genuine spirit of Lutheranism could not flourish in an English-speaking atmosphere.[7] The First World War was responsible for settling this issue.

The period between World War I and World War II was marked by little change in basic attitudes. The Missouri Synod did not feel any compulsion to sort out the relevant from the irrelevant until the Second World War was concluded. In the post-war period an increasing awareness of a responsibility for social problems led to the creation of a special agency for such concerns. The basic principles covering the Synod's relationship to other churches were also re-examined.[8] Even here a slowness toward change was still in evidence. Not until June, 1956, did the Synod finally feel the necessity of officially expressing itself on the racial issue.[9]

It is essential to define the use of the term "ethical" in the problem under discussion. The terms "ethic," "ethics," and "ethical" may be used in a variety of ways. On a practical level the ethical may simply refer to the content of right

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[7]Frederick C. Luebke, "The Immigrant Condition as a Factor Contributing to the Conservatism of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXXVIII, (April 1965), p. 24.

[8]Coates and Lueker, op. cit., p. 387.

[9]Ibid., p. 405.

action or the code which prescribes it. On a more abstract level concern with ethics is used to denote that body of moral attitudes which characterize a culture, subculture, or religious ethos.[10] It is in this latter context that the various issues will be framed. It is not the intent of this study to engage in a lengthy debate within the larger intellectual discipline of philosophical or theological ethics. The main argument of this paper will attempt to attribute the change in the Synod's moral attitude to a variety of complex influences.

SOURCES

Since no systematic treatment of this topic is currently in existence, the opinions of influential leaders of the Missouri Synod had to be carefully examined. References of this type will be used throughout the body of this thesis.

General church history has little to contribute to such a precise area of investigation. Such resources will not be utilized beyond an isolated reference in a discussion that is deemed important.

Specific works on the history of Lutheranism in America and especially on the history of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod are represented within the scope of their availability and pertinence. Even here the literature is not extensive in its treatment of this issue.

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[10]Edward W. Uthe, Director, Theology: An Assessment of Current Trends, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 79.

Finally, there is much valuable information to be derived from the official publications of the church body itself. The periodical literature produced between 1920 and 1960 was carefully examined. Source material has been taken from The Lutheran Witness, the Synod's official house organ; from the Walther League Messenger, the magazine for the Synod's youth; from the Theological Monthly and its successor, the Concordia Theological Monthly, the official scholarly journals edited by the St. Louis seminary faculty; and from the Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, a publication rich in material from the synodical archives.

CHAPTER I

THE HERITAGE OF PIETISM

The history of Lutheranism in America is characterized by two kinds of Lutheranism: "pietistic Lutheranism" and "confessional Lutheranism." Pietistic Lutheranism was a form of theology and church life which stressed the importance of a conversion experience and a life dedicated to Christian action. The Lutherans who came to America during the colonial period prior to the American Revolution were those primarily influenced by the movement of Pietism on the Continent. Adjusting to the new ways of the New World, these Pietistic Lutherans developed a pattern of church life known as "American Lutheranism" whose major exponent was the nineteenth century leader Samuel Simon Schmucker.[1]

These early Lutherans tended to have a conservative outlook on the world, similar to that of the New England Puritans. They opposed festivals and all expensive forms of entertainment because they led to indulgence and wasted money. Card playing and dancing were considered wrong because they wasted precious time. They severely condemned the corrupting influences of the theater and the excessive consumption of beer, wine, and tobacco. This conviction is seen clearly in the example of

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[1]John H. Tietjen, Which Way to Lutheran Unity, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 7.

Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the patriarch of American Lutheranism. In 1765 he secured a court order to close an obnoxious tavern opposite one of his churches in Pennsylvania because it represented a place "where Satan conducted his school."[2]

The sobriety and frugality of these early Lutheran settlers can still be seen in the first Lutheran periodical in America, the Evangelisches Magazin. It first appeared in 1811 and was strongly pietistic in flavor. From its contents it seems that Lutherans of that day were especially interested in reading about the westward movement of former neighbors, about needy orphans in Europe, about deathbed conversions, about the burning of theaters, about marvelous piety in children, and about the imminent end of the world. All this was accompanied by urgent periodic appeals for the preservation of the German language.[3]

Confessional Lutheranism was a movement which began early in the Nineteenth Century in opposition to the spirit of rationalism which had dominated the Lutheran Church in Europe. Its adherents advocated a return to the theology and the understanding of the faith present in the Lutheran confessional writings of the Reformation period. These confessional Lutherans were also descendants of the pietistic period in Lutheran history and continued to stress many of Pietism's

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[2]Wentz, op. cit., p. 58.

[3]Ibid., p. 91.

major concerns. In addition they were also concerned about recovering the theology that had prevailed in the period of Orthodoxy which had preceded Pietism. Confessional Lutheranism therefore represents a blend of Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism in reaction against rationalism.

Confessional Lutheranism was introduced into the United States by the waves of immigrants seeking a better life in the middle and latter part of the Nineteenth Century. Many of them had been influenced by the confessional revival going on in Europe. They came with a new appreciation of their Lutheran heritage and vigorously opposed the pattern of Lutheran church life already present in the New World. The founders of the Missouri Synod were in the vanguard of this movement.[4] Because both kinds of Lutheranism in America were strongly influenced by European Pietism, the movement itself must be examined in closer detail.

Pietism in Germany originated in part from the well-intentioned efforts of dedicated spiritual leaders who sought to restore the German people to a higher plane of living. The movement was especially concerned with halting the moral decay that had become widespread in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War.[5] In addition to this, Pietism sought

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[4]Tietjen, op. cit., p. 8.

[5]Theodore Graebner, The Borderland of Right and Wrong, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), p. xi.

to recover some of the vigorous theology of the Reformation era which had suffered both from the war and the systematization and subsequent debilitation of Reformation teachings in the abstract speculations of Lutheran scholasticism.[6] The Lutheran Church in Germany was marked by a spirit of "dead orthodoxy" which manifested very little social or mission concern, and no interest at all in the recovery of Christian unity.

Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) was the leading personality in the Pietist revival. The datable beginning of this new movement in German Lutheranism is generally traced to the period of Spener's ministry in Frankfort. More specifically, the appearance of Spener's Pia Desideria (Pious Longings) on March 24, 1675 marks the end of Lutheran scholasticism and the beginning of the era of Pietism.[7]

The second great name in German Pietism is that of August Hermann Francke, 1663-1727. His great contributions lie in the area of social service, specifically in his successful founding of orphanages and schools. He was also the most prominent promoter of Protestant foreign missions in his time. This identification with missions contributed to the spirit of ecumenicity in the Pietist community at Halle. Yet Francke

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[6]John T. McNeill, Modern Christian Movements, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p. 50.

[7]Ibid., p. 56.

was rather narrow theologically and much more austere than Spener.[8]

This spirit of austerity was a negative aspect in the life of this important revival movement. Many Pietists were of the opinion that whatever does not directly serve the honor of God, our own or our neighbor's bodily or spiritual welfare, is sin because at best it is a waste of time. To rejoice in anything not directly sinful, though pleasant or amusing, was nevertheless contrary to the spirit of Christian self-denial. Not only dancing, attending the theater, playing cards, but also innocent jokes and enjoyments, partaking in festive meals, going for walks, laughing, were regarded as sinful. In Francke's home for orphans at Halle the children were even forbidden to play. According to Spener bowling and the use of tobacco could be permitted only where these were regarded as essential to health.[9] Francke's severe attitude can be seen in the following statement:

> All laughter is not forbidden, for it happens, indeed, that even the most pious may so heartily rejoice, not over worldly, but over heavenly things, that his lips may show evidence of his mental delight in a faint laughter. But it easily becomes sinful and paves the way for a great distraction of mind, which soon discovers that it has become too unthoughtful when it again wishes to meekly turn to God.[10]

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[8] Ibid., p. 64.

[9] Graebner, op. cit., p. xii.

[10] Ibid., p. 107.

Orthodox Lutherans also conceded a danger in too much worldly living, but they refused to admit that rejoicing in God's natural gifts was inherently sinful. They maintained that no man had the right, in the realm of religion and morals, to command or forbid anything which God has left free. Because Pietism was concerned more with the active Christian life than it was with preserving sound doctrine, it was indicted by later confessional Lutherans for paving the way for Liberalism and rationalism.[11]

The nineteenth century German Lutheran immigration and confessional reform was initiated by a group of settlers from Saxony who settled in Missouri in February, 1839. These newcomers, the vanguard of the Missouri Synod, were in flight from the rationalism of the Saxon state church and the threat of possible enforced union with Reformed Christianity in all Germany. Though it seems paradoxical, these arrivals were characterized by a spirit of intense pietism coupled with strict Lutheran orthodoxy.[12]

In this company, totaling 612 souls, we find an interesting socio-economic composition. Forty-five per cent of this

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[11] Ibid., p. xiv. On page 35 Graebner quotes Francis Pieper, the leading dogmatician of the Missouri Synod. Pieper implies a condemnation of Pietism in his following definitive statement about the nature of Orthodoxy. "In order to claim the orthodox name, a church body must permit all those things to be free which are not commanded in God's Word. It must not prescribe to any of its members to believe or to do aught that God has not in His Word prescribed to men."

[12] Wentz, op. cit., p. 116.

total were female, and the average age was twenty-five years. The group was comprised of eight pastors, eleven theological candidates, five teachers, nine merchants, a lawyer, a doctor of medicine, the curator of the Saxon state archives, and other professional people. Only fourteen per cent could be classified as peasants, while sixty-one per cent were craftsmen or mechanics. These Saxons had not left the Old World for economic reasons. They were the products of an urban, middle class culture, with a highly educated theological leadership.[13]

The dominant figure in this Saxon emigration was Martin Stephan, a clergyman with dynamic organizational skills. Pietism had been a major formative influence leading him into the ministry. While he was serving as a pastor in Dresden he exerted a powerful influence on other clergy and theological candidates who also identified with pietistic attitudes. Many of these later formed the nucleus of the group seeking religious freedom in the New World. The most important member of this select circle proved to be C. F. W. Walther, the patriarch of Missouri Synod Lutheranism.

