

COMPLETE AGREEMENT IN DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE (I Cor.1:10):

**(THE SCRIPTURAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PRACTICE OF
CHURCH FELLOWSHIP)**

or

**THE WISCONSIN SYNOD'S CONFESSION - WHAT IS IT?:
ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS.**

May 24, 1997

(Why I came out of the WELS)

by

JOEL N. KRAFFT

Copy No. 21

May 24, 1997

Dear Reader,

Enclosed you will find a work that comes from the bottom of my heart. It has been almost five years in the making. Most of that time it was in my head. It took me a year to put it down on paper. It deals with a matter which is very dear to me and which should be of the greatest concern to you also. It concerns the future of the Church and the very salvation of souls. I have made every attempt to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and hope that you will prayerfully read and consider what is presented.

This paper is a product of my research and prayerful study. Although I have received much advice and assistance from many people while compiling this information, I am speaking for myself and no one else. Much of the original work was completed by men who have gone before me, so I do not claim for myself any credit for original thought or theology. I, and I alone, am responsible for its content and conclusions, however. If anyone would like to discuss the contents of this work with me or would like further information, please contact me at the address below. I would be glad to assist in any way I can. God's blessings to you as you study the matter.

Trusting confidently in the power of the Word as the Holy Spirit works through it, I am Christ's witness,

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INTRODUCTION

As a former member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) who has family members and friends who are still members of the WELS, I am compelled to write this, my confession, as a witness and obligation to them who publicly accept WELS doctrine by virtue of their membership in that Synod. The following is only some of what I have found. This is the path on which the Holy Spirit has led me.

I have spoken with many of you in person about these matters but it is difficult to present the pertinent information in an orderly fashion while carrying on a discussion. I hope to consolidate much of the most noteworthy information in this document so you will have it handy as we have opportunity to discuss it further. As you read this please make notes in the margin as you deem appropriate. My primary purpose is to illuminate as clearly as possible, using the WELS' own confessions as expressed in their official resolutions and actions (e.g. Synod convention proceedings), semi-official publications (e.g. books published by Northwestern Pub. House) and commonly accepted orthodox writings from past generations, the doctrinal error of the WELS and how it developed. I am not starting from scratch with this paper. I am assuming that the reader has a basic understanding of the Biblical principles of church fellowship as taught by the WELS and that he accepts them. I believe that if a question arises about most things presented here, it can be shown that it is a teaching the WELS stands behind. To discuss secondary points of doctrine which have long been accepted by orthodox Lutherans, with which we all should agree and which may be drawn into the discussion, is not my purpose in this presentation.

Let me say at the outset that it is not my intention to twist or distort the historical record or doctrinal statements in any way. It would be the height of dishonesty to present an issue for anyone's consideration using lies and halftruths or not to include pertinent facts which illuminate the situation. Having said that, I will also admit that the volume of material concerning the doctrinal controversy which led to the break up of the Synodical Conference (SC) is large and I will make no attempt to comment on all of it. The issue can be clearly delineated for honest, Christian consideration without being exhaustive.

If I err in my presentation of the facts or in not presenting others which might have bearing, it is inadvertant and unintentional. I invite correction so that my witness might be perfected. I also realize that any result of this witness will not be brought about by the eloquence of my words nor the logic of the arguments. This is a spiritual matter and must be guided by the Holy Spirit. He alone gives insight into such things. All orthodox Christians must be completely committed to the Word of God and follow the Lord's guidance found there, no matter what the human consequences might be. The Word of God alone is the norm and rule for faith and life, as we all confess.

I will list the sources of the quotes I use. Several appendices will follow containing some of the most important documents so that the reader will be able to examine the quotes in context. All emphasis, either underlining, capitalization, italics or some combination of the three, is mine unless otherwise stated.

THE FOUNDATION

The issue which concerns us was born of the doctrinal controversies of the Synodical Conference (SC) of the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's. These things happened a long time ago, granted, but the issues are still relevant today. For just as we hold the Catholic Church accountable for its confession as expressed by the Council of Trent (convened on Dec. 13, 1545), which it holds to be correct yet today even though it happened long ago, so the WELS is to be held accountable for its confession proclaimed in the days of the breakup of the SC, which it still defends and supports as being Scripturally true and correct. It is therefore relevant today as well. The members of the WELS need to know what their church practices as well as teaches on the doctrine of separation of church bodies who have been in fellowship with each other. This question is pertinent for all of us because the statement of belief the WELS ratified in 1959 (in the form of a Synodical resolution) is as binding on the Synod and its members as is the Augsburg Confession since WELS subscribes to both. Even as the Bereans searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul told them was correct, so the reader must decide if the WELS' confession agrees with the "naked words of Scripture."

This sounds pretty deep! Can a person, especially a layman, ever sort through the issues and be certain of the truth? There are times when both sides of a question might appear to ring true. Read what F. Pieper wrote, in 1925, in his essay "Unionism. What Does the Bible Say About Church Union?" On page 30-31 we read:

"God has so arranged His Word, the Holy Scriptures, that from it we not only *may* know the truth but *must know* it as long as we by faith continue in the words of Scripture and refuse to take our eyes off these words. The possibility of erring in Christian doctrine does not arise until one sets the Word of God aside and indulges his own thoughts concerning certain doctrines. As long as a man keeps his eyes fastened upon the Word of God and refuses to entertain any thoughts save those which the clear words of God suggest, it is simply not possible to err.

Is this certainty within the reach of laymen, is it within the reach of all Christians? Surely! Jesus says of Christians, not only of the teachers, or of Christians who are specially gifted (John 8) : 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth.' And when all Christians are *warned*: 'Beware of false prophets, which come unto you in sheep's clothing!' (Matthew 7:15) and all Christians are

admonished (Romans 16:17) to avoid them that cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine that they have learned, it is presupposed that they can be sure of the truth and distinguish between truth and error. The same thing we learn of Jesus (John 10) when he says : 'My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me,' v. 27. 'And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers,' v.5." (Italics in the original.)

We Christians can most certainly know what to believe. When confronted with a need to make a decision we can make it with certainty if we keep our eyes focused on God's Word and not become distracted by the desires of our hearts. *"I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws."* (Ps. 119:30) It is not too difficult a task nor impossible or God would not have commanded it.

We have seen how we have the ability, with God's help, to distinguish the truth between two or even among various opposing teachings. Pieper also says in "The Difference Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches" and Supplement, on pages 24-25,

"Christians have the duty on the basis of doctrine to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches. But can they do this? Certainly! For Christ the Lord tells them to do this, and this at the same time implies that by God's grace they can do it. Many suppose that only pastors are in a position to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches. But this is altogether wrong. Precisely all Christians, and not only the pastor, are exhorted by Christ the Lord, in Matt. 7:15: 'Beware of false prophets.' And John says: 'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world' (1 John 4:1); this passage is likewise addressed to all Christians alike. Christ the Lord has so arranged it, that all His dear Christians, the unlearned as well as the learned, can distinguish between truth and falsehood in spiritual things. He has revealed all doctrines in perfectly clear passages, in passages which can be understood by the unlearned as well as the learned. The Holy Scriptures are such a testimony, that makes wise also the simple (Psalm 19:7). When, therefore, a Christian simply holds to the word of Scripture, then he can very well distinguish between truth and error.

That the Christians sometimes are confused and imagine that they do not know which is the true doctrine, is due to the fact, that *they lose sight of the Word of Scripture*, that they want to judge this matter with their blind reason, and not with God's Word, which refutes all errors as soon as it is brought into the discussion." (Italics in the original.)

The Brief Statement of 1932, to which the WELS subscribes, in paragraph 28, states:

"Since God ordained that His Word *only*, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Pet. 4:11; John 8: 31, 32; 1 Tim. 6: 3, 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7: 15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox

church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16: 17. We repudiate *unionism*, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2: 17-21." (Italics in the original.)

Here we see that not only do we have the ability to judge all the doctrines being taught, we also have the ability and obligation to judge the church that teaches them. A church which is faithful to the Gospel will teach all things the Lord has commanded, nothing more and nothing less (Matt. 28:19-20). Pieper continues on the topic of the standards to which we must hold ourselves and any church which believes or considers itself to be orthodox on page 55 of the same essay:

"We Missourians must and will permit ourselves to be judged according to that doctrine which is taught by our individual pastors, whether it be in San Francisco or New York, St. Paul or New Orleans, or what is taught in our periodicals, whether they be published officially or unofficially. If any one shows us that even only *one* pastor preached false doctrine, or that even only *one* periodical is in the service of false doctrine, and we did not remove this false doctrine, we thereby would have ceased to be an orthodox Synod, and we would have become a unionistic fellowship.

Briefly, the characteristic mark of an orthodox fellowship (church body) is that everywhere in it the pure doctrine alone not only has official standing but also actually is in effect and prevails." (Italics in the original.)

This distinguishing is essential because of the grave danger that any deviation from God's Word presents to the Christian and to the Church. These standards are high but they are Scriptural and therefore correct. It is vital to keep this in mind as we consider the matter before us. Indeed, it is a standard to which we are to hold the Church continually. P. Leppien and J. Smith emphasize this point further on page 347, of "What's Going on Among the Lutherans" where they state:

"Luther pictured the articles of faith (doctrines) as a golden chain from which the precious gem, the saving gospel of Christ, is suspended. In the following quotation Luther not only emphasizes the importance of all doctrines of the faith, but he also identifies the enemy and the major instrument of destruction: *The Ruinous Virus of Rationalism* - 'When the devil has persuaded us to surrender ONE article of faith to him, he has won; in effect he has all of them, and Christ has already lost. He can at will unsettle and take all others, for they are all intertwined and linked together like a golden chain so that if one link is broken, the entire chain is broken and can be pulled apart. There is no article which the devil cannot overthrow once he has succeeded in having reason dabble in doctrine and speculate about it. Reason knows how to turn and twist Scripture in masterly fashion into conformity with its views. This is very agreeable, like sweet poison.' " (Italics in the original.)

This is the gravity of the situation. This is what is at stake.

The claim by the WELS is that it broke fellowship with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LC-MS) in 1961, for Scriptural reasons on the grounds of Romans 16:17-18. We will look closely at the official record later to see if this was so. But let's look first at what the WELS says it believes about the verse itself.

Much has been written on this passage. It is recognized among orthodox Lutherans as being a clear passage and that its meaning is also clear. The following quotes are from an essay entitled "Romans 16:17,18 and its Application to Individual Fellowship", written by Wilbert Gawrisch and printed in the October, 1980, Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, the official doctrinal publication of the WELS. I will reference the article since it is presumably an officially accepted statement on the verse, and compare it with historical documents which are also the WELS' confession on the passage. The question my essay will answer is this: Is the historical record and practice of the WELS (its confession in actions) in harmony with Scriptural teaching?

Romans 16:17-18 in the NIV says: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people."

In the above noted WLQ article Gawrisch writes on p. 255:

"Luther considers this Epistle [Romans] so important because, as he says, 'it appears that he (Paul) wanted in this one epistle to sum up briefly the whole Christian and evangelical doctrine.'

We mention this because in the passage we are considering Paul refers to the doctrine the Romans have learned. It is significant that in his Preface Luther also takes note of the warning in Romans 16:17. He writes: 'The last chapter is a chapter of greetings. But he (Paul) mingles with them a noble warning against the doctrines of men, which break in alongside the teaching of the gospel and cause offense....' "

He continues a bit farther on p. 256:

"It has been argued that Paul's admonition to avoid false teachers is a kind of afterthought, an unexpected and abrupt interjection into the close of the epistle without any logical connection with what precedes or follows. A glance at the chapter as it is printed in the NIV will quickly dispel this misconception. The warning against fellowship with errorists fits very logically into a context in which Paul glories in the joys and blessings of fellowship with like-minded brothers and sisters in Christ."

That this passage applies to false teachers, errorists, false prophets and those who adhere to them and their false teachings is made clear by many references made throughout the article. Never is this passage even remotely or indirectly applied to weak brethren. This is proper because this

clear verse simply won't allow it. Gawrisch examines phrase by phrase the meaning of the text. I won't quote them all, but under the term "watch out for" he says , on page 257:

"The Romans are to be on the lookout for those who are continually engaged in making, causing, or creating divisions and offenses. Such activity is characteristic of these adversaries."

In describing "divisions" he states on page 259:

"Divisions are the very opposite of unity, the God-pleasing oneness of heart and mind Paul prayed for in chapter 15:5,6..."

Again further in the same paragraph he says:

"Divisions are the opposite of the unity Paul appealed to the Corinthians to strive for: 'I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions... among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought' (1 Cor 1:10). The errors taught by the troublemakers have the potential of causing a split and finally a schism, an irreparable break, in the congregation.

Paul mentions a second result of the false teaching of the errorists. They cause ... offenses. A skandalon [which is the Greek word Paul used for offense] is, literally, the trigger on a trap."

He continues in the same paragraph:

"And so the word came to mean a death-trap. It is a rather common word in the New Testament and always has the connotation of being fatal. In the KJV it is generally translated 'offense' or 'stumbling block'."

On page 260, Gawrisch continues with defining and explaining the various terms found in the Greek where he writes:

"The NIV, as quoted above, translates the word [skandalon] in our passage 'obstacles in your way'. Anything that causes Christians to fall from faith or hinders them in their faith or is an obstacle that prevents sinners from coming to faith is such a death-trap. False teaching has such dire consequences. It is harmful, and sometimes even fatal, to faith."

