

# The Ohio Synod and Open Questions

by

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December 2006

[During a controversy within the AALC over the issue of open questions, various people kept bringing up the positions of predecessor bodies to bring up more and more issues that should be considered open questions, issues in which doctrinal disunity would be considered acceptable, and issues which were not divisive of fellowship. In some cases these issues were brought up by people attempting to block the fellowship talks between the AALC and the LCMS. This was written as background to that ongoing discussion.]

Since the Ohio Synod was brought into the discussion of what open questions should look like, the following is important. Loehe was instrumental in the Ohio Synod, more so following his break with Missouri over Church and Ministry issues. But eventually he was forced to break with the Ohio Synod over certain open questions.

“The conflict between the American Lutherans and the “Old Lutherans” was embodied in the Ohio Synod in the controversy of the distribution formula in the Lord’s Supper. The Old Lutherans insisted on the removal of the words “Christ said” (“Christus spricht”) from the liturgy as this formula was used in the Prussian Union as a way of providing space for either a Lutheran or Reformed interpretation of the sacrament. The Ohio Synod upheld the use of this formula at their 1845 convention. Loehe was not surprised. He and his men would now look elsewhere. The break with Ohio would also parallel the movement of Loehe’s colonies in the Saginaw Valley away from the Michigan Synod. Twenty-two men gathered in Cleveland on September 13-18, 1845 to draw up a declaration of separation from the Ohio Synod. Eleven of these men had been sent to America by Loehe. The document adopted by the assembly listed several reasons for their departure from the Synod: Ohio’s favorable disposition toward unionism, the retention of the problem distribution formula in the Lord’s Supper, the refusal to require a vow to the Book of Concord in ordination, the practice of licensing candidates for a specific period of time rather than issuing a call, and the toleration of some Reformed congregations in the membership of the Synod.” (*Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod: Forgotten Paternity or Living Legacy?* 2005. International Loehe Society. Wartburg Theological Seminary.)

And from another source:

No sooner had the General Council formed than Charles Porterfield Krauth had to deal with the “Four Points” issue. The Ohio Synod highlighted these problem areas: 1) Chiliasm, 2) Mixed communion, 3) Pulpit fellowship, 4) Secret societies. (Three Doctors of the American Lutheran Church: Charles Porterfield Krauth (1823-1883); Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811-1887); Gustav Adolph Theodor Felix Hoenecke (1835-1908). Southern Conference North Atlantic District, Raleigh, NC, 1994.)

And from ELS we find a generous explanation of the controversy over Sunday:

“Besides coming in contact with various Reformed sects, which, to say the least, have a very vague conception of the third Commandment, our people were in many places also influenced by missionaries sent out by the Adventists. These missionaries found very fertile soil for their propaganda among the Norwegian immigrants, whose conception of the Sabbath was quite confused because of conditions prevailing in the state church from which they came. When our pastors began to instruct their members as to what the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions teach concerning the Sunday question, they were vigorously assailed, not only by the Adventists, but also by Eielsen's adherents and the Augustana Synod. This controversy was later taken up by the Norwegian-Danish Conference, and was continued until the eighties.

“During this whole controversy the fathers of the Norwegian Synod stressed the doctrine of the Scriptures and the Confessions in opposition to the traditions which in course of time had commonly been accepted even in parts of the Lutheran Church. They maintained that the third Commandment does not require of us the observance of any certain day as was the case in the Old Covenant. To the Christian every day throughout his life is a Sabbath unto the Lord. To keep the Sabbath holy, one must use the word of God rightly and diligently. The word of God nowhere stipulates that Sunday is to take the place of the seventh day, which was the Sabbath fixed by law in the Old Covenant. Exercising its Christian liberty, the church of the new Covenant, for the sake of order and for other practical reasons, chose Sunday as the day on which to gather for public worship and for special use of the word of God, and not because of any direct command of God.

“This controversy brought home to our people a very valuable lesson, inasmuch as the authority of Scripture and the Confessions was strongly stressed in opposition to all sorts of traditions and products of human reasoning.” (*The Doctrinal Position of the Norwegian Synod: A Brief History of the Position in Doctrine and Practice Held by the Old Norwegian Synod Prior to the Merger of 1917*. Rev. Chr. Anderson, extracted from an address to the synodical conference.)

Accordingly to these sources, and sources discussed in other places, the issues where discussions over open questions might take place are the following:

1. Fellowship – Unionism/Syncretism (Pulpit Fellowship)
2. Lord's Supper (Mixed Communion, or Altar Fellowship)
3. Confessional Subscription
4. Lay Ministry
5. Church and Ministry
6. The identification of the Papacy as the Antichrist.
7. Last Things (*chiliasm*, or millennialism)
8. The Third Commandment, or the identification of Sunday with the Sabbath.
9. Secret Societies