When young Walther had entered the University of Leipzig in 1829, he was drawn to a small group of students that had established a so-called "pious fraternity." They met regularly for prayer, reading and study of the Scriptures and

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[13]Luebke, "Immigrant Factor," p. 21.

other religious books, and the discussion of things pertaining to their salvation.[14] The leader of this inner circle was a theological candidate by the name of Kuehn, an individual regarded as a religious fanatic by fellow students and teachers at Leipzig. Kuehn's reaction against rationalism took an unfortunate turn. Though he was sincere, his system was morbid. He felt compelled to produce a necessary degree of stress in his associates and to mold them into what has been described as "a group of legalistic Pietists." His demanding formulas and spiritual exercises drove some of the impressionable young men under his influence almost to distraction.[15] He insisted that a person's Christian faith did not rest upon a firm foundation unless one had experienced the keenest sorrow for sins and had known the terrors of hell in agonizing struggles for repentance. Concerning his experiences in the group, C. F. W. Walther later wrote:

> The less a book invited to faith, and the more legalistically it insisted upon contrite brokenness of heart and upon a complete mortification of the old man, the better we held it to be. Even such writings we read only so far as they described the griefs and exercises of remorse; when a description of faith and comfort followed, we usually closed the book, for, so we thought, this is as yet nothing for us.[16]

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[14]Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 42.

[15]Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), pp. 37-38.

[16]Baepler, op. cit., p. 43.

This spiritual rigor and ascetic zeal contributed to young Walther's eventual physical breakdown and forced him to suspend his studies in the winter of 1831-1832. He returned to his home and devoted himself to the intensive study of Luther's writings. Franz Delitzsch, the noted Old Testament scholar, described Walther's condition at the time he was forced to leave the university in these words: "During that period of struggle he was wasted like a skeleton, coughed blood, suffered from insomnia, and experienced the terrors of hell. He was more dead than alive."[17]

In 1832 Walther returned to his studies. Candidate Kuehn died at this time and the mantle of leadership for the pious circle fell upon the shoulders of Martin Stephan. C. F. W. Walther still found himself in the throes of spiritual agony which finally subsided only when he initiated a correspondence with Stephan. He was in such a state of emotional stress by this time that when he received Stephan's reply, he did not dare open the letter until he had knelt in prayer and asked God to prevent his receiving false comfort if such were the contents of Stephan's letter. After reading it, he felt himself raised from the depths of hell to the blissful heights of

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[17]Forster, op. cit., p. 47. Franz Delitzsch was a leading theologian of the Erlangen School. In early life he was closely associated with the founders of the Missouri Synod. Despite his confessional loyalties, he saw no need for joining the emigration.

heaven. His tears of penitential grief changed to tears of joyous faith. Stephan convinced him that he had long experienced the contrition he sought in the Law and that he lacked nothing but faith. Walther recounts that he could no longer resist; he had come to Jesus. The peace of God had finally entered his heart.[18]

As relations between the state church of Saxony and the Stephanite group grew progressively worse, an Emigration Society was organized in 1839. During the period of planning and eventual departure a fanaticism pervaded the group and caused them to compromise some of their highly moral principles. The state authorities were deliberately lied to and deceived. Some minors were permitted to join the emigration without parental or governmental permission. In several instances they simply left their parents and crossed several boundaries between Saxony and Bremen, the port of embarkation, without benefit of visas.[19] Many loyal Lutherans criticized this group for displaying an attitude of false martyrdom.

Evidence is strong to indicate the fact that Stephan had been contemplating an emigration strategy for some time. His "Constitution for the Lutheran Church after It has Safely Landed" was ratified and appended to the plans for emigration.

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[18]Baepler, op. cit., p. 44.

[19]Forster, op. cit., p. 152.

It was so precise in its detail that it could hardly have been produced in the immediate context of the decision to leave Germany. The founding of a theological seminary was not too large a project, the question of whether women were permitted to knit on Sunday not too insignificant an item, to be included in this prospectus for Utopia.[20] Another document from this period entitled "Regulations for Settlement of the Lutheran 'Gesellschaft' Emigrating with Herr Pastor Stephan to the United States of North America" demonstrates how strong the influence of Pietism really was. A section entitled "Police Ordinances" is of special interest.[21] From their content, it

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[20] Ibid., p. 98.

[21] Ibid., p. 579. Chapter IV, Police Ordinances, lists the following restrictions:

"Par. 1. Prohibition of theaters and dance halls
Theaters and dance halls may never be constructed.
Par. 2. Forbidden games
Lotteries, all games of chance, and card playing are summarily forbidden. On the other hand, the following are permitted: Billiards, bowling, draughts, pigeon shooting, and shooting sports.
Par. 3. Prevention of excesses
All cursing, the use of shameful words, as well as uncharitable taunting and ridicule, are emphatically forbidden in order to prevent, as far as possible, angry disputes and excesses.
Par. 4. Regulations for clothing
Regulations shall be established for clothing. In order to prevent extravagance, a maximum shall be set for prices on clothing, which may not be exceeded. All clothing which is injurious to health and is against Christian decency is forbidden. Corsets and their equivalents, such as dresses stiffened in the upper part with whalebone, are entirely forbidden to the women, as especially harmful to their health.

is apparent that the "New Jerusalem" envisioned by the Saxons was intended to be a tightly-controlled society. A closer examination reveals many of the amusements which the Synod would condemn for a long time to come.

In spite of such carefully laid plans, the emigration almost ended in complete disaster. Shortly after the arrival in St. Louis and the establishment of the main colony in Perry County, the Saxon community was torn by conflict. Martin Stephan had been successful in creating an episcopacy with himself as bishop, but shortly thereafter his world collapsed as he faced the charges of adultery and financial mismanagement. He was quickly deposed from office, banished from the community, and transported across the Mississippi to Illinois. These shattering events created such a feeling of disillusionment and despair that many of the Saxons felt that their leaderless community did not constitute a part of the Church Universal. A large number questioned the religious motives which had caused them to leave their homeland, and some of them eventually returned.

> Par. 5. Penalties
> Definite penalties for transgressions of the regulations in the preceding Pars. 1-4 are to be made public. They are to consist in admonitions, in fines, and if deemed advisable, expulsion from the community."

In this selective listing there are no prohibitions against alcoholic beverages. The omission is deliberate, since brewing and the manufacture of spirits are two of the five major crafts to be engaged in as profitable enterprises for the benefit of the whole community.

Out of this paralyzing crisis there emerged the commanding personality of C. F. W. Walther. He advanced the principle of congregationalism through which the Saxon identity within the Christian Church without Stephan could be rationalized. Now Walther became the dominant force in this group, and their commitment to a congregational polity had a major impact upon their continued religious conservatism throughout the Nineteenth Century. In 1847 the German Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States was formally organized in Chicago with Walther as its first president.[22]

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[22]Luebke, "Immigrant Factor," pp. 21-22.

CHAPTER II

THE INFLUENCE OF ORTHODOXY

Pietism alone is not a sufficient basis for understanding the Missouri Synod's position on ethical issues. It has already been noted that the attitude of the Saxons represented a curious blend of Pietism and Lutheran Orthodoxy. One influence cannot really be understood without also examining the other, especially since the story of American Lutheranism in the Nineteenth Century is the story of the triumph of confessional orthodoxy. Walther and the Missouri Synod play a primary role in this chronicle of success.

The conservative character of the Synod was shaped primarily by four major doctrinal authorities on which its theologians relied. These were the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, the writings of Martin Luther, and the literature of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran dogmaticians.[1]

Within a very short time after its formal organization, the Synod had established its position as the most militant defender of orthodoxy in American Lutheranism. Truth was defined in Aristotelian categories of essence and resultant characteristics. It is difficult to conceive of this triumph of abstract theology, for it goes against the spirit of Martin

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[1]Milton L. Rudnick, Fundamentalism and the Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 73.

Luther. Luther had broken with the medieval synthesis between revelation and reason. He contended that no logic or philosophy can reveal the "Hidden God" to the human heart. God is known only through His gracious dealings with men, especially in the revealing of His great love in Jesus Christ. The heart apprehends God, not the mind, the intuition of faith, not logic or philosophy. Thus Luther was not interested in minute definitions and distinctions, nor in elaborate doctrinal systematization.

The Age of Orthodoxy came after Luther's death when the system of Aristotle was introduced into Lutheran theology. The Lutheran universities adopted this approach because professors of theology generally also taught philosophy. In the first half of the Seventeenth Century the Lutheran scholastic dogmaticians produced a number of massive volumes, presenting Lutheran theology in the schema of Aristotle's dialectic. They were specifically designed to defend Lutheran teachings against alleged Calvinistic errors and against the rising power of the Counter-Reformation. Although this orthodoxy substituted intellectualism for a living encounter with God, it did preserve the Lutheran stance in a turbulent historical period. It accomplished essentially the same thing in preserving the faith of American Lutheranism.[2]

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[2]O. H. Pannkoke, A Great Church Finds Itself, (Quitman, Georgia: By the Author, 1966), p. 18.