On page 261 Gawrisch continues:

"The point in our passage is that the [offenses] are contrary to the doctrine the Romans had learned. Error by its very nature is a death-trap and damaging to faith.... Any and all who deviate from it [the doctrine] are guilty of creating divisions and setting death-traps for believers. Paul does not restrict his warning to a particular kind of errorist. He is warning the Romans to be on guard against any and every kind of false teaching."

Next Gawrisch discusses the meaning of "avoid" where on page 262, he states:

"Because of the danger such false teachers present, Paul admonishes:...keep away from them! Avoid them! Steer clear of them! ...[We are to] shun them definitely, turn from them completely and finally. Do not toy with their errors."

I agree with the statements here presented. As I stated earlier the verse is not considered obscure. On the contrary, it is quite clear. Permit me to present a paraphrase of the verse using Gawrisch's terms as he defines them in the article. I hope this can be useful in understanding the intent and extent of Paul's warning. We could state it:

I urge you, brothers, to be always on the look out for those who continue to engage in making, causing, or creating divisions and setting spiritual death traps which cause believers to fall from faith. They do this by teaching, spreading or supporting any kind of false doctrine or error which is contrary to the doctrines you have learned. Keep away from those who do this! Avoid them! Steer clear of them! Shun them definitely. Turn away from them completely and finally. Do not toy with their errors!

In summary, the points we've covered so far are as follows and ought not, I trust, cause any debate among us:

1. God has given the Christian the ability and duty, on the basis of His word, to judge all doctrine.
2. God has given the Christian the ability and duty, on the basis of His word, to judge the church's teachings.
3. All doctrines are interconnected. There is no small doctrine or small doctrinal error. If a person loses one doctrine, he is in danger of losing them all.
4. A church that teaches false doctrine or allows it to stand is not an orthodox church but a heterodox (false teaching) church.
5. A Christian is not to belong to, i.e., be a member of, a heterodox church, but is to leave it.

THE HISTORY

The roots of the problems in the Missouri Synod have their beginnings early in this century. The "Brief Statement of 1932" was an orthodox confession written, in part, to state clearly and succinctly the doctrinal position of the SC over against the liberal Lutheran church bodies with whom Missouri was having doctrinal discussions. These discussions and contacts with the other Lutheran bodies were exerting a negative influence on Missouri's theological mindset. With the

passing of the former generation (e.g. Francis Pieper, one of the authors of the Brief Statement and a strong leader in the Missouri Synod, died in 1931), the LC-MS softened its position against the errors found in those church bodies and began to cooperate in spiritual matters with those churches despite the lack of doctrinal unity. Over time (from the end of the 1930's and through the 1940's) the LC-MS continued to diverge from its former Scriptural positions by instituting the military chaplaincy, allowing communion of other Lutherans (outside SC fellowship) in times of "emergency", and allowing participation of its members in the Boy Scout and Girl Scout organizations, among other things.

By 1950 the LC-MS had accepted a document known as the Common Confession (CC) Part I as a settlement with the American Lutheran Church (ALC) of past doctrinal differences. The WELS strongly objected to the CC because it was not a settlement of past differences but, in their view, either confused the issues between the LC-MS and ALC or ignored them. The WELS objected to all of these issues and contended against them consistently over the years at every forum to which they had access. They followed the Scriptural injunction to deal with weak brethren in patience and love admirably. By 1954, however, to cite one example, the issue of the Boy Scouts had been studied by three different committees three different times since 1944. Here is how the situation is described in a paper written ca. 1954, entitled "Historical Background of the Present issues Between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods". On page 10 we read:

"These divided conclusions were in substance and in points of argumentation the same divided conclusions in which the discussions on Scouting had ended in the two previous inter-synodical committees. (Inter-Synodical Relations Committee, 1944-48; and Missouri-Wisconsin Synod Committee, 1948-50.) In other words, three official committees, after many and lengthy discussions, had come to the same divided conclusions; and a situation was at hand concerning which it could no longer be said that the material had not been thoroughly studied by both sides, or that the objection raised by those who opposed Scouting and the manner of defense presented by those who condoned Scouting were not mutually very clearly understood."

These committees were formed by theologians who knew the Bible. They studied the appropriate verses and came to different understandings. Each time a divided report was issued. The LC-MS and Slovak Synods approved of membership in the Boy Scouts and the WELS/ELS said it was not possible because of the works righteousness that was integral to the program. By 1954 it could not be said that one side did not fully understand the position of the other. There was no movement in the position of either side. They simply did not agree. (It is important to note that one of the characteristics of weak brethren is that they permit themselves to be corrected by the Word of God. In other words they don't seek to justify their false position. WELS has always explained that their continuing in fellowship with Missouri from 1955-1961 was because they considered Missouri to

have been weak, i.e. that Missouri was not "conclusively" shown to be persistent in their error. (Cf. p.38 of this essay.) Similar things could be said about the other issues although they were not all so clearly delineated in statement form, any one of which provided sufficient grounds to terminate fellowship due to a lack of agreement in Scriptural teaching.

In 1955, came the convention in which the WELS' current doctrinal position began its formal rise toward acceptance. What follows is the majority of the preamble to a resolution which spelled out the status of fellowship of WELS with the LC-MS. Appendix A contains the entire preamble and resolution. (I will point out here a fact that those who have never attended a convention may not know. Since the use of words in language is the method by which one conveys what one means, through admonitions and warnings, as well as praise, the accurate use of words in expressing oneself is of paramount importance. The convention delegates know this. There may be times when hours are spent in committee trying to get a paragraph, phrase, or word just right. The placement of a comma can change the meaning of a sentence entirely. Great care is taken to communicate precisely what is meant. It is only right and proper to assume that just such care was taken when the resolutions, from which I will quote, were written and approved.)

1955 - The Saginaw Convention

Preamble

"We of the Wisconsin Synod in our convention of 1953 with heavy hearts had to declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod by reaffirming its acceptance of the Common Confession and by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices "has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister Synod."

Without entering upon the question of whether the present charges of our Synod against the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod do not already constitute the accusation of false doctrine, we believe that it should be reiterated in no uncertain terms that a specific charge of false doctrine is not a Biblical prerequisite for separation from a church body. A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16: 17-18. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing. (Cf. Proceedings 1939 - p. 159; 1941 - p. 43f, 74ff; 1947 - p. 104ff, 114f; 1949 - p. 114ff; 1951 - p. 110ff; 1953 - p. 95ff.)"

Notice here that a brief reference is made to an observation made public and official already in 1953. These matters had not suddenly occurred but had developed over time and had been addressed and witnessed against by WELS often over the years. Notice the many references in the above quote to official admonitions made against Missouri's errors since 1939.

The second paragraph above contains the clear and unmistakable words seen in bold print. A church body which creates divisions and offenses becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. Missouri Synod is creating divisions and offenses. These divisions and offenses are not accidental or inadvertant but are of LONG STANDING. This is a most important passage to remember because still today the WELS denies that Romans 16:17-18 was here applied to Missouri even though it was specifically cited as a proof passage. I will discuss this denial and the obvious problems that arise from it later.

The preamble continues with some current events which indicate clearly the identifying characteristics of false teachers. False teachers do not want to be instructed from God's Word and they defend their false position and try to gain followers. (I Tim. 6:3-5; II Tim.2:17-19)

"Moreover, Dr. John W. Behnken, President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in two recent articles in "The Lutheran Witness" (July 19 and August 2, 1955) has intensified these divisions and offenses by attempting to justify the position of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod through bare declarations that its position is correct and the charges of our Synod are false, without, at least up to this time, bringing the facts of the controversy into true focus. We do not wish to imply that this has been intentional, since that would involve a judgement on our part, but we do maintain that it has made more difficult the possibility of reaching Scriptural agreement on the issues that are dividing the two Synods."

This attitude is clearly not one of willingness to bow to the authority of God's Word. The WELS correctly assessed this. The third and final paragraph of the preamble follows. This delineates again most, if not all, of the actions which the LC-MS had committed and was committing for most, or all, of the past 17 years.

"In view of these facts your Floor Committee, together with the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, affirms "our position that the Missouri Synod by 'its acceptance of the Common Confession as a settlement of past differences, which are in fact not settled' and 'by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices (the Common Confession, joint prayer, Scouting, chaplaincy, communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council, cooperation with unorthodox church bodies in matters clearly not in the field of externals; negotiating with lodges and Boy Scouts of America with the plea that this gives opportunity to bear witness, and under the same plea taking part in unionistic religious programs and in the activities of unionistic church federations; negotiating for purposes of union with a church body whose official position it is that it is neither possible nor necessary to agree in all matters of doctrine and which contends for an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God)' has brought about a break in relations, and that our Synod, bound by the Word of God, should now declare itself on the matter.' (Cf. Supplementary Report of the

Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union.)" [This sup. report is found on page 80 of the 1955 Proceedings.]

What follow are portions of the above mentioned Supplementary Report of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union. This gives some flavor to the preamble's charges against Missouri by showing what the committees thought of the work they were doing and discussions they were having with Missouri. This Supplementary Report followed the Preliminary Report which was just as negative.

"Our evaluation of the work of these committees [which were assembled 'with the purpose of seeking an answer' to the charges of our Synod overagainst the LC-MS] is as follows:

1. Regarding the Synodical Conference Doctrinal Committee

This committee took up a discussion of the Common Confession. It was necessary for our [WELS] members on the committee to emphasize repeatedly the inadequacy of the Common Confession as a settlement of past differences with the American Lutheran Church, which are in fact not settled. A resolution, indeed, was adopted pertaining to antithetical statements. (In this resolution our members of the committee saw an indication of 'a step, at least, in the right direction, or, as someone else called it, a ray of hope.') It was, however, indicated in several ways by the Mo. Synod representatives that the Common Confession as a settlement of past differences with the American Lutheran Church will in itself not be altered or retracted by Mo. Synod. Hence, we deplore that there is no indication that the divisions and offenses caused by the adoption of the Common Confession as a settlement of differences will be removed."

I find it difficult to resolve the obvious conflict between the two statements in this paragraph which indicate on the one hand there was a "ray of hope" as expressed by one man and the committee's opinion that there was "NO INDICATION THAT THE DIVISIONS AND OFFENSES... WILL BE REMOVED." The question with which the committee was assigned to deal was: Would the LC-MS repudiate the CC as WELS had asked in 1951 (Cf. Proceedings p. 147.)? Or put another way: Are we (the WELS and LC-MS) in agreement on the doctrines of Scripture with which the CC deals inadequately? It is truly of no import whatsoever if someone saw a ray of hope so clearly that he could pick it up in his hand. What mattered was that the WELS had been admonishing the Missouri Synod of the dangers and errors of the CC. Missouri knew the position of the WELS and Scripture and chose a path which diverged from the truth as WELS knew it. According to the committee they were not exhibiting the characteristics of weak brethren but that of false teachers. A clearer picture of the attitude of the LC-MS will be brought out later in this report.

"2. Regarding the Synodical Conference Committee on Unionism and Prayer fellowship

The report of our men indicates **NO CHANGE** on the part of the Mo. Synod but rather the **CONFIRMED POSITION** of the Mo. Synod men that our admonition and charges are 'due to an inadequate understanding of the pertinent Bible Passages.' The Mo. synod men expressed the hope that further study of the passages would induce us 'to drop our charges against them.' Over against this, however, a study of Rom. 14:1-5, by this committee revealed a marked difference of interpretation of matters with which we have charged Missouri and which we consider divisive,... Thus with deep regret we report that as far as the work of this committee is concerned, there still is **no indication** that the divisions and offenses caused by the Mo. Synod's resolutions in regard to joint prayer and by instances of unionistic practice will be removed."

This paragraph also clearly shows that the LC-MS was not taking the position of a weak brother by being willing to be admonished but rather one of instruction and teaching, and having taken a firm position in their understanding of Scripture. The report continues...

"The Mo. Synod men on these committees urge a study of Scripture passages. The pertinent passages have, however, been repeatedly and prayerfully considered by our Synod in conventions, by its districts, its conferences and congregations. On the basis of our study of these passages we have over the past years again and again brought our admonition and testimony to the attention of the Mo. Synod. We deplore the fact that our testimony has not been heeded by the Mo. Synod. On the contrary, we find that our testimony is being openly repudiated by Mo. Synod representatives, and we are now publicly being accused of misapplying Scriptures and of bringing false charges against the Mo. Synod. We deplore the vehement tone and the assertion of Dr. John W. Behnken, President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in his last two articles in the Lutheran Witness (July 19 and August 2) that there is no basis for any of the charges of the Wisconsin Synod: 'We do not admit the charges. On the contrary, we **emphatically deny them.**' [The emphasis in this sentence is in the original.] Thus any gains that may have been achieved by the committees mentioned above have practically been nullified by this complete and unconditional denial."

This, then, gives the background and reasoning behind the preamble which was quoted above. The LC-MS was clearly not taking the posture of a weak brother but was seeking to defend its errors and justify itself before its brethren in the SC and trying to gain acceptance for the errors among the constituent synods of the SC. These are the qualities and characteristics of false teachers (Rom. 16:17), false prophets, and wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). They spread error like gangrene (2 Tim 2:17) and as yeast, grow throughout the church (1 Cor. 5:6). This is what the committee, charged with the responsibility of speaking to the LC-MS on WELS' behalf, warned against.

The preamble as found in appendix A was adopted unanimously by the WELS convention in 1955. There was not a dissenting vote. (Typically at convention when a resolution is brought to the floor it will be discussed and voted on in pieces. Sometimes the votes will be by section or by paragraph as deemed convenient. Here the record indicates two votes were taken, one on the preamble and one on the resolution itself. These were self-standing votes, the one not being dependent upon the other.) The resolution follows:

RESOLUTIONS

"Out of love for the truth of Scripture we feel constrained to present the following resolution to this convention for final action in a recessed session in 1956:

RESOLVED, that whereas the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

We recommend this course of action for the following reasons:

1. This resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences.
2. This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention."

