

ably, make his verbs and subjects agree? Do you suppose that *he* is intolerant of small errors in other matters as he would probably want us to be in this matter? Would he say of equivalent mistakes in his bank statement: “Well a dollar here, a dollar there—it’s just a little mistake”?

MISSOURI: NOT JUST A STATE

Coming across the Mississippi River into Saint Louis on the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1955, I was not overly impressed with the state where I would study for four of the next five years. Missouri was not New York and Saint Louis was not New York City. In spite of Saint Louis’s claims to being a cosmopolitan city, in comparison to the place I called home, it was not. No subways. No beaches. No oceans. The Ozarks were not the Poconos or the Berkshires or the Catskills. A trip to Perry County and the shores of the Mississippi, where the synod’s founding fathers had landed, only added to youthful conviction that our church body had a human side. Upon seeing that “Zion on the Mississippi,” it became obvious that this was a faith-statement for which the historical evidences were inconclusive.

My grandmother, a Fort Wayne native and a granddaughter of the Lutherans who had helped establish the synod, used her sharp wit to ask about “the other states” in the synod’s official title, “The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States.” In her mind, chief among the other states would have been Indiana. Why put Ohio in the title? Once there was an Ohio Synod, but it was wrong on predestination. Michigan has always had more Missouri Synod Lutherans than Missouri. Why not the Michigan or Illinois Synod? Of course, there were historical reasons, of which the best may have been that some Germans had called themselves the Michigan Synod and the Swedes were a formidable presence in Illinois. Even today the Missouri Synod has three districts in Illinois.

Wilhelm Löhe had brought more Lutherans to the Great Lakes area, but C. F. W. Walther became commander-in-chief, and titles are handed out by the victors. For the sake of modernization “Ohio and other States” were squeezed out of the title. Still later, “Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod” was abbreviated to LCMS. It may be just a coincidence that in the same timeframe Kentucky Fried Chicken became KFC. Fried foods were out, especially for those concerned with arterial accumulation of fat, but the old trademark of the Kentucky colonel has been introduced.

The argument for a name change for the synod is that Missouri is so geographically freighted, that someone from Kazakhstan or Germany or California might come to the conclusion that our church is limited to one particular place in the United States. Probably most people living outside the United States do not know where that place is. Expand that to include most New Yorkers. It is argued that a name like the Missouri Synod is too provincial for a church with worldwide mission and confessional ambitions. Of course, it is with this provincial name that the Missouri Synod made a reputation for itself in European theological world as a church that actually believed some-

thing. “Missouri” separates confessional Lutheran missionaries from all the others. We are not the only church with provincial nomenclature. The Church of Rome approaches geographical universality with one quarter of a billion members or one of out every two persons who claim to be Christian. Perhaps we could determine who knows more about the home province: Missouri Synod Lutherans or Roman Catholics?

A very early experience of pastoral ministry was the discovery that Lutherans who were not members of the Missouri Synod were less certain as to which synod they belonged. Those were the days of the ULCA, UELCA, ELC, ALC, and NLC. Church officials knew how to unscramble this alphabetic soup, but the members themselves often did not know which letters fit their church. It was like memorizing phone numbers. Some can do it; the rest of us are never quite sure. Out of frustration many people said they were members of the Missouri Synod, even if they were not. This was a clear opportunity for mission work, but for others this might have been considered moving sheep from one fold to another.

Back then the Wisconsin Synod had not thought of WELS, an abbreviation that later gave birth to a logo of a real well and an oaken bucket with the superscription “Come to the WELS.” Get it? It was probably test-marketed for evangelistic purposes. When alphabetized Lutheranism was boiled down to the LCA and ALC, there was added to the pot AELC, the Association of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches. “Association” meant that no hierarchical church like the LCMS would tell their congregations what to do. Instead they are now choosing Episcopal bishops to let them do that. This algebraic formula—LCA, ALC, and AELC—came together to form the ELCA, the same letters in a different combination.

Use of the more simplified LCMS instead of Missouri Synod fell into the alphabetic soup tradition of North American Lutheranism, but the combination “MS” had the advantage of limited prior use. It could have been used for Lutheran Church—Minnesota Synod or Michigan Synod, but no one thought about it in the nineteenth century. Closely resembling this alphabetical identification of Lutheran churches is the New York Stock Exchange, where certain companies are assigned certain letters, a code known to stock brokers and savvy investors.

Some suggestions for a new name for the synod are sectarially frightening. “International Lutheran Church” is cultic, like calling a denomination “The Church of God,” “The Church of Christ,” or the “Apostolic Church of God.” It is not as bad as “King James Version of the Bible Church.” “International” implies a church of two or more nations, but nations as political entities are comparatively modern phenomenon. Germany and Italy became nations only in the nineteenth century. Nations are here today and gone tomorrow. To some, “international” in the title may camouflage American imperialistic ambitions.