The spirit of orthodoxy was intellectual and abstract--interested in universal, impersonal, eternal, changeless truth. To a great extent the movement became detached from ordinary people and the burning issues of life. Theological debate often became an end in itself, and hairsplitting was regarded as a splendid scholarly pastime. Truth had to be defended so that truth might ultimately triumph. There was the feeling that God Himself listens to intellectual debate and is pleased when abstract truth wins out. The definition of faith and its intellectual defense against all opponents became the touchstone for genuine Christianity.[3] Thus for the confessional German immigrant, the faith of the church was its greatest treasure and the ultimate reason for existence. The contamination of that faith was regarded as its greatest pitfall.[4]

In order to insure doctrinal purity in the alien and hostile American environment, the leaders of the Missouri Synod believed that religious, social, and cultural isolation would be essential to the preservation of faith. German culture became a key factor in perpetuating religious conservatism. Fundamental to such an isolationist program was a system of education which especially separated students for the ministry from outside influences at an early age. The theological

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[3] Ibid., p. 19.

[4] Luebke, "Immigrant Factor," p. 22.

curriculum consisted of courses which were abstract and strongly dogmatic. It was education in a vacuum and with a predetermined goal. The result was that the average student became imprisoned in this mode of thought.[5] This system flourished in a world apart from the main currents of Protestantism in America. Many young graduates simply replaced their elders in positions of leadership, untouched by revivalism, rationalism, the Social Gospel, or whatever else characterized the religious climate at a given historical period.[6]

Another factor in warding off Americanization was the German language. In this the Missouri Synod did not differ essentially from other immigrant Lutheran groups. Group particularity was the means by which immigrants established a sense of continuity with the past in the face of the bewildering discontinuity of their larger environment. The church became a beacon light to other likeminded, perplexed wayfarers who arrived in successive waves. This led ultimately to the establishment of a variety of separate Lutheran churches throughout the country, all claiming loyalty to the historic confessions, but so different in culture and practice that they had little in common.[7]

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[5]Pannkoke, op. cit., p. 20.

[6]Luebke, "Immigrant Factor," p. 22.

[7]G. Everett Arden, "En Route to Unity," in The Maturing of American Lutheranism, ed. by Herbert T. Neve and Benjamin A. Johnson, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), p. 226.

To many of the Nineteenth Century German immigrants, the Missouri Synod offered a cultural refuge. The issue of doctrinal strictness made no real difference. The average layman was quite willing to follow his pastor's leadership in matters of dogma and practice. Despite the pre-eminence of the local congregational polity, it was the clergy who maintained the conservative orientation of the church body.[8]

A further element in this closed system was the accumulation of a body of tradition which sought to apply the doctrines to every imaginable situation. The guiding principle was that every part of life must be understood in the light of God's Word and eternity. The position of the Missouri Synod on practically all issues of life had to be articulated. Insight was based upon precedents established in the past rather than creative response to the present. This represented a subordination of reality to a principle of formalism. Since God's revelation had to be defined and defended down to the most minute item, the Synod was reluctant to trust in the ability of the individual Christian to follow his Lord. Rules of discipleship were spelled out in precise detail, and strict standards of supervision were established.[9]

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[8]Luebke, "Immigrant Factor," p. 24.

[9]Pannkoke, op. cit., p. 29. Pannkoke relates how he was a member of a student committee at the St. Louis seminary which tried to urge the faculty to change the classroom technique of dictating paragraph after paragraph of material. The response

In the period between the Civil War and World War I, the will to be conservative was evident in every area of the Synod's life. Caution was voiced over such common American economic practices as life insurance and the charging of interest on loans. Members were also warned about the evils in such social customs as the dance and the theater, and they tended to show little enthusiasm for getting involved in American political life. Such characteristics were intensified by the fact that the Synod's membership was still predominantly rural. During this same period most other American churches were moving in the opposite direction.[10]

Cautiousness was also in evidence in other economic issues. Synodical leaders did not believe in purchasing fire insurance and preferred to meet fire losses out of the collective treasury. Members were cautioned against speculating in the stock market for fear that this would encourage irresponsible gambling. The problems of labor-management relations were a subject of concern, but the synodical leadership refused to align itself with either side.[11]

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of Dr. Francis Pieper, seminary president and leading Missouri Synod theologian, was: "Mein lieber, memorieren sie nur. Zwanzig jahre [sic.] müssen sie memorieren. Dann können sie zu denken anfangen." This incident took place in the first decade of this century! (p. 22)

[10]Meier and Mayer, op. cit., p. 344.

[11]Ibid., p. 345.

The social isolation of the Missouri Synod is highlighted by an ongoing campaign against dancing and attending the theater. Many of the clergy carried on a continual warfare against these alleged tools of the devil. The frequency with which these condemnations appeared in convention proceedings, church periodicals, and other literature would seem to suggest that lay members continued to involve themselves with these activities.[12]

Two books were published in 1895 which dealt exclusively with the theater and dancing. Appropriately titled The Dance and The Theater, both volumes attempted, through the use of testimonies, arguments, Biblical proofs, and anecdotes, to especially influence the youth of the church. The author, William Dallmann, was also the editor of The Lutheran Witness, the periodical of the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri and Other States. At the time this was the only geographic district within the Missouri Synod which permitted and encouraged the use of the English language. Dallmann was therefore associated with the progressive wing in the Synod, but this fact is not evident in these two books.

The line of argument is rather unsophisticated. In his attack upon the dance, Dallmann makes use of the rather typical appeal to Lutheran tradition. Luther is cited as an authority against dancing, though he was barely acquainted

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[12]Ibid., p. 350.

with this form of social activity. Because Luther was critical of couples turning around in a circle in public, Dallmann interprets this as a blanket indictment of the modern round dance. He is less severe in commenting on the square dance, although the same general arguments can be applied against it.[13] The appeal to Biblical material is very limited, and is heavily dependent upon the way in which it is interpreted. A very strong appeal is made in behalf of exemplary Lutheranism. Since they attach such great importance to purity of doctrine, loyal Lutherans must be careful not to discredit the pure doctrine by the negative example of dancing. This would only discredit the Lutheran Church in the eyes of other denominations. Missouri Synod Lutherans must be even more scrupulous, because they are setting an example for other Lutheran synods. Dancing would be a special threat to the maintenance of orthodox doctrine.[14] Ultimately, by a unique process of rationalization, almost all of the ills of society are somehow traced either directly or indirectly to dancing.

Dallmann's attack against the theater utilizes a similar approach. Almost everyone who has ever condemned the theater from ancient times to the present is quoted as a responsible

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[13]William Dallmann, The Dance, (Chicago: American Lutheran Publication Board, 1895), pp. 7-11.

[14]Ibid., pp. 38-42.

authority. In a book of 112 pages, only five are devoted to actual Biblical evidence. Amid some exhortations to avoid worldliness and support for worldly enterprises, the arguments again depend largely upon logical deductions of what the Scriptures have to say.[15] A similar problem of strained interpretation is encountered when Dallmann attempts to present a uniquely Lutheran viewpoint on the theater. The problem is compounded by the fact that Luther has nothing to say against modern dramatics. In appealing to examples from Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism, he collects only enough information to fill three pages. C. F. W. Walther is regarded as a major authority in defining the theater as a threat to true and vital Christianity.[16]

Unlike the synodical pronouncements on economic issues which ultimately fade into the background, statements condemning the dance and the theater (later the motion picture) continue well into the Twentieth Century. The special focus on these two issues can be understood in light of the Pietism which characterized the Saxon immigrants. Of additional significance is the way in which these issues are related to the maintenance of pure doctrine. The faith of the individual

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[15] William Dallmann, The Theater, (Chicago: American Lutheran Publication Board, 1895), pp. 66-69.

[16] Ibid., pp. 101-106.

as well as the public witness to the orthodoxy of the Missouri are jeopardized by people who engage in worldly practices.[17]

Two other factors contributed to this conservatism in practice which accompanied the Synod's pattern for uncompromising doctrinal strictness. Without the traditional restraints of European family and village life, many immigrants were tempted to lead undisciplined lives. The missionary pastor would often encounter situations which required a clean-up campaign. He was therefore forced by circumstances to condemn certain types of conduct among his parishioners, a position which often was incompatible with the attitudes he may have derived in his training. Among these were the dancing and drinking which were commonly a part of weddings, picnics, and other festive occasions.[18] It was also true that the pastors from Europe who were willing to work in the harsh, primitive conditions of the American frontier tended to be men of greater zeal and with stricter standards of conduct than many of their fellow-clergy who chose to remain in the comfortable, secure environment offered by the European state church. This also explains why so many of these candidates were obtained from independent missionary societies.[19]

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[17]Meier and Mayer, op. cit., p. 350.

[18]Luebke, "Immigrant Factor," p. 25.

[19]Ibid., p. 26.