After our examination of the meaning of the Romans 16:17-18, and in light of the foregoing preamble which presumably sets the foundation for the action to follow, this resolution is rather a surprise. On what grounds does the Synod delay separation from the LC-MS? On what basis can further continued fellowship be allowed? There are two reasons given. The first is general and open to many interpretations. The second gives the first major clue as to the origin of the doctrinal deviation that was to come. This "reason" misstates the situation and misapplies to whom the exhortations to patience and forbearance apply. We are to show patience to **WEAK BRETHREN** not to false prophets, or wolves in sheep's clothing. What does the preamble mean if it can be claimed that continued fellowship with the LC-MS was proper and God pleasing? The WELS very clearly and pointedly said that the LC-MS "has... created divisions and offenses..." with the specific reference to Rom. 16:17. God tells us just as pointedly to **AVOID THEM!** He says that we are not to fellowship with such as do these things! Look back at Gawrisch's own words regarding divisions. "Divisions are the opposite of unity... The errors taught by the trouble makers have the potential of causing an irreparable break..." And "...the false teaching of the errorists...cause...offenses" (spiritual death traps). Gawrisch states very correctly, "The fact that they teach contrary to the doctrine of Scripture **IDENTIFIES** them as false prophets." Once the truth of the preamble had been established by its acceptance and it became the WELS' position, the

LC-MS could not be considered a weak church body any more but a heterodox one.

Remember what Pieper said:

"If any one shows us that even only *one* pastor preached false doctrine, or that even only *one* periodical is in the service of false doctrine, and we did not remove this false doctrine, we thereby would have ceased to be an orthodox Synod, and we would have become a unionistic fellowship."

And the Brief Statement says:

"We repudiate *unionism*, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2: 17-21."

The WELS, still, to this day maintains that this preamble/resolution combination is correct, proper and God pleasing. It has never been rescinded or repudiated by them. On the one hand the WELS identifies Missouri as causing divisions and offenses (preamble), and on the other hand continues in fellowship with them (resolution). Since WELS has taken no action to correct this confession but has supported and defended it over the years, one can only conclude that this combination defines how the WELS' understands Romans 16:17-18. The fine words of many published articles cannot erase this confession.

There are some problems which arise, naturally, if it is maintained that this 1955 preamble/resolution is Scriptural. If WELS claims that they were in fact in agreement with Missouri and that therefore the resolution continuing fellowship with them was acceptable and proper, then the preamble is untrue and means something quite different than what it says. If the preamble is untrue then it is a clear violation against both the Eighth and Second Commandments.

When the proceedings of such a convention are published they are in the public domain and as such bring the attention of the world to the work of the Church. This was a major controversy in the church and was covered by many, if not most, of the religion pages in the country. The WELS had publicly accused Missouri of being under the indictment of Romans 16:17-18, and if this were not true was guilty of libel against them. Luther's meaning to the Eighth Commandment says: "We should fear and love God that we do not belie, betray, SLANDER, or DEFAME our neighbor..." What is the preamble if not defamatory (if untrue)?

The meaning to the Second Commandment says: "We should fear and love God that we do not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie or DECEIVE BY HIS NAME..." God's name, in the context of the Second Commandment (and the First Petition), includes anything He has revealed to us

about Himself. By stating their position as expressed in the preamble, the WELS uses God's name in the form of a Scripture passage (Romans) to defend such a charge.

How the Synod understood the preamble and resolution at that time can be shown clearly from quotes from two contemporary sources. The first is found in the Post-Convention News Bulletin, published to interpret for members of the Wisconsin Synod the meaning of the synodical resolutions. It reported, in part:

"Agreement on the fact that Romans 16:17-18 applied to the situation in the Missouri Synod was almost unanimous. [Actually, the record, as indicated, shows that the vote was unanimous.] The divisions and offenses are clear. There was an honest difference of opinion on whether it was necessary to break relations completely with the Missouri Synod now or whether we, in the words of our President, 'still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished so many years.' The body, by a vote of two to one, decided to wait a year."

Of course the "unpaid debt of love" argument is completely out of place here since it implies that terminating fellowship with a false teaching church body is unloving. It is not unloving since God, in His Word, commands us to separate from them, out of love, in order to show them how serious is their error. (Ps. 119:103-104; John 14:21a)

It is also very important to note that the clarity of Scripture is brought into question by this statement. There cannot be "an honest difference of opinion" regarding a doctrine taught in Scripture. Gawrisch doesn't allow for any question of the necessity to break relations, as we read in the article quoted earlier. This makes it sound as though each side was justified in holding its position even though Scripture allows for only one position which is, that those who cause divisions and offenses, we are to avoid.

The second source which clearly indicates that the understanding of the action of convention was that the Romans passage had certainly been applied to Missouri, is found in the Northwestern Lutheran of that year which says:

"The preamble (of the 1955 resolution), which reiterated the 1953 charges of our Synod and applied Romans 16:17-18, was unanimously adopted. All were firmly convinced and fully agreed that the charge of unionism against the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod was valid and that the Romans passage is applicable, even though some could not agree that action be deferred until the next meeting of that Synod."

Most clearly the Synod knew with what it had charged Missouri and had approved of the action. The history leading up to this convention and the facts supporting the charge against Missouri were very well known and documented. By their own admission there was confusion in the WELS about what "avoid them" meant. This is certainly not unforgiveable. But the WELS did not seek to

correct this false understanding but continued it, defended it and finally confirmed it. The story continues in...

1956 - The Watertown Convention

During the latest round of doctrinal discussions between the WELS and the CLC (Church of the Lutheran Confession) in 1987-1990, in the correspondence between President Mischke (WELS) and President Fleischer (CLC), there is a statement of Scriptural principle made by President Mischke which bears repeating here. It is correct and I bring it up here and now because it also applies to the controversy in 1955-1961, but I have not found it stated in the record anywhere during those years. Its absence is noteworthy and significant. President Mischke writes in a letter dated October 22, 1992: "...we have felt and still feel that the paramount question is, 'Are we agreed on the scriptural doctrine of fellowship today?' " He was speaking here of the question which needs to be answered before WELS/ELS and the CLC can ever be joined in fellowship. This expresses the Biblical prerequisite of complete agreement in doctrine which must exist for God pleasing fellowship to exist. This was not the question or sentiment expressed by the majority in 1955 or 1956.

The reason for convening a recessed convention was entirely flawed. It is expressed again in the introductory paragraph of the Report of Floor Committee No.2 (Church Union) which says:

"When our Synod at its Saginaw Convention [1955] resolved to hold a recessed convention in 1956, it did so, in part, to give The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod an opportunity to express itself on our Synod's resolutions in its 1956 convention."

The question which needed to be asked in 1955 and again in 1956 is the question quoted above. Are we (WELS and Missouri) agreed on the Scriptural doctrine? Are we in complete agreement or are we practicing sinful unionism by giving evidence of agreement by fellowshiping with each other when no agreement exists? That is the paramount question. It is not difficult to see from the record that there was **no unity** as the reports of the committee testify. Church fellowship without complete agreement is **UNIONISM**.

The report continues:

"The Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union carried out its assignment and presented its report to the Districts of Synod and to this convention, and is of the conviction that our Synod ought not to close the door to further discussions at this time, but, while prayerfully awaiting the outcome of added efforts at attaining unity, hold the judgement of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance."

This paragraph bespeaks two errors. While continuing to draw attention away from the real question - Are we agreed?, by focusing on the possible effects of continued discussions, it also implies that the God pleasing cessation of fellowship would be a closing of the door! It is vital to recognize that ALL of the efforts the WELS made to correct the errors of the LC-MS from 1955-1961 could have been done and should have been done, in order to be consistent with Scriptural principles, outside the framework of fellowship. The disunity and lack of agreement between the WELS and LC-MS was clearly spelled out in 1955 and is again in this report and in every subsequent convention through 1961.

I want to repeat what was said earlier about the care with which terms and words are chosen and used in these statements. The above paragraph admits the fact that the synods were not in agreement by stating that there were efforts being made to ATTAIN UNITY. How can two synods walking together, spiritually united, as the Bible requires, work TOWARD unity? That is an impossibility. If they were truly united, even if there were grave concerns which needed clarification, then the situation would not have been expressed in this way. They were working to attain something that they were already required to have had. This characteristic can be noted throughout all of the reports dealing with this situation. This was not unintentional. The situation was expressed accurately. Notice this in the other portions of the report quoted below. The Report of Floor Committee No. 2 continues:

I

"Even though we deplore the fact that the question of unionism and the controversial issues listed in our Synod's 1953 resolutions in themselves still remain unresolved, yet...[be it]

RESOLVED, That we concur in the suggestion of our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to "hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance" until our next convention; and be it further

RESOLVED, That our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union continue to evaluate any further developments in these matters."

In other words, even though the issues still remained unresolved, the committee recommended that WELS continue in fellowship with Missouri while evaluating, thus ignoring the observations of the 1955 preamble. "Abeyance" means that the judgment under question will be temporarily suspended. By the "official" interpretations which were quoted above, the only thing which had not been determined was what the term "avoid them" of Romans meant. Notice too, that the observations of the preamble are not included in this "abeyance". There was no justification for this maneuver, however. Historic Lutheran methods of Bible interpretation demand that Scripture interprets Scripture and that Scripture is not to be taken out of context. Romans 16: 17, is not unclear or difficult. All were "firmly convinced and fully agreed" that Missouri was "causing

divisions and offenses". How can this be separated from - He who does these things - avoid? (Refer to Gawrisch's article quoted on page 8 of this paper.) There is no question about the meaning of "avoid" among orthodox theologians today.

The report continues:

II

"WHEREAS, We deplore the specific resolutions which our sister synod [LC-MS] passed on the issues of Scouting and military chaplaincy, its stand on prayer fellowship; and the fact that several other issues were not acted upon at all, e.g., the communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council; be it

RESOLVED, That our fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod be one of vigorously protesting fellowship to be practiced where necessary in the light of II Thess. 3: 14 and 15: 'And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.'

'Action by the Convention: The report was adopted by a roll call vote of 108 'yes' votes to 19 'no' votes.' "

Here again, even though the reaction of the WELS' committee was to "deplore" the action of Missouri, the resolution called for **continued fellowship**, albeit a "vigorously protesting" one.

Let's look briefly at this idea of a "state of confession" from which this "vigorously protesting fellowship" is derived. II Thessalonians 3: 14&15 is the reference. The New Evangelical Translation (NET) says:

"If anyone will not listen to what we say in this letter, take note of him, and do not have anything to do with him, so that he will feel ashamed. Yet, do not treat him like an enemy, but warn him like a brother."

The NIV is almost identical and no common translation is significantly different from the rest. There seemed to be wide variation in understanding of the meaning of this verse among the WELS men whose writings I found on the topic. Pastor G. Sydow (CLC) wrote ca. 1972:

"Concerning this Thessalonians passage it should be understood that there is disagreement among competent Greek scholars on the details of what is said... However, it is a commonly accepted procedure that passages which pose exegetical questions are not used as 'proof' passages."

I cannot present a word study of this passage for your edification. But recalling a premise from the beginning of this paper, I can tell you for certain what this passage does not mean. "Do not have anything to do with him" does not mean continue to fellowship with him. Do not never means

continue to, even in the Bible. The point is clearly not to fellowship, in order to bring him to his senses. This understanding is also in agreement with the explanation given by David Kuske in the Thessalonians volume of "The People's Bible" (WELS) page 114f. And Professor J. P. Meyer of the WELS Seminary wrote in the April, 1950, volume of the Quartalschrift (German edition of the Theological Quarterly):

"...Paul is speaking strictly about church life, not about social, political, or business affairs. But regarding church life his instruction is very definite: have nothing to do with him - no pulpit and altar fellowship, no prayer fellowship, nor even an occasional joint prayer. And this in spite of the fact that the break has not been consummated, and they still regard him as a fellow-believer. In this way they will show real brotherliness. They will show real brotherly concern. They will show how serious his error is in their estimation, while an occasional joint prayer would, to say the least, take the edge off their testimony."

So the Scriptural requirement to avoid those who are not in agreement with us in doctrine and practice was deferred once again without retracting the clear and strong words of the 1955 preamble. The contradiction between what the Bible says and what the Synod was doing was becoming ever clearer to those who cared to see. Protests to Synod over this were increasing rapidly. The next regular biennial convention of the WELS was held in...

1957-The New Ulm Convention

A committee to deal with the protests had been appointed in 1956 and the committee presented its first report to the convention in 1957 as a response to the protests. It is interesting to note that it reveals again the contemporary understanding of the situation. It says in part:

"2. While there exists in our midst confusing divergence of opinion concerning the interpretation of Romans 16:17-18, especially with regard to the meaning of the expression 'avoid them'; while essays were delivered and it would appear were officially or tacitly accepted in our midst, which are not in harmony with one another, yet the Synod did speak a very clear language concerning this passage at the Saginaw Convention in 1955 when it passed a resolution unanimously, stating that the passage did apply to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, though the voting on the break was delayed, for the reasons given, for another year....

4. A number of later protests were possibly encouraged, and further warrant and justification may have been given to the earlier ones by the fact that in many instances all evidence of a "vigorously protesting fellowship," which our Synod resolved to practice, seems to have been lacking, and fellowship relations with the Missouri Synod seem to be carried on as though there were nothing at all between us....