“Concordia” has been suggested because of its confessional connotations. “Concordia Lutheran Church” carries the message that the churches in the fellowship of the synod still adhere to the Concordia, the Book of Concord, with all the Lutheran Confessions. It would be a statement of faith, espe-

cially in the face of the ELCA defection to the Reformed. This meaning of Concordia is rarely appreciated or exploited now. Use of the word *concordia* for the synod's schools, publishing houses, retirement homes, and some churches has produced little more than a slew of word-study sermons on the word *concordia* in urging group harmony.

Another possibility is ELCA. Not improbably, these letters standing for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America might be vacated by the present occupants. The next step for that church would be to drop "Lutheran" from its title and, with their Reformed sisters and brothers, form the Evangelical Church in America, the ECA. Hardly an original thought, it would only take advantage of what has already happened in Germany, where Lutherans and Reformed are gathered under the umbrella organization of the Evangelical Church in Germany. ELCA and ELC would cause great confusion, however. We would have to explain that, historically and gratefully, we were neither of these churches.

Just how detrimental to evangelization is the name "Missouri Synod"? Does any synod pastor ever stand up in the pulpit and urge the non-churched present to join the Missouri Synod? Even the word "Lutheran" in sermons is probably limited to Reformation Day sermons. Our pastors visiting prospective members on mission calls do not introduce themselves as Missouri Synod pastors. The non-churched rarely know the difference between Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian. Evangelism is not the place to bring up denominational differences. Sooner or later the pastor is going to have to say that our church accepts the entire Creed, including the virgin birth and the resurrection; is opposed to abortion and women pastors; accepts the historicity of the Bible; allows for no other teaching on the Lord's supper than that it is the actual body and blood of Christ; and that other churches like the ELCA are lax on these requirements. Knowledgeable members of other churches know that this is a description of the Missouri Synod. "Missouri," like "Lutheran," is a statement of faith and not a place or a person.

A major objection to the continued use of Missouri Synod as our church title is that it is too geographical and does not reflect what or where the synod is today. It is said to be parochial or at least provincial. Using this reasoning, names like the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion (Church of England), the Russian Orthodox Church, the Antiochian Church, and so forth should also face change. There are many more Roman Catholics in South America than there are in the city of Rome or perhaps in the entire Roman Empire. Southern Baptists are found north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Some American Evangelicals have found no cultural obstacles in joining the Antiochian Orthodox Church. One would have to check the religious encyclopedias to find out if this communion still has a church in Antioch and whether this Antioch is in Syria or Pisidia. With all churches, the place of origin in their titles is associated with what they believe.

The word "Missouri" not only suggests a history, but it has immediate recognition among other Lutherans and a great many Christians. We are the church that held to biblical inspiration and inerrancy in the mid-1970s. Lutheran World Federation members know what "Missouri" stands for. We are the

Lutherans who do not ordain women, who have not signed an agreement with Rome (not the place but the church) on justification, and who still believe that the Reformed are wrong in their teachings on the Lord's Supper. Losing the word "Missouri" would surely be putting our light under a bushel.

Before we become overly concerned about those who favor dropping "Missouri" from the Missouri Synod, because of a lack of recognition, perhaps we should say something about those who do not recognize the word "Lutheran." European Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and British Anglican Christians have no idea who or what Lutherans are. How about New York City, where I was brought up? This is also true in Germany, of all places, where one is either *evangelisch* or *katholisch*. *Lutherisch* rings fewer and fewer bells in the land of Luther.

The advent of air conditioning has helped sublimate some of my early negative feelings about the State of Missouri, but I still prefer New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Even after forty years in the Midwest, I am an easterner; however, I was born a Missourian and by God's grace I hope to die one. Sectarian? Not really. Some of us take the same attitude to Luther's doctrine. It is not man's but God's. When it comes to changing provincial names, how about New York Life, Texas Instruments, Pittsburgh Glass, Northwest Airlines, Burlington Coat Factory, Union Pacific? Whatever we do, save us from becoming the "International Lutheran Church." Rome has a better claim to being international than we do. Catholics like Rome because Peter and Paul were martyred there. Joyous irrelevancy! Missouri was where confessional Lutheran theology made its most significant revival in the nineteenth century. The Missouri Synod. Joyous irrelevancy!

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WHAT THE AFRICAN BISHOPS CAN TEACH BISHOP SPONG

In the summer of 1963, Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, addressed a congress of Anglican churchmen in Toronto. In that keynote speech one item was rather remarkable. As reported by *Time* magazine, the Archbishop called for a new sharing of missionary responsibilities: "Let African and Asian missionaries come to England to help to convert the post-Christian heathenism in our country and to convert our English Church to a closer following of Christ" ("One Big Family," *Time*, 82.8 [23 Aug 1963], 49. The article was a report on the Second Anglican Congress).

This must be seen as an amazing admission of the failure of the Anglican Church, and others, in Britain and Europe generally. What is also remarkable is the way in which the archbishop's prophecy is being fulfilled. The *Time* magazine report of the archbishop's call ended with the comment: "The archbishop may get his wish some day." That day seems to be at