The Synod continued to assert its independence even in its ethical conservatism. It never attempted to organize or to follow crusades against that which it opposed. Other Protes- denominations were regarded with suspicion even though certain ethical concerns clearly overlapped. The church body reacted negatively to the moralism common to American Protestantism. The Puritan heritage manifested itself in sabbatarianism, temperance movements, and other reformist tendencies; all this had little appeal for confessional Lutherans. Rationalism was repellent because of the situation which the Saxons had fled in Germany. A bias against Roman Catholicism resulted in a strong anti-liturgical tendency. Emotionalism was offensive because of the Methodist frontier missionary who was a strong competitor for the German immigrant. Methodism's anti-intellectual revivalist techniques were especially regarded with disdain.[20]

Fraternal orders, lodges, and other secret societies were also strongly opposed. The motives for such opposition stemmed unquestionably from theological grounds, yet Missourians were quick to recognize that the appeal of lodgery was strongly social and economic. On the basis of this particular issue, the caution against life insurance was finally rescinded. In

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[20] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

order to fight fire with fire, the Synod chose the lesser of two evils. Several associations were formed by conservative Lutheran groups to halt a defection to lodges that were selling fraternal life insurance. Because of an uncompromising stand on this issue, people had to choose between either remaining with the church or taking advantage of some of the attractive retirement and disability benefits that lodges were able to offer. The Aid Association for Lutherans, with its home office in Appleton, Wisconsin, was specifically organized to serve Missouri and Wisconsin Synod members. A stated purpose for its organization was to make fraternal life insurance available so that the possibility of lodge membership might be forestalled.[21]

Isolation and the insistence upon truth supported by a view of the inerrancy of the Scriptures continued into the early Twentieth Century. Orthodoxy had developed into a system defining the Missouri Synod's faith, functions, and its relationship to others who claimed to be Christian. The individual was imprisoned in an intellectually coherent framework created primarily by the great orthodox theologians of the Seventeenth Century. They were regarded as the competent interpreters of the Bible and the Confessions, even though their authority was

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[21] Paul W. Spaude, The Lutheran Church under American Influence, (Burlington: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1943), pp. 138-139.

not given equal ranking to these two primary doctrinal sources. Contemporary theologians and theologies were either ignored or categorized together as threats to the pure faith received from the Holy Scriptures and adequately systematized by Lutheran Orthodoxy.[22] This Orthodoxy became even more militant because the First World War was considered to be a sign of the impending end of the world. Defense of the truth required a separatism from all who were in error. Total doctrinal agreement was essential before there could be any cooperative ventures with other church bodies.[23]

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[22]Pannkoke, op. cit., p. 20. While Pannkoke was a student at the St. Louis seminary, the libraries of deceased ministers were frequently auctioned. Most of the volumes were from the Age of Orthodoxy. He relates how, early in this century, the courses on the history of theology arbitrarily stopped with the year 1800. The orthodox theologians were regarded as the one great source of theological truth, to the virtual exclusion of everything else. In personal conversations with faculty colleagues, I discovered that this spirit of suspicion was still present in their student days. Dean Paul Gabbert, who graduated in 1942, remembers one year in which there were no textbooks. The courses simply consisted of lectures on the professors' printed notes!

[23]J. H. Horstmann, editor of the Evangelical Herald, wrote a series of articles in 1919 and 1920 in which he characterizes Methodism and Missouri Synod Lutheranism as the two major barriers to Christian unity. Both are said to represent unhealthy extremes. Methodists are condemned for attempting to create moral autocracy, while Missouri Synod Lutherans are challenged for their doctrinal autocracy. (J. H. Horstmann, A Vital Problem in American Protestantism, [St. Louis: The Evangelical Herald, 1919-1920], p. 31.)

Of equal importance to this separation from doctrinal error was the proper understanding of the church's role in society. The purpose of the Gospel was not the redemption of the social order. The true mission of the church was concern for saving souls. The two realms, church and state, the other-worldly and the this-worldly, were distinct and completely separate. This focus on personal salvation fostered an attitude of extreme individualism in the Synod. There was little appreciation for the social self. To solve pressing social problems, the conversion of the individual was of primary importance. There was also little understanding of the complexities of the social order in which an individual might become enmeshed. Social problems could be "solved" without reference to actual facts, with simplistic abstract principles. Secular culture was regarded with suspicion because it was inherently evil.[24]

It is probably true that in the area of education and theology, immigrant Lutheranism in America had reached intellectual stagnation by 1915. Most of the clergy were products of cultural inbreeding, even though many were second and third generation descendants of original immigrants. Few pastors had a university education. Because of the fear of a larger

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[24]Pannkoke, op. cit., p. 26.

vision and new ideas, students were actually encouraged not to attend secular universities. Most of the professors at the seminaries and the preparatory schools were themselves products of the system. In this intellectually barren period, the chief concern was to guard and reproduce the past in spite of the revolutionary changes sweeping over America and Europe. Even after World War I and despite the transformation from German into English, the repristination theology of the Missouri Synod remained influential.[25]

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[25] Ibid., p. 34. The utilization of legalistic pietism in order to preserve orthodoxy is seen in the following school rules which were designed for the control of ministerial students. The house rules for Concordia College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, included the following in 1908:

> "11. Open bathing is strictly forbidden.
> 13. Eighteen year olds with written permission may smoke. The chewing of tobacco without exception is forbidden.
> 16. All students are strictly forbidden to visit taverns and theaters. Card playing is also forbidden."

In 1912-1913 the house rules for St. Paul's College, Concordia, Missouri, included no prohibition against card playing, but they were even more strict. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

> "The students must
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> 6. not buy books or order periodicals without previously securing permission.
> 10. not attend dances or theatrical presentations, visit taverns or public eating and drinking places, nor frequent restaurants.
> 11. not associate with those who are ungodly, hostile to the church, or who have left the church. All students are also forbidden to have relationships with girls other than those in the open association of the family." ("College Rules in the Early 1900's," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXXII, [July 1959], pp. 52-53.)

CHAPTER III

BETWEEN THE WARS

The Missouri Synod in 1920 bore a striking resemblance to the Synod at the end of the Civil War. In the areas of theology and practice, social acclimatization and political philosophy, there seemed to be no essential change. There was some discernible progress in the realm of economic issues; practices which had been condemned in the past were now accepted. The effects of the language transition did not become evident until the second and third quarters of the Twentieth Century. World War I had been instrumental in ending large-scale German immigration. By 1920 the Synod began to show signs that it was accepting the challenge of English home mission work, and a commitment to the foreign mission as well.[1]

Confessional Lutheranism continued to demonstrate that it was not free from the sectarianism it so abhorred. It was often very uncharitable, and the old Lutheran slogans, "the Word alone," "grace alone," and "faith alone," were sometimes strained to the point of heresy. "The Word" often meant the Word twisted to fit into the intricate scheme of Lutheran scholastic dogmatics; "faith alone" was meant as intellectual assent to the propositions of dogmatic abstraction; and "grace

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[1]Meier and Mayer, op. cit., p. 376.

alone" meant grace for the individual capable of fitting into the system. This frequently was associated with an insensitivity to human personality that was wholly inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel.[2]

An intellectual religion tends to foster pride. In wanting to be right, it may do violence to the law of love. It fears enthusiasm and sentiment and is often unimaginative. In providing a comfortable security for the true believer, it frequently fails to grasp the heroic adventure of Christian living. Even in the revolutionary era of the 1920's and continuing into the 1930's, the Synod continued to carefully spell out the do's and don't's of the Christian faith, and in life it insisted upon safely following the letter.[3]

The periodical literature of the church body serves to illustrate the Synod's penchant for expressing itself on almost every issue. Every new invention or discovery, whether it be the automobile, the radio, the motion picture, or even Einstein's theory of relativity, is subjected to careful scrutiny and criticism. Between 1920 and 1950 two dominant personalities served as editorial voices for the Missouri Synod. Both were professors at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The older of the

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[2]Leigh D. Jordahl, "Schmucker and Walther: A Study of Christian Response to American Culture," in The Future of the American Church, ed. by Philip J. Hefner, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), pp. 77-78.

[3]Pannkoke, op. cit., p. 29.

two, Dr. Theodore Graebner, served as the editor of The Lutheran Witness for a period of thirty-six years, from 1913 to 1949. Between 1928 and 1950 he also served as the associate editor of the Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly. A prolific writer in many fields, he influenced several generations of clergy in his thirty-seven year tenure at the St. Louis seminary. Perhaps more renowned because of his flamboyance was Dr. Walter A. Maier who, in addition to his twenty-two years at Concordia Seminary, also served as the speaker on the International Lutheran Hour during the first sixteen years of its existence. Over and above these major responsibilities he managed to hold the editorship of the Walther League Messenger for a period of twenty-four years, from 1920 to 1944. Both men died in 1950.[4]

It is no overstatement to say that these men almost single-handedly molded public opinion through the strong personal sentiments which they expressed in the Synod's printed media. There were many for whom personalistic ethical concerns were no longer of major importance, but the periodical literature edited by Graebner and Maier gave to the Missouri Synod the appearance of a united front on those issues which they chose to criticize. In all fairness, however, it must be noted that such pietistic concerns never received an inordinate amount of

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[4] Erwin L. Lueker, ed., Lutheran Cyclopedia, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), pp. 431 and 467.

coverage in comparison to the other subjects which appeared in print. Occasionally, there were editorial campaigns which attacked certain issues in a spirit of crusading zeal, but there were intervals in which no condemnations appeared for several successive years. Some restraint was imposed by the realization that too much protest would have been a decidedly un-Lutheran attitude.[5]

The modern dance and the motion picture receive most of the critical coverage between 1920 and 1940. Theodore Graebner establishes a basic pattern of protest against dancing in The Lutheran Witness of August 31, 1920. This general critique is essentially reiterated again and again in the period up to World War II. The "unspeakable jazz-shimmy" is singled out for special criticism. Graebner points out that the old dances such as the waltz were warned against in the synodical literature of the past, yet these were objectionable only because they were sources of temptation. The modern dance is not simply temptation; it is undeniably indulgence in fleshly lust, and those who participate are guilty of immorality. Christians

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[5]J. H. Horstmann regards this attitude as a typical example of Missouri Synod arrogance. To demonstrate this he quotes this excerpt from The Lutheran Witness of March 4, 1919: "The faithful Lutheran Church is the only Church that has no childish, minute pietistic stipulations. We cannot be thankful enough that God has so graciously without our merit guarded us against this 'negative piffle' of Sabbatarianism, bone-dry prohibition, immersionism, and other little prohibitions that are almost as bad as some of the rules of the ascetics of the Dark Ages." (Horstmann, "A Vital Problem," p. 29.)

dare not defile themselves with such abominations.[6] Six articles against dancing appear in The Lutheran Witness of 1921; six more in the issues for the year 1922. The line of argument essentially remains unchanged. Apparently some misunderstanding eventually developed over the types of dances which were being proscribed. The editor subsequently advises his readers that the evil referred to is to be found in all so-called round dances, whether they are held in private homes, public dance halls, or at country-wide barn dances.[7] In spite of the fact that there is no specific commandment against dancing, it is wrong because the chief motive for engaging in it is to satisfy the lust of the flesh.[8] This matter of motivation is, of course, the weak link in this argument. Who is to say that it cannot simply be an innocent pastime?