6. After a thorough study of all the protests before us, your Committee is convinced that they but remind us of issues between the Synods which are indeed divisive and augment our fears that a solution of these issues is no longer possible."

These portions show that the Protest Committee, whose job it was to look into these matters in order to respond to the protests, very clearly believed that the Romans passage had been applied to Missouri, while admitting confusion on the meaning of "avoid them". (This also agrees with the two earlier reports quoted from the Post-Convention News Bulletin and the NWL article.) They also indicated that the "vigorously protesting fellowship" had meant no official synod wide change in the WELS' interaction with Missouri. And finally they also acknowledged that the issues were divisive.

This committee will have more to say in later years.

We will look at two other actions by this 1957 convention. The first is several portions of the excellent Report of Floor Committee No. 2 (Union Matters) which failed to pass. And the second is the resolution which did pass. (The Committee No. 2 report is found in its entirety in appendix C as well as the resolution which did pass.)

The Committee on Union Matters reiterated the past charges against Missouri as follows:

"We of the Wisconsin Synod in our convention of 1953 with heavy hearts had to declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod by reaffirming its acceptance of the Common Confession and by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices 'has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister Synod.'

This was unanimously adopted by our Synod in convention in 1955. As a result our floor committee No. 2 at the 1955 convention of our Synod felt constrained to offer the following resolution to the convention:

'That whereas the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.'

Our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union reports to us:

'... we cannot come to the conviction that the answers given by the Praesidium of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod do full justice to the spirit and intent of the pertinent St. Paul [MN] resolutions as they appeared to the majority of your observers...' [meaning the Praesidium had not answered WELS' concerns]

And

'... we must recognize the difficulty of the Joint Union Committees thus far to agree on an antithetical premise, and the problem presented by the fact that the Missouri Synod representatives were not ready to declare issues between us divisive.'

And

'... the controversial issues still remain wholly unresolved and continue to cause offense.'

And

'While we saw a hopeful sign in the excellent statement of Scriptural principles of church fellowship on which The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in 1956, declined membership in the Lutheran World Federation, this hope has been dimmed by the fact that on an official basis The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has, since the 1956 convention in St. Paul, involved itself in just such cooperative programs 'in actual church work, e.g., joint... educational endeavors,' of which it said in its resolution that they would involve it 'in a union in spiritual matters with groups not in doctrinal agreement with us.' "

The committee viewed this refusal to join the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) as a positive sign, as it indeed was, but the fact that Missouri was honestly considering joining tells volumes about where its heart was. The LWF was, and is, an overtly unionistic organization and the question of the LC-MS joining should never have even been seriously considered. The discussion which Missouri conducted regarding its possible membership in the LWF is, in truth, an indictment against its attitude toward church fellowship. So Missouri's refusal to join the LWF is not of any real significance. The report goes on:

"Since we now find that The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod still upholds resolutions and condones principles and practices which deny the Scriptural truth expressed in Article 28 of its own Brief Statement of Doctrine:

'Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Pet. 4:11; John 8: 31, 32; 1 Tim. 6: 3, 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7: 15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16: 17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2: 17-21.'
(Bold type in this paragraph is in original.)

we feel conscience-bound to declare publicly, that these principles, policies, and practices create a division between our synods which The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod alone can remove. Until these offenses have been removed, we cannot fellowship together with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as one body, lest our own Wisconsin Synod be affected by the same unionistic spirit which finally weakens and destroys all true doctrine and leads to indifference and liberalism concerning Scriptural truth; therefore be it

Resolved, that we now suspend church fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16:17,18, until the principles, policies, and practices in controversy between us have resolved in a thoroughly Scriptural and mutually acceptable manner; and be it further

Resolved, that we declare ourselves ready to continue discussions with representatives of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with the aim and hope of reestablishing unity of doctrine and practice."

What a fine statement this was! However, this Scriptural resolution was not accepted by the 1957 Convention. What a sad day for orthodox Lutheranism! This is what happened:

"Action by the Convention:

The motion to adopt the report of floor Committee No. 2 failed to carry by a standing vote of 61 to 77. Eight delegates abstained from voting.

The following resolutions pertaining to matters of Church Union were adopted by the Convention:

WHEREAS, our Synod, after long and patient debate, voted not to suspend fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod at this time, therefore be it

Resolved, that we continue our vigorously protesting fellowship over against The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, because of the continuation of the offenses with which we have charged the sister synod, Romans 16:17,18, and be it further

Resolved, that we continue our doctrinal discussions with the union committees of the synods of the Synodical Conference in an effort to restore full unity on the basis of the Word of God, and be it finally

Resolved, that we ask our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to keep the membership of our Synod informed concerning the progress of these discussions.

(Note: Our protesting fellowship is to be carried on in accordance with the Scriptural injunction in II Thessalonians 3:14 and 15, as the Synod resolved in August 1956. See Proceedings, recessed Session, Thirty-third Convention, Watertown, Wisconsin, August 21-23, 1956, Report of Floor Committee No. 2, Part II. The reference to Romans 16:17 and 18, was made, not to define our fellowship, but only to explain the use of the word 'offenses.' O. J. Naumann.)"

Several things become apparent from this action. First, the fear the Committee on Union Matters expressed, namely, that the WELS might become "affected by the same unionistic spirit [infecting Missouri] which finally weakens and destroys all true doctrine and leads to indifference and liberalism concerning Scriptural truth" if she did not break with Missouri, has come to pass and is becoming ever more apparent. The delegates had just been presented with all of the familiar charges all over again. No record of any argument about the accuracy of the facts can be found. All of the charges reiterated here had long ago been accepted (in 1953 & 1955) as being true and correct. Next they were presented with a sound and Scriptural resolution, based on faithful adherence to God's Word with further admonition being offered but in its proper setting, that being outside of fellowship, and Synod rejected it.

The first "whereas" of the accepted resolution gives a clue. The Synod voted not to suspend fellowship. Remember the paramount question President Mischke posed? The one thing the Synod could properly vote on was whether or not it was in agreement with Missouri. The fellowship question flows naturally from the answer to the agreement question. By voting to continue in fellowship the delegates were saying that they were in agreement with Missouri, but everything else pointed to division. Yes, we are in agreement, then yes, we can fellowship. No, we are not in agreement, then no, we cannot fellowship. Missouri had been doing the things with which it had been charged for so long and the formal charges had been discussed for so many conventions that the will of the delegates flagged. The voters must have wondered - why now? We charged Missouri with these things back in 1953 and again in 1955 surely another two years to see if they turn from there wicked way is not too much. They had lost sight of Scripture.

The second main point to think about in this resolution is in the first "resolved". The vigorously protesting fellowship is mentioned again, which in all practicality meant fellowship as usual. As we have seen above, II Thess. 3:14-15 clearly supports withdrawing from fellowship not continuing in it! Here the WELS resolved to continue its fellowship **BECAUSE OF THE CONTINUATION OF THE OFFENSES** with which it had charged its sister synod! The word "offenses", as we see from the note at the end of the resolution, is defined in terms of Romans 16:17-18!! Remember what "offenses" means:

"Anything that causes Christians to fall from faith or hinders them in their faith or is an obstacle that prevents sinners from coming to faith is such a death-trap. False teaching has such dire consequences. It is harmful, and sometimes even fatal, to faith."

The WELS is saying that Missouri is setting spiritual death-traps for its own members and for those of the SC. Is this with whom Synod wants to continue in fellowship? Jesus says Beware! Avoid! Finally, there is the now routine plea that the committee strive to restore the unity that the Bible requires in order to join in or remain in church fellowship. Such clear contradiction!

What a situation for those who saw clearly the path Synod was on. Needless to say the number of resignations from WELS jumped. The record of the Proceedings has included in it four letters of resignation. Edmund Reim, the president of WELS' seminary in Mequon, resigned, along with M. J. Witt, district president, and Paul Albrecht, along with many others not recorded in the proceedings. After this convention, free conferences began to be held in order for the issues to be studied and discussed and to see if there might be agreement among those who had left the SC or were thinking about leaving. There were also concerned members of the ELS and LC-MS looking at what was happening and wondering what their possible options were.

The next convention was not held until 1959, but things were afoot and more history shaping events unfolded in...

1958 - The Protest Committee Report

Under date of June 27, 1958, a document entitled "A Letter to the Protesting Brethren" was sent from the Protest Committee to the members of Synod who were protesting Synod's current doctrinal course. Accompanying this first document was a letter entitled "A Report to the Protest Committee". This report was essentially a letter from Prof. Carl Lawrenz (Chairman of the Church Union Committee (CUC)- formerly the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union) addressed to the Protest Committee (PC - which was set up by Synod to deal with the protests being presented) in order to inform the PC of CUC's impressions of the status of events thus far. This report to the PC is very significant because not only was it a radical departure from the Synod's earlier position but it was destined to become the official position of the WELS and its public doctrine in word and deed. I will quote mostly from Lawrenz' letter to the PC. The "Letter to the Protesting Brethren" from the PC was essentially a reiteration of Lawrenz' letter to the committee and reached the same conclusions.

Lawrenz writes:

"It is their [the protesting brethren's] conviction that the Synod placed the Missouri Synod under the judgement of Rom. 16:17f. by the unanimous adoption of the preamble and then arbitrarily postponed for a year the avoiding which should certainly follow immediately when an individual or a body has been placed under the judgment of Rom. 16:17. ...

We plead, however, with the protesting brethren who hold this view to face the question anew: Did our Synod at Saginaw [1955] conclusively put the Missouri Synod under the judgement of Rom. 16:17f.?

As a Synod we indeed stated in the preamble that on the basis of all the fruitless, official discussions with Missouri, its past convention resolutions, and the final Lutheran Witness articles of President Behnken, Rom. 16: 17f. would have to be applied. Yet the

Synod resolved not to vote, not to reach a decision on this resolution, until the Missouri Synod had had another opportunity to speak in delegate convention. Our Synod wanted to be sure whether the added testimony which had been brought on our part during a period of three years had not made an impact on the Missouri Synod at large, even though it had not changed the stand of the Praesidium, and of the Missouri Synod's official representatives with whom our Union Committee had had an opportunity to deal. Our Synod was not willing to put the Missouri Synod under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. until it had also heard the official stand of that Synod over against our charges reconfirmed by another delegate convention.

What our Synod therefore held in abeyance at Saginaw [it was at Watertown in 1956, not Saginaw] was not merely the 'avoiding,' the breaking of Fellowship, enjoined in Rom. 16:17f. but also the conclusive application of the very judgment that the Missouri Synod was persistent in causing divisions and offenses. Not merely the judgment expressed in the resolution and the action recommended by it, but also the judgment expressed in the preamble was held in abeyance, pending the examination of the added bit of evidence desired by the majority of our Synod's delegates, namely the answer of the subsequent Missouri Synod convention upon our charges."

The first sentence of his quote I would agree with. The question posed in the second paragraph, "Did our Synod...conclusively put the Missouri Synod under the judgement of Romans 16:17f.?", you will have to answer for yourself. Let's look at the evidence. He says in the third paragraph "As a Synod we indeed stated...that ...Rom. 16:17f. would have to be applied." Reread the preamble for yourself (found on page A-1 of the appendix and page 10 of this paper). The language used, the essential means to communicate a very important situation facing the church, gives no indication that the convention was speaking about anything other than what was currently held to be true at that time. The language used does not indicate futurity in any way or that it did not apply to Missouri then, in 1955. His interpretation, stated now officially for the first time, three years since the preamble passed, flies not only in the face of the clear words of the preamble but also clearly contradicts the Post-Convention News Bulletin and the "official" article in the NWL both quoted above. Even as late as 1957, in the "Report From the Protest Committee" given to the 1957 convention the Committee had the following understanding of what had happened:

"...yet the Synod did speak a very clear language concerning this passage [Romans 16:17-18] at the Saginaw Convention in 1955 when it passed a resolution unanimously, stating that the passage did apply to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod..."

This says that it "did apply" not that it "would have to be applied" as Lawrenz states.

What's more, this same Protest Committee, to whom this letter was sent, had this reaction to these words as found in their report (A Letter to the Protesting Brethren) on page 3:

"In these several paragraphs [as quoted above] Professor Lawrenz pin-points what is given as the official interpretation of the Saginaw resolution. It is true that many did not understand the [1955] resolution in that way [the way Lawrenz describes it] originally. The members of your Protest Committee will need to admit that they did not understand it that way at the time."

Even this very committee did not understand the resolution to mean that Romans 16: 17f. had not been applied. How can this new revelation only now come to light? How much more clearly could the WELS' position possibly have been stated if they had indeed wanted to apply it? The wording was carefully chosen to say what the delegates wanted to say and had been officially understood that way for three years. The reason for this new interpretation is found in the following paragraph where Lawrenz states:

"The above interpretation given to the Saginaw [1955] resolutions is the only one that can make any sense."

To that I would have to say there is another understanding which he is refusing to acknowledge, one that fits with the facts. It is that the WELS had in fact recognized that Rom. 16:17f. applied to Missouri as the record shows but that, out of sinful weakness, WELS had refused to take the necessary step of avoiding them, steering clear of them, shunning them definitely, and turning away from them completely as Gawrisch instructs us in his article quoted earlier. I do not wish to imply that the WELS decided cold-heartedly to disobey God's Word. There were indeed great pressures, humanly speaking, on the delegates not to break fellowship. I would not presume to judge motives but I, and you, must judge actions. No matter how difficult a command of God may be to carry out, if it becomes clear that we have failed to obey we must ask forgiveness (repent) and correct the error lest it distort and eventually destroy our witness. This the WELS failed to do and continues to refuse to do.