Condemnations against dancing continue into the next decade and generally deplore its negative influences upon the morality of the church's youth. Jitterbugging and swing dancing are seen as sure signs of deterioration in the human mind, heralding a new period of decadence in human history.[9] As late as 1940,

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[6] [Theodore] G [raebner], "The Modern Dance," The Lutheran Witness, XXXIX (31 Aug. 1920), p. 280.

[7] Ibid., XLV (23 Feb. 1926), p. 51.

[8] Ibid., XLVI (28 June 1927), pp. 218-219.

[9] Ibid., LVIII (5 Sept. 1939), p. 302.

The Lutheran Witness cites the kind of questionable statistical evidence which suggests "that up to 95% of 'fallen girls and women' directly attribute their plight to the modern dance."[10]

The motion picture almost parallels the modern dance as an insidious source of evil and corruption among the young. Although the theater is also still a target for condemnation, the majority of broadsides after 1921 are fired against the film. At first the attacks are somewhat emotional and unsophisticated, but eventually the role of the motion picture for achieving positive educational goals is also recognized. The editor is particularly concerned about the interaction which eventually takes place among the questionable entertainment media. It almost seems as if the radio is superseding the motion picture as an evil influence because of the vogue which broadcasting has given to the dance. Congregations are called upon to do their utmost to provide wholesome entertainment as a means of combatting such depravity.[11]

The year 1934 witnessed an unusually severe reaction to the movie. A series of articles appeared in support of the general principle that such an institution must ultimately

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[10] Ibid., LIX (12 Nov. 1940), p. 386.

[11] "Dance-Crazy," ibid., LIII (17 July 1934), p. 257.

have harmful effects upon the life of the nation. Two factors are especially significant. There is a recognition that the movie has become the strongest educational and character-molding agency in the nation, far surpassing the Church, the school, or the newspaper. Secondly, its influence is largely evil. It has done immeasurable harm to the moral standards of American youth.[12]

Throughout this period The Lutheran Witness also contains critical evaluations of popular music and jazz, and warnings against certain magazines, novels, and the indiscriminate use of the lending library. All of the criticism is not unjustified. There is something very contemporary about indictments against radio broadcasting, which especially deplore the moronic character of some commercial advertising. Nor can we really fault the Synod for warning its youth against some of the dangers of "night-club" culture and the excessive use of alcohol. In one unusual instance Graebner calls for an activist response in the form of a boycott against McCall's Magazine. He protests the serialization of Hendrick Van Loon's The Story of the Bible, and calls upon congregations to cancel their subscriptions and inform the editor of the offense to Christianity involved in the choice of such an author for such a subject.

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[12] Ibid., LIII (8 May 1934), p. 180.

The offense centers around the fact that Van Loon accepts the evolutionary hypothesis. This call for action is rather uncharacteristic in light of the traditional quietism of the Missouri Synod.[13]

Unlike The Lutheran Witness, which was drab and unimaginative in its basic format, the Walther League Messenger shows the creative talent of Dr. Walter A. Maier. Although it was specifically designed for the Synod's young adults, it was laid out in an attractive arrangement comprising a broad range of topics. In its variety it sought to educate as well as to counsel. Lutheran history and culture, the Christian response to world affairs, all these and more were reflected in its pages. Because of the close association of Maier and Graebner, there is a parallel development of ethical conservatism in both magazines. In addition to the characteristic prohibitions against dancing, parties, cheap literature, and the motion picture, Maier also attacks the use of cosmetics, trends in clothing styles, birth control, gambling, careers for women, and the low tastes of the American public in general. Some of Dr. Maier's major concerns are reflected in a set of twelve "New Year's Resolutions" which appear in the Walther League Messenger in January, 1925. He appeals to the youth of the

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[13]"Another Magazine to be Avoided," ibid., XLI (7 Nov. 1922), p. 362.

church to take these pledges seriously. Three of the twelve are particularly significant:

> (5) I pledge myself not to purchase or read any magazines which either openly or by insinuation refer to immorality.
>
> (6) I promise that I shall never knowingly witness a moving picture or stage production which in any degree pictures or glorifies the transgressions against the Sixth Commandment.
>
> (7) I will not be found in dance halls, those graveyards of purity, where sin and shame stalk unchecked.[14]

None of these resolutions totally forbid a person from pursuing these activities. Nevertheless, controls are to be established and maintained.

Maier addresses himself to such a wide variety of issues that dancing and the motion picture are not singled out for special condemnation. The dance is regarded as an undesirable form of entertainment, especially when so many positive recreational pursuits are available. His strongest statement against dancing comes late in his career as editor. Conscious of a perceptible change in public attitudes, he makes reference to the fact that the issue in 1915 was one of frequenting places of public dancing or dancing in private. Now the issue has become one of dancing in the churches. He laments the

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[14]Walter A. Maier, "Keep Thyself Pure", Walther League Messenger, XXXIII (January 1925), p. 312.

trend in some congregations where dancing has become an accepted activity because it signals the rejection of the Missouri Synod's traditional attitude. He concludes that the dance still involves too many unsavory aspects. Therefore, the Synod, especially in its own buildings, cannot sanction any pastime that has such potential for moral and spiritual danger.[15]

Maier's strongest attack against the motion picture appears in 1934, the same year in which The Lutheran Witness editorializes so vehemently on this subject. He is happy to note the decline in attendance at movie theaters throughout the nation. The depression, increasing outdoor amusements, and the Legion of Decency in concert with Protestantism have all contributed to this decline. Now Maier calls upon the Christian home and Christian young people to engage in a boycott in order to further slash box-office receipts. This should be carried out by scrupulous efforts to avoid any film that even has the suggestion of the salacious. He concludes by stating that the Walther League Messenger will begin to classify and review films in future issues.[16]

There is hardly a subject on which Maier does not have something to say. He speaks out on many moral issues which

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[15] "Shall the Churches Sponsor Dancing?" WLM, Vol. 49 (October 1940), pp. 62-63.

[16] "Declining Film Attendance," WLM, Vol. 43 (August-September 1934), p. 12. A feature for the review and classification of films is not introduced until 1947.

all churches have traditionally opposed, but his ethical attitudes often manifest a Lutheran selectivity. He is opposed to the use of tobacco and the consumption of liquor in excessive amounts, but feels that the moderate use of these does not lie in the field of morals. His arguments are based on "scriptural caution" and stress the necessity of avoiding the extremes of fanaticism and Puritanism.[17]

In some instances his viewpoints are rather narrow. On one occasion he condemns the action of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America for appointing a committee "to discover ways for church groups to help in the development of the drama and create wider appreciation of the dramatic art." This is regarded as contrary to the true work of the church, especially because it suggests an alliance with supposedly corrupt theatrical interests. He also ventures the opinion that young people are not to produce plays in the church as a part of their youth program.[18] The individualistic theology of the Missouri Synod is reflected in almost all of his opinions. He is strongly opposed to tendencies which make the church in America into an agency for the Social Gospel and for social service. There is no warrant for the Lutheran

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[17]"Look Not...Upon the Wine," WLM, Vol. 46 (October 1937), pp. 80-81.

[18]"The Dynamite of Dramatics," WLM, XXXIV (May 1926), p. 522.

Church to take an official stand on political and social issues because its primary mission is to save souls.[19]

In any review of his editorial opinions, Walter A. Maier emerges as a complex personality. He was not a typical product of the synodical system because his graduate degrees were earned at Harvard. Nor was he the product of midwestern rural isolation, having grown up in the city of Boston. Despite these background influences, he clearly went beyond the sometimes limited area in which the Missouri Synod sought to express itself. Because of his strong defense of Biblical authority and the deity of Christ, some have conjectured that he was influenced by the Fundamentalist movement which flourished in some sections of American Protestantism between 1909 and 1930. In a certain sense he was the Missouri Synod's only ambassador and its only informational outlet to Fundamentalism. As the speaker on the Lutheran Hour, he enjoyed great popularity in the Fundamentalist camp because of his outspoken attacks against theological liberalism. Yet this hardly supports the allegation that he absorbed many of their ideas. His impact was limited to creating a more friendly and sympathetic climate between the two groups.[20] The Fundamentalist movement had little opportunity

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[19]"Sold!--For a Glass of Beer," WLM, XXXVII (August-September 1928), p. 47.

[20]Rudnick, op. cit., p. 102.

to exert a substantial influence on Maier or the Missouri Synod. Channels of communication were too limited and indirect. A major reason for relative isolation in spite of shared concerns is the fact that the Synod was surrounded by a wall of resistance to non-Lutheran ideas and emphases. Lutheran Orthodoxy, not Fundamentalism, was the primary source of the Synod's ultra-conservatism.[21]

The Lutheran Witness and the Walther League Messenger were clearly designed for mass appeal to lay readers. They were not the only synodical periodicals which expressed concern over contemporary moral issues, nor were Graebner and Maier the only men who voiced opinions in this area. To a lesser degree, such concerns were reflected in the Theological Monthly, the official scholarly journal of the Synod, edited by the faculty of the St. Louis seminary. It is true, of course, that such criticism is essentially limited to brief editorial commentary. One would expect that a theological journal would not devote too many lead articles to a discussion of such subjects.

In a somewhat uncharacteristic departure from pure theology, W. H. T. Dau, later to become president of Valparaiso University, writes an article entitled "Sexual Ethics in Present-Day Germany." In his assessment the major cause for decadence in post-war German sexual attitudes can be attributed

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[21] Ibid., pp. 112-113.

to the detrimental effects of apostasy from the divine norms of pure doctrine and holy living.[22] Admittedly naive and simplistic in its interpretation, this article underscores the outdated rhetoric about doctrinal purity which still prevailed in synodical attitudes. The following year Dau again devotes a lead article to a lengthy condemnation of Stephen Vincent Benet's King David. He deplores the selection of this poem by the Nation magazine as the prize poem of 1923. Not only is it an offense against common decency, it is also to be regarded as a serious attack upon revealed religion and Christianity.[23]

Another individual who devotes his editorial attention to ethical issues is Dr. J. T. Mueller, a leading dogmatician at the St. Louis seminary. His special concerns are immoral literature, the evil of dancing, and the motion picture. In a rather severe review of the Cecil B. DeMille movie, "King of Kings," he writes:

> It will not make believers. The Church would not suffer loss if such films were eliminated; not the movies, but the Churches of Christ are commissioned to preach the Gospel of the King of kings.[24]

The Theological Monthly was a militant journal. Its

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[22] Theological Monthly, II (June 1922), p. 161.

[23] W. H. T. Dau, "Crowned Dirt and Profanity," Theological Monthly, III (October-November 1923), pp. 289-294.

[24] J. T. Mueller, "The Movies and Religion," ibid., VIII (March 1928), p. 86.

writers were constantly preoccupied with defending the Bible by waging war against science, evolution, masonry, modernism, unionism, divorce, and Catholicism. These issues were also debated in the other periodicals. All of this indicates that the Missouri Synod was not yet inclined to permit the wall between itself and the larger world outside to be breached.

In 1930 the theological journal changes slightly in format and also in name. It becomes the Concordia Theological Monthly, the form in which it is still known today. This change is accompanied by a marked decline in comment on ethical issues. Only in isolated instances is this general trend reversed. One rather surprising fact is that there are still many articles in German. One of these bears the title "Tanz und Kirchendisziplin" and is identified as a fragment from the Protocol of the Wisconsin Pastoral Conference of 1862. The article advocates strong discipline toward the worldly modern dance which so clearly is a sin. Those who demonstrate their worldliness by dancing should be excluded from the Christian fellowship.[25] Since this excerpt is included without any commentary whatsoever, one wonders if it is simply an item of nostalgic reminiscence.

One man whose conservatism is very much in evidence is

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[25]"Tanz und Kirchendisziplin," Concordia Theological Monthly, IV (April 1933), pp. 281-284.

Dr. P. E. Kretzmann. In a major article entitled "Biblical Ethics Concerning Young People," he makes some pertinent observations. Careers for women are regarded as a tampering with God's order established in Holy Writ. The highest vocation and calling to which a Christian woman may still aspire is to be a devoted wife and mother. Another interesting item of isolationist theorizing is his advice to avoid social contacts with unbelievers. This caution is to be observed by limiting one's involvement in activities such as parties and even sporting events. In keeping with the inviolability of the Sixth Commandment, young women are reminded to keep their personal adornment to an absolute minimum. Because the Bible denounces all physical intimacies, church youth are not to engage in kissing, petting, or dancing. Any physical contact which tends to arouse is clearly sinful.[26]

An article by Martin S. Sommer also serves to demonstrate the narrowness in the Synod's attitudes. In writing on the subject of "The Pastor and Secular Literature," Sommer feels constrained to remind the clergy that the time spent in reading secular literature is never to exceed the amount of time spent in reading the Scriptures. For the pastor's literary enrichment, he either lists volumes from the classical period or the

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[26] Concordia Theological Monthly, IV (September 1933), pp. 644-652.

classics of English and American literature in the Nineteenth Century. All contemporary literature is conspicuously ignored.[27]

While all this data does not prove conclusively that every one in the Missouri Synod shared such opinions, it does suggest the official attitude which was permitted to appear in print. The viewpoints which were expressed were opinions and interpretations of older men, but this is to be expected in a system that was still patriarchal. Opposing views were not printed because they would not have passed through the system of synodical censorship. While the old remained firmly in control, a new Americanized generation was beginning to emerge in this period. This group formed the vanguard of the change in attitudes that was soon to take place.

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[27] Ibid., VII (September 1936), pp. 677-684. Martin Sommer was also the co-editor of The Lutheran Witness.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERIOD OF CHANGE

One of the major changes that can be observed in the period between 1940 and 1960 is the emergence of diverse opinion. The united front which once existed in public print is no longer regarded as essential. Synodical periodicals begin to show some independent reflection, and in some instances they dare to take different stands on the same issues. As the church is compelled to look more and more into the future, the past is examined with objective detachment, and certain portions of synodical history lose their mythical character. The old opinions do not give ground easily. In some areas, they even enjoy a brief renaissance. Yet it is apparent at the end of this twenty-year time span that the Missouri Synod in 1960 is a different church body from what it was in 1940.

At the time of the American involvement in World War II, Theodore Graebner and Walter A. Maier are still exerting a dominant influence on the periodical media. For a brief period, the gathering storm clouds of war tended to overshadow issues in personal morality. In 1942 there are no major articles or editorial commentaries on ethical concerns in either The Lutheran Witness or the Walther League Messenger. The Concordia Theological Monthly also reflects an increasing

scholarly sophistication which never again condescends to the level of pedestrian debate on minute ethical issues. This is now left entirely in the domain of the popular magazines.

Editorial commentary in The Lutheran Witness is still highly opinionated. Readers are reminded that the basic issue in dancing still centers around the fact that it arouses sexual excitement and abnormal sex development. Because of the ruinous influence of the dance, the Synod has always seen fit to oppose it.[1] The fact remains, however, that this is Graebner's last statement on the subject of dancing until his retirement in 1949.

The motion picture overshadows the dance as a moral issue in this period. Graebner departs from his usual policy of generalization to specifically indict a film entitled "Heaven Can Wait." He considers this film to be so blasphemous and insulting that one should hesitate to see other future productions of the Twentieth Century Fox Company. Christians should resent godless actors and actresses and a godless director who "have fun with Judgment Day."[2]

In the following year, Graebner comments that a positive

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[1] "Christian Attitude Over Against the Dance," The Lutheran Witness, LXII (7 Dec. 1943), p. 399.

[2] "Blasphemous Once, Entertainment Today," TLW, LXII (9 Nov. 1943), p. 368.

change has taken place in the motion picture industry. While vice and crime were formerly glorified, now it is decent, upright people who are represented as successful and as reaping the benefits of the good life. He notes, however, that even though they are morally improved, doctrinally they still lie. There are no references to God, the Church, or the Bible. Man is portrayed as capable of moral perfection through the utilization of his own natural powers. This is the great lie of the movies, the doctrine of self-righteousness which teaches men to trust in their own merits and to disregard God's plan of salvation and the redeeming merits of Jesus Christ.[3] It seems that the movie industry just cannot win the unqualified approval of the Missouri Synod.

One must take note of the good, along with that which is not. Some of Graebner's later editorials take parents to task for allowing their impressionable young children the free run of local movie houses. He admits that the church is incapable of exerting tight censorship and control, and consequently appeals to the Christian home to create a positive atmosphere for proper growth and development. During the final three months of 1947, Graebner speaks out against the quality of literature being purveyed by book clubs,[4] radio thrillers and

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[3] TLW, LXIII (21 Nov. 1944), p. 377.

[4] "The Book Club Virus," TLW, LXVI (7 Oct. 1947), p. 325.

murder pictures,[5] and the trashy contents of many modern magazines.[6] Following this succession of condemnations, Dr. Graebner remains silent on such issues until his voluntary retirement.

The Lutheran Witness undergoes an interesting metamorphosis after Graebner's retirement in 1949. For almost five years the periodical does not address itself to concerns for personal morality until the appearance in February 1954 of a new feature entitled "What's the Answer?" This column continues into the 1960's; and under the authorship of Otto Sohn of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, we note a return to traditional Missouri Synod conservatism. In his debut as a commentator on ethical matters, Dr. Sohn again approaches the subject of dancing. He reiterates the historic arguments against this activity and strongly urges Christians to seek other forms of entertainment.[7] This statement is apparently challenged because Sohn must address himself to this same issue two more times that year. In response to a question about square dancing, he notes that his objections may not apply since the close embrace of individuals is not involved.

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[5] "Being Taught by the Movies," TLW, LXVI (2 Dec. 1947), p. 392.

[6] "The Anti-Christian Trend in the Modern Magazines," TLW, LXVI (30 Dec. 1947), p. 424.

[7] Otto Sohn, "Social Dancing Sinful?" TLW, LXXIII (2 Feb. 1954), p. 45.

He leaves it up to the individual congregation to decide whether this type of dancing may take place in the church fellowship hall. In his opinion, however, such activities cannot enhance the church's name in the community.[8] This viewpoint is essentially repeated when Dr. Sohn states that square dancing, card playing, and beer drinking are all innocent pastimes if properly engaged in. Nevertheless, all such activities should be kept away from the church premises.[9]

Following this initial barrage, the subject of dancing is treated two more times. In 1957 Sohn still feels that modern dancing merits strong condemnation. One may be sure that Christ would not condone the sinful worldly dance with its close embrace because it offends against Christian virtue.[10] As late as 1960, his position remains unchanged. Responding to the issue of whether high school students should be permitted and encouraged to attend public dances, he again cites the objectionable feature of the close embrace of the opposite sex outside of marriage. Christian young men and women have no right to hold each other so closely. This is a violation of God-willed modesty, whether done on a dance floor, or a park bench, on a sofa, in a car, or in any other place. Those

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[8] The Lutheran Witness, LXXIII (27 April 1954), p. 147.

[9] Ibid., LXXIII (26 Oct. 1954), p. 367.