The dishonesty of one not accepting the simple, clear wording of one's own statement is recognized as wrong by the secular world as well. In an editorial in the December 4, 1996, *USA Today*, the writer, Linda Chavez, comments on the ruling by a judge in California who put a temporary restraining order on a proposition which passed by popular vote. In her editorial, Chavez quoted Judge Thelton E. Henderson as saying:

" 'Courts must look beyond the plain language of an enactment.' [He was defending his decision.]

[Chavez' editorial continues with the comments] But if we can't trust that the words of our laws mean what they actually say, the whole basis of the rule of law falls apart. Suddenly we are in a world in which a judge can say, like Humpty Dumpty in Alice's

Adventures in Wonderland, 'When I use a word... it means just what I choose it to mean, nothing more or less.' "

This is what the WELS is doing when it declares that the words:

"A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing":

mean that Romans 16:17-18 had not been "conclusively" applied to Missouri. As I asked before - What would WELS have had to say if they had indeed wanted to apply it? Clearer words would have been difficult to find. "When WELS uses a phrase it means just what WELS chooses it to mean", is not a statement which anyone would want to ascribe to one's own testimony. It is dishonest.

When Lawrenz says:

"Our Synod wanted to be sure whether the added testimony which had been brought on our part during a period of three years had not made an impact on the Missouri Synod at large, even though it had not changed the stand of the Praesidium, and of the Missouri Synod's official representatives with whom our Union Committee had had an opportunity to deal",

he is also giving evidence of a false position regarding admonition between church bodies. When we elect or appoint officials and committees to function in our name we are assigning them our voice. They do work on our behalf and they use their expertise to accomplish the mission or duties assigned them. The same is true for the committees of Missouri during those years. The membership of the Missouri Synod gave the men who were on the Union committee the authority to speak on their behalf. This is an efficient, orderly and proper procedure. One synod does not have the right to circumvent this order and attempt to sway the popular opinion within another synod even if it knows its position to be correct. That would be disorderly. This is the same principle which prevents one pastor from infringing on another pastor's call. The Praesidium and the representatives in the committees are the voice of Synod and the members of the synod are responsible and accountable for the committee's actions, good or bad. The membership must ultimately answer for the committees' work. This is a very important concept. To say, that despite the fact that officials of a sister synod hold to a false position and are trying to sway us toward that position, we now should go before their membership at large in order to see if we can have some effect upon them, is outrageous, especially when considered from the opposite point of view. What

if Missouri had lobbied the WELS membership in order to get them to accept the Boy Scouts, or their prayer fellowship principles, etc.? That would not have been tolerated by WELS nor would it have been proper of Missouri. For Lawrenz to suggest that that was a reason to wait and see is Scripturally indefensible. The position of Missouri was expressed by their officials and WELS had her answer.

He continues in the letter to claim authority for his new "official" interpretation because of the need for a synod to clarify official statements which may not have been clear. There were resolutions and statements written by Missouri, for example, which were not clear or were conflicting and it was right to allow Missouri to make official corrections regarding its position for the sake of clarity. These official statements were then used by WELS as the basis for discussion. But an official interpretation must be faithful to the thing being interpreted. If there is something unclear or ambiguous it is not wrong to officially clarify it. But an official interpretation cannot completely deny or radically change the meaning of an already clear statement without casting great doubt on the leadership of the synod and upon any statement made by Synod in the future. If it did so, who then, could be sure that several years from now an "official interpretation" contradicting some other action by Synod wouldn't be introduced? If the preamble and resolution were wrong then the document should have been repudiated and a new statement made which was correct in the Synod's view. Since that was not done one can only understand that WELS found them to be good and proper.

Lawrenz continues:

"The fact that an individual or a church body has fallen into an error of doctrine or practice, or even the fact that the individual or the church body still defends that error of doctrine or practice, is not yet in itself a reason for terminating church fellowship."

Contrast this with the Scriptural position expressed by Pieper:

"If any one shows us that even only one pastor preached false doctrine [not inadvertently], or that even only one periodical is in the service of false doctrine, and we did not remove this false doctrine, we thereby would have ceased to be an orthodox Synod, and we would have become a unionistic fellowship. [Remember that several of these false positions held by Missouri had been officially supported and defended for over seventeen years.]

Briefly, the characteristic mark of an orthodox fellowship (church body) is that everywhere in it the pure doctrine alone not only has official standing but also actually is in effect and prevails." (Italics in the original)

(Cf. also Gawnisch's statements regarding error in doctrine on page 7.) The pure doctrine did not even have official standing in Missouri, as evidenced by statements from the Praesidium and the

Missouri Synod representatives who staffed the committees dealing with the issues (as quoted from Lawrenz' own letter above), let alone prevail in the practice of the LC-MS (Cf. the long list of charges in the 1955 preamble.) The fact that a church body defends its errors shows that it is not committing them out of weakness or ignorance but that it has chosen a course which is false and has become a false teaching church. A church body committing them out of weakness certainly will not support and defend the errors but will acknowledge them and seek to remove them. Lawrenz continues in that same paragraph:

"Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error."

Here, then, is the Wisconsin Synod's official position statement, which has become its confession in word and describes its confession in action, of the Bible's teaching on separation from the heterodox. The above statement was accepted as true by the Protest Committee, since it was repeated by them in their Report to the Protesting Brethren, which was accepted by the Synod at its 1959 (Saginaw) Convention. It is, unfortunately, not Scriptural. This is a blending of two distinct Bible teachings and as such has produced a new doctrine which is false. God warns us against adding anything to His word. (Cf. Prov. 30:5-6, and Rev. 22:18) I believe it is a fulfillment of the following passage found in 2 Tim. 4:3-4:

"A time will come when people will not listen to sound teaching but, following their own desires, they will surround themselves more and more with teachers who say what they want to hear. They will refuse to listen to the truth and will turn to myths." (NET)

The above statement by Lawrenz on separation is an invention of man.

The discrepancy created by the fact that Missouri and WELS were not united in doctrine and practice, and yet were still engaged in fellowship was creating quite a stir in Synod. There was a strong desire to "explain" the situation in order to relieve the tension. This statement by Lawrenz was the relief which some members of Synod wanted to hear and which misguided many others. It allowed them time to concentrate not on what Missouri was observed to be doing by their words and deeds, but on how WELS felt about the possible effects their admonition might be having on Missouri.

The Bible gives us instruction on how we are to handle weak brethren and instruction on how we are to handle false teachers. They are always separate and quite different procedures. The statement above draws our attention away from that of which we can be sure, to that of which we

cannot. "By their fruit you will recognize them." (Matt. 7: 16 & 20) We can observe only a person's fruit, his confession in word and deed. Lawrenz' statement would have us recognize false teachers by how we perceive our admonition to be proceeding [no further avail] not by what we can observe, namely their fruits - their confession. In other words, he says we are to base the decision to separate on our subjective feelings, not on the objective, observable fact that they are teaching contrary to the doctrine of Scripture. The fact that we are not in agreement in doctrine and practice is not the determining factor for Lawrenz. This statement by Lawrenz is supported and defended by WELS today despite the fact that it contradicts what Gawrisc wrote on page 263 of his article on Romans quoted earlier. "The [observable] fact that they teach contrary to the doctrine of Scripture identifies them as false prophets."

How can we possibly know that our "admonition is of no further avail"? We can never be certain of that. Separation from one church body by another is by definition a doctrinal statement. We began this paper discussing the fact that doctrine is not unclear but is sure and certain. God does not ask us to confess doctrine without being sure of His will. Lawrenz tells us that termination of fellowship is to be determined on the basis of something unsure! Remember the paramount question: Are we agreed in doctrine and practice? This is the question which needed answering, not: Do we feel that admonition is finished? Are we agreed? is a question which can be answered with certainty.

Now with this false idea firmly planted in the record those contending for the truth react as one might expect. The memorial "A Call For Decision" was presented to the next WELS convention in order to officially and publicly object to the errors cited and to compel the Synod either to accept or reject this statement by Lawrenz. A decision was made at the next convention in August,...

1959 - The Saginaw Convention

There were several things happening at this time. Meetings were ongoing among the Union Committees of the SC, there was the Conclave of Theologians convened in Oakland, CA, and among other things, there was an invitation by the National Lutheran Council (NLC) to the Synods of the SC asking them to become members of the NLC. The following is a portion of the letter by WELS President O. Naumann to the Executive Director of The National Lutheran Council, Dr. Paul C. Empie, declining membership on behalf of the SC, dated April 3, 1959:

"If the Lord of the Church crowns our efforts within the Synodical Conference with His blessings and the various efforts presently aimed at union and merger [among various synods of the NLC] meet with success, we would not be averse to consultation to explore what divides us at present and to seek to establish true unity in doctrine and practice.

As we have replied to a previous similar invitation, so we wish to give expression once more to our convictions that true unity in doctrine and practice is the only God-pleasing basis for cooperation in spiritual work."

Twice in this short passage Naumann states the Scriptural requirement for fellowship, i.e., "spiritual work", namely true (complete) unity in doctrine and practice, to which he points in order to defend the proper decision not to unite with the NLC. It is important to note the terms used to describe the goal such a meeting between two bodies not in fellowship would have, namely to seek "to establish true unity in doctrine and practice". Notice that almost the identical terms were used as instruction to the Church Union Committee of the WELS by Convention in 1957, regarding Missouri with whom they were in fellowship, "Resolved: ...in an effort to restore [re-establish] full unity in the basis of the Word of God...", and in 1959 (to be quoted more fully later) "Resolved: ...That we instruct our Church Union Committee to ...continue ...discussions ...to bring about complete unity of doctrine and practice in the SC." And, these efforts should continue "until agreement on doctrine and practice has been reached ...". These terms were not used without due consideration. The WELS was fully aware that complete unity did not exist between them and Missouri (and used terms to reflect this) and had not existed for many years. The statements revealing this are numerous. Despite this clear statement of Scriptural principle by Naumann the Report of Floor Committee No. 2 (Church Union), which was adopted by Convention, had this to say on pages 195 and 196 of the 1959 Proceedings:

"Resolution No. 2

Subject: Offenses

Whereas, Many of the offenses [spiritual death traps] of the The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which have brought about the troubled conditions in the Synodical Conference, and which are named in our 1955 Saginaw Resolution [the one held in abeyance] (page 85), have not been removed and have been aggravated by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's reaffirmation of their position on Scouting, and

Whereas, These uncorrected offenses [spiritual death traps] have caused many consciences to be troubled and have been the underlying cause for a serious breach of fellowship in our own Synod; therefore, be it

Resolved, That in our vigorously protesting fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod we testify strongly against the offenses [spiritual death traps] which are still prevelant and unresolved in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and request that body to remove them, and to refrain from causing a wider breach between the members of the Synodical Conference."

What an incredible contradiction! Let me repeat something from earlier. Weak brethren DO NOT cause offenses in the context of that word's usage here (which is taken from Romans 16:17). False teachers and false prophets cause spiritual death traps by teaching falsely. "Protesting fellowship", in

any sort of true scriptural sense, is not a license to continue in fellowship with known and acknowledged false teachers and those who adhere to them. The action by the convention was not a complete rejection of this report as one would hope, but this resolution was adopted as being good and proper.

Resolution No. 1, which was also included in the report of Committee No. 2 and was adopted, gave Synod its marching orders for the next two years in regard to its discussions with Missouri. On page 195 of the Proceedings we find the following:

"Resolved,

b) That we instruct our Church Union Committee under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to continue and accelerate the discussions in the Joint Union Committees to bring about complete unity of doctrine and practice in the Synodical Conference;

c) That we instruct our Church Union Committee to continue its efforts in the Joint Union Committees until agreement on doctrine and practice has been reached, or until an impasse is reached and no such agreement can be brought about;"

After clearly stating again that complete agreement in doctrine and practice did not exist with Missouri the instruction was given to continue this effort until an impasse is reached. As we shall see in the 1961 action by the WELS, this "impasse" now further defines the term used by Lawrenz "that admonition is of no further avail".

The other noteworthy decision by Synod at this convention regards a memorial submitted by a group of the "protesting brethren" entitled "A Call For Decision". (See appendix D). It is significant because it directly challenged the statement by Lawrenz, quoted earlier in his "Report to the Protest Committee", and required Synod to choose either to accept or to reject the Lawrenz statement. A portion of "A Call" reads:

"This statement [the Lawrenz Statement] is basic to the entire issue which called forth the document [A Report to the Protest Committee]. We hold that it is false and unscriptural, and that the argument based upon it is rationalistic and untenable. We ask Synod to disavow it."

It cannot be said that the Lawrenz Statement was one man's opinion and that it was taken out of context. The convention voted on page 211 of the 1959 Proceedings:

"Resolved, That the Synod disavow the serious and repeated charges made in "A Call For Decision", such as: "we hold that it (the statement under attack [the Lawrenz Statement]) is false and unscriptural, and that the argument based upon it is rationalistic and untenable."

Synod did not disavow the Lawrenz Statement but **defended it and upheld it**. So this statement by Lawrenz was confirmed as the public doctrine of the Wisconsin Synod and remains in effect to this day just as certainly as the Council of Trent remains in effect.

With the pressure of the Scriptural principle to avoid fellowship with those who cause divisions and offenses relieved by the fact that the WELS was "admonishing" Missouri, WELS was free to continue in fellowship for two more years until the next time this question was to be faced which was at the ...

1961 - Milwaukee Convention

Please read the portion of the 1961 resolution as found in appendix E. (The portions of the resolution not reproduced in the appendix are not germane to this matter but can be provided to anyone who wishes to read them.) Now compare the 1961 resolution with the 1955 resolution as found in appendix A. Notice that the charges made against Missouri in 1961 are identical to those made in 1955 with a couple exceptions. First, the charges in 1955 were more numerous and were broader in scope than those in 1961. And second, the only substantive difference in the listing of facts as found in the "whereas" clauses, which are the basis for the action taken, was that in 1961 the "Commission ...reports that differences with respect to the Scriptural principles of church fellowship ...have brought us to an impasse." This now is the fulfillment of the directive given the Commission by the 1959 Convention. That WELS held the "impasse" to be pivotal and the deciding factor in determining the correct time to separate from Missouri is shown in an essay written by Edward C. Fredrich as published in the WLQ in 1977, and reprinted in a bound volume entitled Essays on Church Fellowship published by NPH. On page 237, Fredrich writes, "Our 1961 convention in Milwaukee had to react to the impasse." The "suspension" of fellowship by WELS was not due to Missouri's errors, but to the impasse.

The authority to "suspend fellowship" with the LC-MS in 1961, as stated in the first "Resolved", is based on the WELS' understanding of Romans 16:17, 18. This, then, defines how WELS teaches and practices what they believe this verse and the rest of Scripture teaches on this doctrine of separation. Doctrinally sound articles written by WELS men about the meaning of the text mean nothing if they practice in a fashion contrary to the text. It is essential to understand this point. This is a doctrinal matter and defines what this Scriptural principle means to WELS. Since the charges brought against Missouri in 1955 were identical to those leveled in 1961, save for the fact that an "impasse" had not yet occurred in 1955, then that must be the determining factor which defines and differentiates those who are to be avoided from those who are only weak in faith. Otherwise there is no reason not to have separated in 1955. This is, of course, in full agreement with Lawrenz' statement that "termination is called for when you have reached the

conviction that admonition is of no further avail...". However, it is not in agreement with Scripture.

The paramount question is "Are we in agreement?". What separates one synod from another is lack of agreement. An "impasse" does not identify this, but an objective comparison with Scripture does. The very use of the word "impasse" clearly implied that agreement did not exist. The fact that that word is used here, as I said before, is not without due consideration. A labor union and management can come to an impasse in negotiations because they come to the bargaining table with different starting positions. But two synods in fellowship cannot start from different positions without contradicting the Scriptural requirement for unity. Practicing church fellowship without unity is unionism. "We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17, 18; 2John 9, 10" (as the Brief Statement reminds us in paragraph 28). The WELS claims that it subscribes to (agrees with) the Brief Statement of 1932. Perhaps what might have been said is "until a divergence is realized" but divergence was realized long before 1961 so that wording also would not do. After all, the whole reason that all those meetings were taking place was because a great divergence, a chasm, a "division" had taken place between WELS and Missouri as far back as 1938, and the WELS/ELS men knew it and had said as much in 1953, 1955 and in many statements during the years following which I have referenced for you in this paper.

The clear Scriptural teaching is expressed by Gawrisch as quoted earlier and repeated again here, "The fact that they teach contrary to the doctrine of Scripture identifies them as false prophets." (Don't be fooled. The fact that a church body SAYS the right things is not the mark of orthodoxy. It must do them as well. Actions speak louder than words. "By their fruit you will recognize them" Matt. 7:16) Lawrenz' statement and the 1961 resolution say that a church body is identified as false teaching and must be avoided when WE feel that admonition is of "no further avail" and that a negotiated settlement, in our opinion, cannot be reached ("impasse"). The Bible just doesn't say any such thing. The Bible teaches that established fellowships or existing fellowships are to be terminated when it has been ascertained that a person or group, through a false position, is causing divisions and offenses in the church. WELS has reduced a doctrinal determination of whether or not a synod is orthodox, from observing what can be seen, namely their confession in word and deed, to a subjective opinion about how one feels about the course of admonition.

That this is true is borne out by the action of the 1961 convention. Termination of fellowship is by definition a doctrinal statement. It is an acknowledgement of the fact that the two sides are not in agreement on one or more points of doctrine or practice. Doctrinal issues are decided by a synod by unanimous vote because, by definition, the members of a synod are in doctrinal agreement. If a doctrinal issue is voted on and there exists a difference of understanding

among the members then the minority is instructed by God's Word and brought to see the truth and the vote is made unanimous or the members have the right to leave the fellowship since they would not, at that point, be in agreement with the body. The record shows that there were 49 member delegates who were not in agreement with the body because they cast nay votes. There is no record of the vote being made unanimous or that the dissenters were instructed and changed their votes. The record shows that 49 members were not in agreement with the resolution calling for separation from Missouri for the reasons stated by the WELS and yet were allowed to remain members in good standing. This is, of course, not surprising because this doctrinal statement had been reduced to an opinion as to whether or not the delegates felt that an "impasse" had been reached. How can one person hold another accountable for an opinion which can be arrived at differently via different perspectives? If the Synod had focused on the correct question, "Are we agreed in doctrine?", then the question of "impasse" is irrelevant. Do you see how this leaven of error is weaving a very tangled web? The clear Word of God has been muddled. A doctrinal statement was decided by majority vote! That is the way the Missouri Synod decides doctrine today. Remember the words of Pieper from the beginning of this paper:

"God has so arranged His Word, the Holy Scriptures, that from it we not only *may* know the truth but *must know* it as long as we by faith continue in the words of Scripture and refuse to take our eyes off these words. The possibility of erring in Christian doctrine does not arise until one sets the Word of God aside and indulges his own thoughts concerning certain doctrines."

The WELS set the Word of God aside and inserted her own thoughts concerning this doctrine.

It is the WELS' contention yet today that the Romans passage was not "conclusively applied" to Missouri until 1961. It must be pointed out that even if the Lord had not seen fit to have the Apostle Paul record the words he did in Rom. 16:17-18, we would still have clear instruction from the rest of Scripture to know that God's will is that we have nothing to do with false teachers and that they are shown to be such by what they do, not by how we feel admonition is proceeding. You decide if the words of the 1955 preamble and the official contemporary interpretations sound inconclusive. The idea that Romans was not conclusively applied, however, begs the question, How does one inconclusively or partially apply it? It either applies or it doesn't. The words of the preamble certainly say it applies.

The Intervening Years

Beginning in 1957 a series of "free conferences" were held to facilitate discussions among concerned Lutherans regarding the doctrinal controversies surrounding the SC in those days. The

following is a portion of a booklet entitled "This is Your Church", authorized by the CLC, as information on its formation and history.

"In free conferences those who meet are not bound by agreements, fellowship commitments, or organizational membership. They come together only to discuss a particular, troublesome situation, not to practice fellowship.

Although often new movements are a matter of people following a strong leader, the beginnings of the CLC were not of that nature. It is true that there were leaders, but mainly pastors, teachers, professors, and laymen here and there individually, through personal study of the Bible, came to the conviction that their synods were not abiding by Scripture. These people were led to find each other and to meet in free conferences.

The first two free conferences were held at Lyons, Nebraska (October, 1957) and Mankato, Minnesota (December, 1957). They were attended by some who had already withdrawn from their synods and others who were still members. These gatherings continued in 1958 and 1959. At these conferences those who attended concerned themselves entirely with doctrinal questions, especially the Scriptural teaching on fellowship. To correct the errors that had arisen, the confessional document Concerning Church Fellowship was begun; it set forth what Scripture had to say on this point and what this new group believed...

After a number of free conferences, when it became apparent in which direction things were going, the group called itself the "Interim Conference". The name fits the situation, since an interim is the time between two events. In this case it had reference to the time between withdrawing from one synodical organization and participating in the formation of another... At the conference in Red Wing, Minnesota (August, 1959) a committee was appointed to write a constitution which would lead to the organization of a new church body... The meeting scheduled for August of 1960, at Watertown, South Dakota, became the constituting convention... Paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, point by point, the entire constitution was discussed, changed, edited, and finally adopted on Friday afternoon, August 12... [T]he convention recessed by deciding to meet again in January, 1961, at Sleepy Eye, Minnesota...

At the Sleepy Eye Convention the membership of the new church body was established. The convention report listed 34 congregations, 67 pastors and professors, 21 teachers, and 6 seminary students as charter members."

Also in 1958, "The Lutheran Spokesman", which became the official publication for the membership, was begun. On 11 August, 1960, the name "Church of the Lutheran Confession" was chosen.

Since the time the CLC formed in early 1961, they have had periodic, irregular discussions with the WELS/ELS. One such series of meetings, ending in 1972, did produce an acknowledgment on the part of the WELS that there is a doctrinal difference which separates our two church bodies. At its 1972 convention the WELS passed a resolution which stated in part:

"Whereas a joint meeting of our Commission on Interchurch relations with the Board of Doctrine of the Church of the Lutheran Confession in July, 1972, produced no positive results on questions dealing with the doctrine of Church Fellowship (specifically, the matter of dealing between church bodies when error or false doctrine has arisen); and...

Whereas no further arrangements have been made for doctrinal discussions with the CLC Board of Doctrine; therefore be it

Resolved,

a) That we express regret over the failure at that meeting to reach agreement on the doctrine under discussion..."

The meeting failed to produce agreement on the specified doctrine. The fact that agreement could not be reached "on the doctrine under discussion", by definition, admits the WELS' recognition of the existence of a difference in doctrine between themselves and the CLC. The acknowledgment of a doctrinal difference by the WELS was certainly a positive step since discussions carried on between them and the CLC would require agreement on the point of controversy i.e., on what, exactly, are we not in agreement? Without such agreement the talks could not be productive since each side would come together discussing a different question. This is historic Lutheran procedure. This fact is important because the latest rounds of discussions (ca. 1987-1990) came to a halt because this difference in doctrine was denied by the WELS committee with whom the talks were being conducted. Professor Gawrisch wrote in a letter to the chairman of the CLC Board of Doctrine, dated August 8, 1990:

"We do not believe there was a real difference between us in doctrine but a difference in regard to the question: Has Missouri been conclusively shown to be persistent in its error?"

This statement destroyed the foundation on which the talks were initiated. The CLC believed it was discussing the doctrinal difference that the WELS had admitted existed in 1972. The WELS, by this statement, was still standing by the Lawrenz argument of 1958, while simultaneously denying the existence of the doctrinal difference which they had earlier acknowledged. This statement also illuminates the fact that the WELS' error from years back is still in place today. The fact that the church body in question is teaching, defending, and supporting error is not the determining factor for the WELS to terminate fellowship. Romans had not been "conclusively" applied to Missouri is the WELS' claim. The Word of God says to avoid them when it is clear that they are causing divisions and offenses not when they are "conclusively shown to be persistent" in their error. The support and defense of the procedure the WELS used in separating from Missouri has seen no retreat through the intervening years. The same errors which infected the WELS then are still in effect today.

A by-product of these recent talks was a document, signed by the nine members involved in the discussions (three from each synod, WELS/ELS & CLC), which has been named the "Joint Statement" (JS). This document more than any other serves to illustrate the duplicity of the WELS position. Let's compare two statements made in the JS with earlier statements. The WELS' position is that their doctrine and practice has not changed. First is para. II,H of the JS which reads:

- "II With respect to Romans 16:17,18, on the basis of Holy Scripture and in a spirit of Christian unity and love, we believe and affirm:
- H. That the imperative ekklinete [avoid] calls for a **clean break of fellowship** with those who persistently adhere to error. When it has been ascertained that a person or a church body is causing divisions and offenses (tous poiountas dichostasias kai ta skandala) by teaching contrary to Holy Scripture, the directive to avoid is as binding as any word addressed to us by our Savior God in his holy Word. Pleading a debt of love dare not serve as an excuse for putting off a break in fellowship with those who have shown themselves to be not weak brethren but persistent errorists. (Cf. II,D)."

(Underlining in the original. Note the similarity between the sentence in bold print above with the position of the CLC as stated in their confessional document "Concerning Church Fellowship," which says: "We... believe, teach and confess that established fellowships... are to be terminated when it has been ascertained that a person or group through a false position is causing divisions and offenses in the Church.")

Compare this with the already well known preamble from 1955:

"A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16: 17-18. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices **created divisions and offenses** both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference."

Yet the resolution of 1955 read in part:

"Out of love for the truth of Scripture we feel constrained to present the following resolution to this convention for **final action in a recessed session in 1956:**"

So even though the directive to "avoid" is **binding** on the Church, the WELS has no problem accepting a resolution which declares that they will continue fellowshiping and not "avoid". The convention "decided to wait a year", as is quoted below.

In the quote from the JS above, the WELS contradicts the supporting argument used to defend the delay in separation when they admit that "pleading a debt of love dare not serve as an excuse for putting off a break in fellowship." The Post-Convention News Bulletin (1955) claimed:

"There was an honest difference of opinion on whether it was necessary to break relations completely with the Missouri Synod now or whether we, in the words of our President, 'still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished so many years.' The body, by a vote of two to one, decided to wait a year." (Cf. p.16 of this paper.)

Again, the WELS representatives accepted the statement found in para. III,D of the JS which says:

- "III. With respect to Romans 16:17,18, on the basis of Holy Scripture and in a spirit of Christian unity and love:**
D. We reject the view that the decision to continue or discontinue admonition and proceed to avoid is to be made on the basis of a subjective judgment or conjecture about the possible outcome of the admonition. (Cf. II,D)."

This statement, in plain words, contradicts the statement forwarded by Lawrenz and accepted by Synod in 1959 which says:

"Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error."

With these statements being included in the JS one would think that progress toward a settlement of our long separation was truly being made.