[10] Ibid., LXXVI (2 July 1957), p. 329.

who feel otherwise are encouraged to examine the scriptural statements on lust.[11] Sohn's conservative attitudes clearly remain unchanged, yet it is interesting that he never condemns the motion picture in his column.

A very different trend can be discerned in the Walther League Messenger. Just prior to our national involvement in World War II, personalistic ethical concerns are almost completely overshadowed by articles advocating isolationism and condemning communism. After Pearl Harbor the concerns of a nation at war become so dominant that there are no major articles on isolated issues of personal morality, aside from general warnings against wartime moral laxity. When Walter A. Maier lays down the mantle of editorial leadership in 1944, major changes lie just over the horizon. In 1947 the magazine changes its format and begins to include a special feature containing film reviews and classifications prepared by the Protestant Motion Picture Council.

1947 is also the centennial year of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. To commemorate this one hundreth anniversary celebration, a series of doctrinal essays are commissioned by the church body. One of these takes note of changing attitudes and laments the fact that members of the Synod have become

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[11] Ibid., Vol. 79 (6 Sept. 1960), p. 471.

more worldly-minded. Moral decay has permeated modern literature, the stage, and the screen. These trends are clearly the results of an unbelieving attitude so characteristic of the times.[12]

Before one may further evaluate the developmental changes in the Walther League Messenger, it is necessary to briefly digress to observe another unusual phenomenon. In the early 1950's, the spirit of Theodore Graebner enjoys a brief rebirth. A revised edition of one of his earlier works, The Borderland of Right and Wrong, is published in 1951; and it is heavily advertised in the popular synodical periodicals. Since it was first printed in the very different cultural milieu of the mid-1930's, this reprint represents a classic example of theological and ethical repristination. Graebner expresses himself on such a wide variety of ethical issues that only a random sampling is possible within the limitations of this study.

The book attempts to demonstrate how the attitudes of traditional Lutheranism have represented a "golden mean" in comparison to other Christian groupings. This can be seen in one of Graebner's concluding remarks.

> So it has been rightly said that compared with the legalism and pietism of some Protestant bodies, the

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[12]Carl S. Mundinger, "Dangers Confronting the Church Today," The Abiding Word, ed. by Theodore Laetsch, (3 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945-60), I, pp. 482-507.

> Lutheran Church is to an eminent degree liberal. I would mention here such subjects as the use of alcoholic beverages, the use of tobacco, Sabbath laws, the freedom of Christians to serve in war, and many other problems of conduct.[13]

Despite this Lutheran avoidance of extremes, Graebner expresses an understanding for those groups of Christians who have imposed stricter standards of ethical conduct. In voicing concern over the theater, he mentions that there has always been conflict between the Church and the stage because of the questionable conduct of theatrical people and the numerous instances of moral offense in both plot and dialog. Those church bodies which forbid members to practice the acting profession and ban attendance at plays can hardly be faulted. Nonetheless, such policies are not Lutheran and cannot be supported by the clear teachings of Scripture.[14] Although pastors and teachers are to issue warnings against movies and the dangers involved in attending them, the church is not in a position to forbid attendance as a part of one's Christian duty.[15]

Of all the issues which are discussed, the subject of dancing receives the most detailed examination. The condemnations are extremely severe. The modern dance "is as plainly a device of Satan as anything in the catalog of human nasti-

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[13]Theodore Graebner, The Borderland of Right and Wrong, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), p. 168.

[14]Ibid., p. 81.

[15]Ibid., p. 83.

ness."[16] Four aspects of the dance are particularly offensive: the tango style which is basic to all modern forms; the accompanying syncopated music known as jazz; the pervasive night club or dance hall atmosphere; and the air of seduction which constantly surrounds this activity. Folk-dancing is to be regarded as an exception. Only an extreme pietism would condemn the enjoyment to be found in the old schottisches and quadrilles.[17]

Graebner realizes only too well that times are changing, and is therefore compelled to conclude his discussion on this defensive note:

> We know full well that many who have read this chapter will not agree with it. We are convinced that some who agree with it will not act in accordance with it. There are those who have testified, as we do, for years and have seen no results. But if our fathers were right in complaining of the comparatively modest dances of fifty and a hundred years ago because of their evil effect on morals, what kind of church, what kind of churchmen, would we be not to warn against the evil inherent in the modern dance?[18]

The condemnation against modern dancing is clearly unequivocal. There simply is no such thing as compromise based upon moderation. This is what differentiates the dance issue from some of the other concerns which Graebner includes in his book. Smoking and the chewing of tobacco, the consumption of

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[16] Ibid., p. 113.

[17] Ibid., pp. 113-115

[18] Ibid., p. 134.

alcoholic beverages, card playing, or membership in labor unions are not in themselves sinful. They can be, however, if we give such a disproportionate amount of time to them that some of the weighty issues of life are neglected. Anything immoderate, extreme, or excessive is contrary to the spiritual principles that should govern the Christian life. This even includes such innocent pastimes as golf or basketball. Excess in any area can create an idolatry of dominant interest which always threatens to supersede the Christian faith.[19]

It is the Walther League Messenger which eventually repudiates this conservative stance on dancing. In the decade between 1950 and 1960 the magazine develops an editorial sophistication that demonstrates that a new generation of leadership is starting to come into its own. This fact can be seen in a response given to the question of whether or not the Missouri Synod should have an organization similar to the Roman Catholic Legion of Decency. It focuses on the issue of the censorship of questionable books and movies. The article takes a stand against the creation of such an agency and cites the following reasons:

> In the first place where would we find an individual or even a board with sufficient wisdom to determine exactly what is good for everyone else? In the next place, to forbid something is to make it that much more attractive

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[19] Ibid., p. 90.

> for many people. In another place, who has the right to tell you and me exactly what we are to read and see? And in a final place, while there is a distressing heap of filth on our newstands and in our theaters, aren't our people intelligent enough to recognize it? And should we not rather devote our energy to help them to be strong and sensible enough to pass by on the other side?[20]

This statement represents a significant milestone in dealing a death-blow to the so-called "official attitude" which was so characteristic of the Synod. By finally giving credit to the intelligence of the average layman, the author of this article seems to implicitly suggest that the time has come for the seminary faculty to be gently pushed from its lofty height of unique censorial insight.

A similar attitude is reflected some years later in a special editorial by Alfred P. Klausler, who somewhat reluctantly feels that he must add his opinion to the controversy developing over the film Baby Doll. He refers to the fact that Cardinal Spellman has condemned it and has forbidden members of his diocese to see it. Dean James Pike is cited as an authority who does not agree with the severe reaction of Spellman. Klausler reacts to the film by relating that it left him depressed and frightened. He is depressed over the fact that the Gospel had never reached the people portrayed in Baby Doll. He is frightened because the average uncritical

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[20] Armin C. Oldsen, "Censor Movies, Plays?" The Walther League Messenger, Vol. 62 (December 1953), p. 29.

movie-goer will accept merely the surface values of the movie and think that the amoral and immoral actions of the characters represent an accepted standard of behavior. He cannot say whether one should or should not see it. One who decides not to, deserves to be commended for not simply giving in to group pressure. One who does should apply his high standards of Christian judgment. He laments the terrible sickness in our civilization which permits playwrights to devote their talents to such depraved themes.[21] This evaluation stands in contrast to the stricter condemnations so characteristic of earlier periods in the history of the Synod.

The dance issue is resolved in the short period between 1955 and 1960. A new feature is introduced into the Walther League Messenger in 1954, similar in format to the column by Otto Sohn in The Lutheran Witness. Entitled "It's Your Problem," it attempts to provide frank answers to questions of personal morality. The writer is Paul G. Hansen, a successful parish pastor and youth counselor. Within a short time it becomes apparent that this represents still another transition from the "ivory-tower" idealism of the past.

Hansen's first comment on dancing follows rather conventional lines. He reminds his readers that the Bible does

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[21]Alfred P. Klausler, "Any Month," WLM, Vol. 65 (March 1957), p. 50. Klausler is currently serving as a commentator on the Protestant religious scene for radio station WINS in New York City.

not contain specific warnings against dancing of any kind. The factor of close embrace with the opposite sex is mentioned as an objectionable feature, but normally this would not be true for square dancing. Even though some churches have adopted square dancing as a normal part of regular youth activities, we must still be careful of possible misunderstandings on the part of other Christians.[22] Slightly more than a year later, Hansen takes the viewpoint that properly chaperoned dances in homes or at school probably arouse no sexual desires at all since the necessity of following a routine demands so much attention.[23] Dances are still not a recommended activity within the church, however. Hansen feels that activities in the youth program should consist of planned recreation that is inclusive, rather than dancing which tends to be socially exclusive. Dancing by Christian young people may still offend others. It cannot be regarded as good wholesome fun because too many actions on the dance floor are apt to be misinterpreted.[24]

The issue of dancing is not raised again until 1959. By this time the magazine is beginning to feature articles about personalities like Soren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

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[22]Paul G. Hansen, "It's Your Problem," WLM, Vol. 63 (April 1955), p. 31.

[23]Ibid., Vol. 65 (September 1956), pp. 5-6.

[24]Ibid., Vol. 66 (September 1957), p. 6.

and Karl Barth. This represents another radical departure from past practice. At one time men such as these would simply have been dismissed as modernists. Responding to a question about "rock n' roll," Hansen states that no type of dance is wrong in itself. Any type of dance can be made wrong, but each person must search his own conscience. When the Bible is silent, the church can only advise. Each congregation may control its own program according to what it feels is best.[25]

A few months later the question is again raised about the legitimacy of dancing in the Missouri Synod. Hansen answers:

> To my knowledge the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has never taken a stand against dancing. The Bible takes no definite stand either. Each Christian (and Christian pastor) must be guided by his own conscience and the Spirit of God. I pray that I have been so guided in whatever I have said or written.[26]

In light of the research covered in this study, such a statement is simply incredible! It does not remain unchallenged for long. One of his readers quickly reminds Hansen of the lengthy condemnation against dancing contained in Graebner's book. He answers this by stating:

> Your quotations from Dr. Graebner's Borderland of Right and Wrong are much appreciated. However, I would much prefer some quotation from Scripture in support of your position that dancing is in itself wrong.[27]

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[25] Ibid., Vol. 67 (April 1959), p. 45.