But when it came time to discuss a preamble for the JS which would construct the frame of reference through which it would be viewed and place it in context for proper understanding, the WELS was not willing to declare that they ever had a doctrinal difference with the CLC nor was it ready to reject or repudiate the actions taken years ago which were clearly in conflict with the Scriptural position espoused in the JS. This refusal to acknowledge the doctrinal difference which they had admitted existed in 1972 brought the JS into doubt. For what the WELS seemed to be saying in the JS was no longer clear. How can WELS true doctrinal position ever be determined when they do one thing and say another? Actions must be used as the greater evidence of their confession since they speak louder than words. Jesus himself witnessed to the truth of this principle. He says of the Pharisees in Matt. 23:3b, "But do not do what they [the Pharisees] do, for **they do not practice what they preach.**"

The weakness of the WELS position is emphasised by the way they refer to the CLC in their writings and instruction. As a new member of the WELS (during my college years), I first heard of the CLC from my pastor who explained their existence by saying that the CLC felt that the WELS had not broken fellowship with Missouri soon enough and had broken away from WELS to form their own church body. This was virtually the same explanation I received from every other

WELS pastor with whom I spoke concerning the CLC. (This lead me to believe that that is what the WELS seminarians are taught concerning the CLC if and when the topic arises.) I accepted this explanation for a time until I had reason of my own to investigate the CLC and learn their side of the story. The documented evidence is quite formidable.

As I studied both sides of the controversy in depth I kept reading similar statements by WELS men in semi-official writings which repeated this charge that the CLC feels WELS broke late and that's why the present split exists. This is certainly an easy and pat answer for members who are casually curious about the origins of the CLC and why it exists but it is **also untrue**. I have no doubt that the pastors with whom I spoke believed what they told me. They had passed on to me as true what they had been taught. But the fact that this line of reasoning is being repeated and taught as the reason for the existence of the CLC was the single most significant fact I found initially which caused me to doubt the entire WELS position regarding their role in the SC break up and their current doctrine on the termination of fellowship between church bodies. Why would this explanation keep surfacing if the WELS had a sound doctrinal defense for its actions? Assuming the reason WELS gives is true, why, then, is there so much evidence to the contrary, and no evidence to support the WELS' charges?

Even if one doesn't agree with a differing position or belief it is decidedly dishonest to misstate the opposing view. The WELS, with regards to most doctrines, stands on Scripture saying this is what the Bible says, this is what we believe. But when the discussion turns to comparing CLC doctrine on this issue with WELS doctrine, in the light of Scripture, the result is not a critical review of both doctrines (since WELS doctrine is assumed to be true) but a false statement of CLC doctrine. Let me cite the most recent example I've found. There are many others.

In a finely bound book entitled "The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger", by Edward C. Fredrich, published by NPH, at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Break with Missouri", on page 198, we read:

"The dates, 1938-1963, need underscoring at the outset. The stretch between them plays its role when an answer is sought to the important and still relevant question: Was Wisconsin's action in 1961 and 1963 hasty or was it tardy? A viable church body, the Church of the Lutheran Confession, came into being on Wisconsin Synod turf basically because it opted for the latter answer."

When an illusionist does a card trick or some other sleight of hand maneuver his technique often involves getting his audience to concentrate their attention on one thing while the illusion is being performed unnoticed. In other words he distracts his audience so they will not observe what they ordinarily might. Though the illusionist deceives with intent, a conclusion I do not apply to this example from WELS' writing (although this being said, I would seriously question the author's

research since this charge of timing has been emphatically and repeatedly denied by the CLC for over thirty-five years, nor do the official records support his claim), the author here does in fact distract the reader away from the real question by posing a different and, in this case, false one.

The "action" taken by Wisconsin in 1961 and 1963 was the termination of fellowship with Missouri and the withdrawal of membership from the SC respectively. And the relevant question involved with such action is not whether or not it was hasty or tardy but was it Scriptural and correct. He distracts the reader away from the truly important question by asking one of no importance. Scripture does not give a timetable for separation (so hasty or tardy is not an issue) but it does give us instruction as to the reason for separation, that being lack of agreement on doctrine. This is important because if the reason for the CLC's existence is not found in Scripture then the separation from the WELS is one of opinion (hasty or tardy). But if the CLC's existence is a statement of doctrine (which the CLC has always maintained) then the necessary comparison of WELS' doctrine over against CLC's doctrine is required in order to determine which, if either, agrees with Scripture.

Fredrich ends the chapter in the same vein on pages 207-208, where he writes:

"The necessity to break when such admonition [the admonition WELS showed to Missouri from 1955- 1961] is no longer possible confronted the Wisconsin Synod in 1961. The membership of the CLC judged that to be too late."

He does, here, restate the WELS' doctrine in different words when he says that "such admonition is no longer possible...". This means when it is judged to be "of no further avail" or that an "impasse" has been reached. The CLC judged that to be FALSE DOCTRINE, not that it happened at the wrong time.

This false statement by WELS about the CLC's doctrine originates from a position of weakness. It flies not only in the face of what the protesting brethren charged and the CLC still charges, and has always charged, against the WELS but also in the face of its own historical statements of record in its own Proceedings and true Biblical doctrine. The CLC has never condemned WELS' actions because the CLC felt WELS acted "too late." The WELS does not want its own record to be examined or questioned due to its divergence from Scripture, hence the almost universal ignorance, by laymen and clergy alike, surrounding the entire historical record. A very similar statement satisfied me for many years so I know its effectiveness. I wanted to believe what I was told.

A SUMMARY TIME LINE

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide, for round us falls the eventide; nor let Thy Word, that heavenly light, for us be ever veiled in night. (TLH 292, Vs. 1)

1938-1955: The Missouri Synod becomes involved in ever increasing ways in unionistic activities, e.g. Military Chaplaincy, Boy Scouts, joint ventures with the ALC in areas of church work, ecumenical church councils, etc. The WELS speaks out strongly and plainly against these things.

In these last days of sore distress grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness that pure we keep, till life is spent, Thy holy Word and Sacrament. (Vs. 2)

1955: In convention WELS publicly lists these unionistic activities of Missouri and makes the statement that a church body which "creates divisions and offenses" by practices not in accord with Scripture becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. Missouri has created such divisions and offenses and not by accident or weakness. These divisions and offenses are of "long standing."

The Post-Convention News Bulletin and the NWL of that autumn confirm what these words clearly convey when these official interpretations state that all the delegates were "firmly convinced and fully agreed" that the charge of unionism against Missouri was valid and that Romans 16: 17-18 was applicable to Missouri at that time. A resolution passes to treat Missouri not as the false teaching, heterodox church body they had just unanimously declared them to be, but as weak brethren by continuing in fellowship with them.

Lord Jesus, help, Thy Church uphold, for we are sluggish, thoughtless, cold. Oh, prosper well Thy Word of grace and spread its truth in ev'ry place. (Vs. 3)

1956: The Committee No. 2 (Church Union) reports that they "deplore" the fact that the question of Missouri's unionism and the controversial issues listed in the WELS' 1953 and 1955 resolutions "still remain unresolved." The committee also reports that it "deplored" the specific resolutions which Missouri did pass on the issues of Boy Scouts and military chaplaincy, its stand on prayer fellowship, and the fact that several other issues WELS had asked Missouri to correct had not been acted on at all, i.e. they were ignored by Missouri. Despite these things, the committee urges the convention to ignore ("hold in abeyance") the unanimous observation of the 1955 convention that Romans 16:17-18 applied to Missouri and to continue a "vigorously protesting fellowship" using 2Thess. 3:14-15 as a proof passage. This verse too, as you will recall, urges the faithful to "have no company with him".

The charges that WELS made against Missouri, although "held in abeyance", were never declared to be untrue, never found to be false. The document was never rescinded, withdrawn, or disavowed. If these charges were true, fellowship could not be continued on any grounds short of complete agreement. If these charges were not true, a clear disavowal and retraction was the only means to correct a sin against the 8th commandment.

Oh, keep us in Thy Word, we pray: the guile and rage of Satan stay! Oh, may Thy mercy never cease! Give concord, patience, ~~courage~~, peace. (Vs. 4)

1957: The Report of the Floor Committee on Union Matters states again to the convention that "the controversial issues [between WELS and Missouri] still remain wholly unresolved and continue to cause offense", and that the committee felt conscience-bound to declare publicly, that "these principles, policies, and practices create a division between our synods". They also recommend that synod should break fellowship with Missouri.

The Report from the Protest Committee again reminds Synod that it had, in 1955, spoken very clearly when it unanimously stated that Romans 16:17-18 did apply to Missouri.

Despite these strong reports Synod resolves that, because of the "continuation of the offenses" (offenses being defined by Romans 16:17-18) they would continue a "vigorously protesting fellowship" with Missouri. And as in 1956 this fellowship was based on 2Thess. 3:14-15.

O God, how sin's dread works abound! Throughout the earth no rest is found, and falsehood's spirit wide has spread, and error boldly rears its head. (Vs. 5)

1958: Professor Lawrenz proposes a new "official interpretation" of the 1955 resolution saying that Romans 16:17-18 had not been "conclusively" applied. He suggests this despite two "official" primary sources and one "official" secondary source which predate his interpretation by more than two years and which clearly contradict him.

He proposes a new criterion for determining when fellowship should be broken. This should occur when the majority at convention feel that "admonition is of no further avail", not when "it has been ascertained that a person or group through a false position is causing divisions and offenses in the Church" (CLC-Concerning Church Fellowship) as the Romans passage plainly says.

The haughty spirits, Lord, restrain who o'er Thy Church with might would reign and always set forth something new, devised to change Thy doctrine true. (Vs. 6)

1959: Synod has the opportunity to reject the Lawrenz statement but upholds it instead. It further defines its termination criteria to include reaching an "impasse" in doctrinal negotiations.

And since the cause and glory, Lord, are Thine, not ours, to us afford Thy help and strength and constancy. With all our heart we trust in Thee. (Vs. 7)

1961: The WELS breaks fellowship with Missouri on the grounds that an "impasse" in negotiations has been reached. All of the other charges listed against Missouri in the 1961 Resolution no. 1 were unanimously observed and charged already in 1955.

This doctrinal statement, a statement of confession and faith, is not unanimously adopted by WELS. The vote is 124 to 49. Only a simple majority is now required to decide matters of doctrine in the WELS!

A trusty weapon is Thy Word, Thy Church's buckler, shield, and sword. Oh, let us in its power confide that we may seek no other guide. (Vs. 8)

Oh, grant that in Thy holy Word we here may live and die, dear Lord; and when our journey endeth here, receive us into glory there. (Vs. 9)

CONCLUSION

To the sin of unionism and false doctrine add pride to the list against the Wisconsin Synod. It not only refuses to acknowledge and take responsibility for the error in this record, its confession, it denies its very own words! That WELS supports and defends the record as it stands and sees no need to correct or amend it is shown in a quote by Edward C. Fredrich in his essay found in the bound volume quoted earlier entitled "Essays on Church Fellowship", page 238, where he writes:

"Had any serious blunders been made along that long pathway of admonition? In hindsight, one might wish that the 1955 resolutions had been set up differently. At the time, it was the best[?] the convention could offer, and some other proposal might have been less useful than that which is on the record. In general, one could conclude by saying we will have to, and should be VERY WILLING TO, LIVE WITH THE RECORD that is now a part of the history of Lutheranism in America."

Just as Missouri was responsible for the destruction of the Synodical Conference through its errors of practice and doctrine, so too, has this record and confession of the WELS created another schism in the Lutheran Church for which WELS is responsible. Remember, it is error or false doctrine which divides and separates, not the truth.

I will finish with a fairly lengthy quote which sums up the gravity and seriousness of error in the Church. It emphasizes several points which I have endeavored to make in this presentation.

"In a very comprehensive way, Jesus urges, 'Watch out for false prophets' (Mt 7:15). False prophets are those who, in their teaching or practice, deviate from God's Word, demand recognition for their errors, and seek to spread them and win adherents for them. Often enough they are themselves deceived by their own sheep's clothing. Yet, they are in reality 'ferocious wolves.' They are that, whether they are conscious of their false teaching or not. They threaten Christ's flock with harm and destruction. Jesus would have us know that it is not a light thing to deviate from his Word. False doctrine undermines, breaks down, and destroys spiritual life. 'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough' (Gal 5:9). False doctrine 'will spread like gangrene' (2 Ti 2:17). That the Lord in his grace often prevents it from becoming fatal, even in the false prophets themselves, is quite beside the point. In his Savior's love, the Lord is seeking to preserve his precious Word for us and others. By it alone faith is created, nourished, and preserved to eternal life. Corrupt the Word by omitting something, adding something, or compromising any part of it, and faith is endangered. That is why the Savior tells us to watch out for false prophets and to practice no fellowship with them. Whether their erroneous message is original with them, or whether they are peddling someone else's error, makes very little difference as long as they hold to it, demand recognition for it, and persist in spreading it.

Just as emphatically, the apostle Paul tells us, 'I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned' (Romans 16:17). In this very epistle Paul had given them a clear summary of Christian doctrine. Thus, they were able to keep a watchful eye on anyone who departed from the doctrine they had learned. Paul is not thinking of anyone who might casually make an erroneous statement. He has such in mind as cling to their error and with it create divisions. He uses a present participle to bring out the fact that it is something which those against whom he is warning practice habitually.

Concerning such errorists he says, 'Keep away from them' (Romans 16:17). We are to cease all confessional fellowship with them. That the apostle does not mean social or any other ordinary contacts of life should be evident from what he told the Corinthians when they misunderstood his exhortation that they should have no company with sexually immoral people. They thought that he meant *all* contact with them. [Italics in original] But Paul explained, 'In that case you would have to leave this world' (1 Co 5:10).