[26] Ibid., Vol. 68 (October 1959), p. 49.

[27] Ibid., Vol. 68 (January 1960), p. 42.

By disclaiming the opinions of Theodore Graebner on the intrinsic morality of dancing, Hansen also implies that he does not agree with his own counterpart, Otto Sohn, who writes for The Lutheran Witness. One of the signs of positive change is toleration for valid differences of opinion. This is the trend which can now be observed in the officially-sanctioned periodicals of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION AND SUMMARY

The scope of this examination of changing trends has been somewhat limited, but the phenomena underlying such changes are often extremely complex. No single theory could serve as an adequate explanation for the diverse movements involved in such a transition in attitudes. Varying disciplines tend to focus their evaluations upon insights that speak to their respective fields of competence. Therefore, the historian, the sociologist, and the theologian may all interpret common data somewhat differently.

It is not easy to fit the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod into simple categories. This can be demonstrated when we attempt to evaluate the church body according to the sociological categories of <u>elitism</u> and <u>populism</u>, terms which may be understood as American functional equivalents to the European designations of "church" and "sect." The following chart is helpful in attempting to understand such an organizational analysis.

	ELITISM	POPULISM
1.	Church-oriented	Lay-oriented
2.	Church as superimposed reality	Church as association
3.	Theological	Biblicist
4.	Nurture	Conversion

5. Sacramental Moralistic[1]

In the first category, we have a radical laicism emphasizing the equality of all believers in comparison to a functional differentiation in which equality is accepted, but the differences of office and authority determine the organization of religious life. The second category stresses the individual act of association over against the collective essence which is greater than a social compact of individuals. The third grouping contrasts "school divinity" with its interest in philosophical systematization to the attitude which vows to teach nothing that is not in the Bible and to use only language found in the Bible. Difference in membership recruitment is characteristic of the fourth category. The contrast lies between conversion, demanding an individual experience of grace, often emotionally intense, and nurture, consisting of the catechetical indoctrination of the young for whom membership begins at birth. The final grouping emphasizes, in the one instance, that holiness is the achievement of the individual believer under God's grace through a group-enforced rigid discipline. This may also include the idea of perfection and second blessing. In the other, holiness is sacramentally given, although Christians are expected to live in accordance with the grace they have received.[2]

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[1]Karl H. Hertz, "Some Suggestions for a Sociology of American Protestantism," in Neve and Johnson, op. cit., p. 51.

[2]Ibid., pp. 50-51.

The Missouri Synod is primarily elitist, but the influence of populism has made itself felt in the historical record. Under Martin Stephan and C. F. W. Walther we see varying crosscurrents which reflect both attitudes. In spite of a significant theological heritage, the influence of Biblicism was strongly felt in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. Only a theological renaissance was finally able to put down this intellectual stagnation. The preoccupation with moralism came at precisely that point when appreciation for the sacraments had reached its nadir. Moralism began to decline in the eventual recovery of the sacramental heritage.

Similarly, American Protestantism has been analyzed according to ethical orientations. First, we have those who hold to the position that in any situation all Christians, regardless of social role, must act alike. The same norms apply to diplomat or ditchdigger, banker or bricklayer. This is contrasted with the ethic which recognizes role-differentiation and refuses to impose the same norms on everyone. The scope of ethical response has also been determined, on the one hand, by those who feel that the individual's conduct in his private life is the basic concern of the religious ethic. The church has nothing to say on public affairs, and worldly matters are not the concern of the individual Christian. On the other hand, there are those groups for whom a social ethic is of

primary importance. What emerges is a potential for four possible ethical styles, diagrammed as follows:

	INDIVIDUAL-ORIENTED	SOCIALLY ORIENTED
DIFFERENTIATION	Individualism	Pluralism
CONFORMITY	Pietism	Collectivism[3]

Generally speaking, we would expect to find certain affinities between pietism and populism, and between elitism and pluralism. In the case of the Missouri Synod, this is again an oversimplification. In structure the Synod is primarily elitist, but in ethical orientation the spirit of pietism exerts a dominant control. The Synod is highly individualistic throughout the immigrant period and maintains this attitude until the mid-1950's. Synodical literature constantly underscores the fact that the primary mission of the church is to preach the Gospel and save souls. Yet, as the socio-economic structure of the membership becomes increasingly pluralistic, a social ethic also begins to emerge.

The success story of the Missouri Synod is often attributed to a "cultural lag." This theory assumes that the Lutheran immigrants of the Nineteenth Century brought with them to America a firm confessional loyalty which developed in the reaction against the Prussian Union of 1817. It

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[3] Ibid., p. 53.

further assumes that they held tenaciously to this heritage by isolating themselves culturally and religiously from the American mainstream. There is historical evidence to support this factor of deliberate isolation, but by itself the theory of cultural lag is an oversimplification. The Missouri Synod also attracted many German immigrants who were not orthodox, and whose major reason for coming here was not religious. Its capacity to adjust to its environment is often overlooked. Confessional orthodoxy might well have disappeared, but with proper modification it suited the American climate very well. This suggests that we are not dealing with a cultural lag, but with a simplistic adaptation to a new culture. The orthodoxy of the Seventeenth Century gave easy answers and was useful for indoctrination and self-identification. C. F. W. Walther demonstrated his ability as an adaptationist when the Saxon immigration threatened to become a disaster. His leadership enabled the Missouri Synod to absolutize a kind of American Congregationalism, which divested itself of hierarchical high-church tendencies. The triumph of orthodoxy is therefore not the simple story of the transplantation of a European phenomenon.[4] This capacity for adaptation is reflected in the Synod's changing ethical attitudes. The dynamic of change lies in the area of deliberate response; it cannot simply be interpreted as an

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[4]"Schmucker and Walther: A Response," op. cit., pp. 83-85.

accidental by-product in the process of emerging from cultural isolation.

The increase of theological sophistication within the Synod cannot be overlooked. In the Luther renaissance that took place after World War I, American Lutherans again discovered the living Luther behind the precise doctrinal formulations of orthodoxy. Some discovered him in the essays of Karl Holl. Others did not rediscover the vital religion of Luther until Niebuhr opened their eyes and led them to Barth and Brunner and Berdyaev and back to Luther.[5]

This suggests that the spirit of change can also be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Modern man is not intensely concerned over a righteous, holy God whose wrath must be appeased. Today there must be an awareness of the continued guidance and presence of God. God's gracious love must be seen in action, working to transform the mean and trivial into the potential for human fulfillment.[6] The God of orthodoxy was chained to abstract theological formulas; but God is a living God who always refuses to be chained by man's systems.

Change in theology has produced a corresponding change in Christian ethics. It is taking on the character of social ethics which was once a subdivision within it. Contributing

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[5]Pannkoke, op. cit., p. 54.

[6]Herbert T. Neve, "Justification by Faith in the Twentieth Century," in Neve and Johnson, op. cit., p. 73.

to this trend are our current human problems associated with rapid change and growth of mass society. Today's ethical concerns do not center around principles and duties, but rather about what it means to be a person in a dehumanized world of fragmented relationships.[7]

This trend is marked by the disappearance of the Kantian duty-ethic which influenced much of Protestantism during the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. Gone is the use of the Bible as the source of revealed morality, a use prevalent in both fundamentalism and--in the form of "the Teachings of Jesus"--liberalism. Christians from a variety of traditions are recovering the essential Biblical insight that man-in-relationship is the proper focus of ethical inquiry.[8]

The new thrust in Christian ethics is upon the nature of man. To become fully human and to achieve full personhood, man must become "public," "participating" man who is concerned about and committed to policies and actions which contribute to the achievement of human freedom, justice, and community. Many theologians assert that God is speaking a word of eschatological judgment to the Church through the explosive change now taking place in all areas of life. It is almost impossible for today's Christian to hide any longer within the comfortable

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[7]Uthe, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

[8]Ibid., p. 86.

surroundings of confessional, moralistic, and cultic obscurantism. The landmarks of public piety have almost disappeared before the tide of pluralism and secularization.[9]

The age-old idea that men may pursue a supernatural good in private life and a natural good in public life, that the supernatural is the realm of the church whereas the natural is the realm of the state, will no longer do. The doctrine of two realms, two kingdoms, the one of this world and the other of another world, the separation of the churches and public life--all these have been rendered invalid by the present course of history.[10]

It is this complexity of interacting forces which ultimately explains the gradual decline of ethical pietism in the Missouri Synod. This study has attempted to identify the changes and to ascertain why some of these have come about. This subject was somewhat precarious because very little scholarly investigation has been devoted to it. One must risk the fact that certain assumptions may not always survive a careful examination. Happily, the research has borne out the underlying assumption reflected in the topic.

The confessional conservatism of the Missouri Synod eventually led to a stagnant orthodoxy which was often characterized

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[9] Ibid., p. 102.

[10] Joseph Haroutunian, "Freedom and the Churches," in Hefner, op. cit., p. 53.

by negativism, suspiciousness, and unreasonable resistance to anything new. Fortunately, the church body came to recognize the sterility and meaninglessness that ultimately result from absolutizing the formulations and insights of a particular age. In abandoning scholastic certainty, the Synod has opened itself to risks. These are the risks which compel all churches to trust in God and not in themselves.

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