When we are saying that Romans 16:17 tells us to withhold confessional fellowship from all persistent errorists, we are not slighting verse 18: 'For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.' Some still maintain that this verse describes the only kind of persistent errorist from whom we are to withhold confessional fellowship. But verse 18 does not serve the purpose of telling us for whom we are to watch out and whom we are to avoid. Verse 17 has done that. Verse 18 cannot do that because it speaks of motives and attitudes, which only God who discerns hearts can establish in an absolute way about anyone. That is why we must recognize verse 18 as God's appraisal of those whom we are to avoid according to verse 17, namely all persistent errorists. God would have us know that insofar as they are clinging to error and disseminating it, they are taking orders from

their own desires and appetites, not from the Lord Christ, whether they themselves are fully conscious of this or not. Error being what it is, people can be captivated to accept it only by artfully adapted illusory argumentation. [This describes the WELS when it defends its confession in this matter.] We cannot fellowship with them as though ours and theirs were a common cause.

When many Lutherans persistently reject that holy Scripture is inerrant in everything that it clearly [?] asserts, when they deny that all the details of the creation account are factual, when they teach that the biblically recorded statements of Jesus concerning historical and scientific matters are not necessarily factual, [or when they add to or subtract from the clear words of Scripture as WELS has done], this is not merely weakness. They want recognition for these positions in the Lutheran church and strive to induce others to share them. We cannot practice fellowship with such errorists. By doing so we would share responsibility for their error....

If the error to which a persistent errorist clings does not of itself overthrow the foundation of Christian faith, making Christian faith impossible, termination or withholding confessional fellowship does not pass judgment on someone's Christianity. That judgment is left to the Lord. Judgment is, however passed on an individual's or a church body's doctrine. By withholding confessional fellowship, we refuse to share responsibility for the error or unscriptural practice to which an individual or church body clings."

It is ironic that this fine passage was authored by the same man whose name has been linked with the Wisconsin Synod's departure from orthodoxy. Carl J. Lawrenz wrote the above passage in an essay entitled "The Doctrine of Confessional Fellowship: Of Joint Worship and Church Work" as found in the afore mentioned volume "Essays on Church Fellowship", pages 270-272. (It was delivered as an address to the tenth anniversary gathering of the Lutheran Confessional Church (Scandinavia) on Sep. 8, 1984, and published in the WLQ in 1985.) He certainly is not solely to blame for the situation. Synod must take responsibility since the doctrine Lawrenz authored was duly voted on and accepted by Synod assembled in convention. But his words are certainly true:

"Often enough they [the false teachers] are themselves deceived by their own sheep's clothing. Yet, they are in reality "ferocious wolves." They are that, whether they are conscious of their false teaching or not. They threaten Christ's flock with harm and destruction. Jesus would have us know that it is not a light thing to deviate from his Word. False doctrine undermines, breaks down, and destroys spiritual life. 'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough' (Gal 5:9). False doctrine 'will spread like gangrene' (2 Ti 2:17). That the Lord in his grace often prevents it from becoming fatal, even in the false prophets themselves, is quite beside the point. In his Savior's love, the Lord is seeking to preserve his precious Word for us and others. By it alone faith is created, nourished, and preserved to eternal life. Corrupt the Word by omitting something, adding something, or compromising any part of it, and faith is endangered."

How very true this is. It makes no difference how fine a man he was or what fine theological articles a church can produce. Once error has sprouted and blossomed, as it has in WELS, it is most difficult to eradicate and it threatens the faith of all associated with it.

If one has the opportunity to speak with members of the ELCA or LC-MS about the very clear errors present in those church bodies, very often, if the person is familiar with the issue at all, the response will be one of denial (after the particular doctrine is pinpointed). "That could never happen in my synod", or "That is not happening in my congregation" or "My pastor is a good man and would never let anything like that happen here" or "That problem will be taken care of", etc., is very likely the answer one will hear. (There is, of course, a different problem if the response is, "That's not wrong.") If a person makes such a statement or gives evidence that he believes such to be true he is saying that he is willing to ignore the clear Scriptural warnings for all Christians to beware and to be careful of false prophets and their teachings. If a person says that this record of the WELS has been looked at and studied by "good" men and that they must have come up with the right answer concerning their confession then one is ignoring these very clear warnings of our God to be personally on the lookout. One has abdicated the watchfulness commanded by God to someone else. (This does not mean one should run around looking for things about which to be suspicious. But the matter discussed in this paper involves doctrine and was responsible for a major split in the WELS and ELS, and the creation of a new church body. A clear, Scripturally correct answer is required, yes, demanded.)

If the information presented here does not cause the reader to be concerned and to look more closely at what the WELS' practice and doctrine is, and has been, then that is in fact an answer not unlike those above, given by many in other church bodies. If the reader's response is "This can't be the WELS' record. These words must mean something else.", and therefore does nothing with this information or chooses to believe his own answer, or place his trust in what he has been told by others who "ought to know", then he has in fact lost the war for orthodoxy and has placed his faith in danger. I'm not asking anyone to take my word for anything. The information presented here is the public record in WELS' own words. My point is that one must hold the WELS (and oneself) to the same Scriptural standards to which one holds the LC-MS, ELCA or CLC for that matter.

We must be constantly vigilant against false doctrine especially where it concerns our own members and church body. If this were not so then Paul's warning in Romans to beware would be pointless. Who needs to be warned to watch out for those outside the church? I believe that false doctrine can and very probably will (humanly speaking) become evident in the CLC someday. I am watching out so that if and when it does, I, with the Lord's help, might be able to warn others and assist them in correcting it. And if the error is uncorrected, to leave it. It is better to have no church membership than to be a member of a false teaching church body.

I know that false doctrine exists and is allowed to exist in the WELS. This is my attempt to bring the facts together so that others can judge them for themselves. As I stated at the beginning of this paper, it is not my concern here to comment on areas of faith in which I do agree with the WELS. But in order to stress the point that the WELS does indeed do a great amount of good and that the Lord can and does do His will through the efforts of the WELS to spread the Gospel, let it be known that that is my sincere acknowledgement. I do not belittle the faithful work the WELS does. But that, again, is not the thrust of this witness. The same can also be said of the LC-MS. A Christian is to belong to a completely faithful church: Belonging to a church which is almost correct in doctrine is not wise nor God pleasing. I made a clear testimony to this when I terminated my membership in the WELS. Luther said:

"Each one, according to his calling and position, obtains the right and power of teaching and confessing before others this Word which we have obtained from Him. Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary... Certainly one Christian may instruct and admonish another ignorant or weak Christian concerning the Ten Commandments, the Creed, or the Lord's Prayer. And he who receives such instruction is also under obligation to accept it as God's Word and publicly to confess it."
(Luther's Works, Vol. 13, p. 333)

I did not try to correct the error in the WELS because they had been under admonition for over thirty years by the time I became aware of the problem. I knew that the WELS did not hold its position in weakness. If, in fact, I am wrong then it is a Christian's duty to point that out to me. No one has been able to show me how the WELS' confession expresses the truth of Scripture or where the CLC's doctrine is wrong. The best (only) defense that I have been given for the WELS' position is that the clear words of their Proceedings and statements do not mean what they say. This, of course, is a decidedly untenable and dishonest point of view, since a church body's witness must be clear and unequivocal (1Cor. 14:8) Where it is not clear it must be made so, even if it means admitting to error made long ago.

I have taken great pains to use sources which would not be questionable to WELS readers. Having used almost all WELS (and some orthodox Missouri Synod) materials actually assisted me in contrasting the errors and inconsistencies which are evident in the WELS' doctrinal record. The question posed on page 6 of this paper can be answered without doubt. The WELS' confessional record and its practice are not in harmony with Scripture. (Matt. 28:19-20)

I pray that this witness will encourage those who read it to delve into the WELS' record and to be concerned and watchful about what is being told them, examining those things in the light of God's word. God's word is the only light we have to illuminate our path. May God give each of us the strength and wisdom to know and to do His will. Amen.

Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may therefore hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of your holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord! Be all Thy graces now out-poured
On each believer's mind and heart, Thy fervent love to them impart.
Lord, by the brightness of Thy light, Thou in the faith dost men unite
Of ev'ry land and, ev'ry tongue; This to Thy praise, O Lord, our God, be sung.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Thou holy Light, Guide Divine, Oh, cause the Word of Life to shine!
Teach us to know our God aright and call Him Father with delight.
From ev'ry error keep us free; let none but Christ our Master be
That we in living faith abide, in Him, our Lord, with all our might confide.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Thou holy Fire, Comfort true, grant us the will Thy work to do
And in Thy service to abide; let trials turn us not aside.
Lord, by Thy pow'r prepare each heart and to our weakness strength impart
That bravely here we may contend, through life and death to Thee, our Lord, ascend.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

M. Luther, 1524
(TLH - 224)

APPENDIX - A

1955

REPORT OF FLOOR COMMITTEE No.2

(Report of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union)

Preamble

For years our Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States has patiently admonished the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the fear and love of God, seeking to win her from the path that leads to liberalism in doctrine and practice.

We of the Wisconsin Synod in our convention of 1953 with heavy hearts had to declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod by reaffirming its acceptance of the Common Confession and by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices "has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister Synod."

Without entering upon the question of whether the present charges of our Synod against the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod do not already constitute the accusation of false doctrine, we believe that it should be reiterated in no uncertain terms that a specific charge of false doctrine is not a Biblical prerequisite for separation from a church body. A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16: 17-18. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing. (Cf. Proceedings 1939 - p. 159; 1941 - p. 43f, 74ff, 1947 - p. 104ff, 114f, 1949 - p. 114ff, 1951 - p. 110ff, 1953 - p. 95ff.)

Moreover, Dr. John W. Behnken, President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in two recent articles in "The Lutheran Witness" (July 19 and August 2, 1955) has intensified these divisions and offenses by attempting to justify the position of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod through bare declarations that its position is correct and the charges of our Synod are false, without, at least up to this time, bringing the facts of the controversy into true focus. We do not wish to imply that this has been intentional, since that would involve a judgment on our part, but we do maintain that it has made more difficult the possibility of reaching Scriptural agreement on the issues that are dividing the two Synods.

In view of these facts your Floor Committee, together with the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, affirms "our position that the Missouri Synod by 'its acceptance of the Common Confession as a settlement of past differences, which are in fact not settled' and 'by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices (the Common Confession, joint prayer, Scouting, chaplaincy, communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council, cooperation with

unorthodox church bodies in matters clearly not in the field of externals; negotiating with lodges and Boy Scouts of America with the plea that this gives opportunity to bear witness, and under the same plea taking part in unionistic religious programs and in the activities of unionistic church federations; negotiating for purposes of union with a church body whose official position it is that it is neither possible nor necessary to agree in all matters of doctrine and which contends for an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God)' has brought about a break in relations, and that our Synod, bound by the Word of God, should now declare itself on the matter." (Cf. Supplementary Report of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union.) [This sup. report is found on page 80 of the 1955 Proceedings.]

RESOLUTIONS

Out of love for the truth of Scripture we feel constrained to present the following resolution to this convention for final action in a recessed session in 1956:

RESOLVED, that whereas the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

We recommend this course of action for the following reasons:

1. This resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences.
2. This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Praesidium make the arrangements necessary for this recessed session.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that our Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union evaluate any further development in the ensuing year,

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we ask the nine Districts of our Synod to postpone their 1956 biennial conventions so that this evaluation may be presented to these Districts, which are to meet according to a staggered schedule as arranged by the Conference of Presidents. It is to be understood that these Districts will meet prior to the recessed session of the Synod;

AND BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod be informed of this action through the President of our Synod.

We, the undersigned members of the Floor Committee, although we are in full agreement with the Preamble and the resolution to terminate fellowship, are of the conviction that the reasons stated for delay do not warrant postponement of action upon the resolution.

We herewith register our dissenting vote. [Seven names of members of the committee follow.]

ACTION BY THE CONVENTION: The Preamble of the Report of Floor Committee No. 2 was adopted by unanimous vote of the Convention. The Resolution calling for a recessed session of the Convention in 1956 to take final action on the resolution to terminate fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was adopted by a standing vote of 94 to 47. ...

The following delegates asked to have their names recorded in protest against the adoption of that portion of the resolution which calls for a final vote on the termination of fellowship in a recessed session of the Convention in 1956: [The names of 24 voting delegates and 19 advisory delegates follow.]

APPENDIX - B

1956 REPORT OF FLOOR COMMITTEE NO. 2 (Church Union)

"In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me, deliver me speedily; be thou my strong rock, for an house of defense to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me." Amen.

When our Synod at its Saginaw Convention [1955] resolved to hold a recessed convention in 1956, it did so, in part, to give The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod an opportunity to express itself on our Synod's resolutions in its 1956 convention. Our Synod at the same time instructed its Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to "evaluate any further developments in the ensuing year" and to present this evaluation to the nine Districts at their 1956 biennial conventions.

The Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union carried out its assignment and presented its report to the Districts of Synod and to this convention, and is of the conviction that our Synod ought not to close the door to further discussions at this time, but, while prayerfully awaiting the outcome of added efforts at attaining unity, hold the judgement of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance.

We, the members of your Floor Committee on Church Union, approach this matter with holy awe, yes, with fear and trepidation, lest we violate the Word of God and lose the sure foundation on which alone the Lord builds His Church. After prayerful consideration of the evaluation of our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union and "A Report of a Minority of the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union, as placed before the Standing Committee, Aug. 20, 1956," and all other reports, memorials, and communications, we offer the following proposals.

I

Even though we deplore the fact that the question of unionism and the controversial issues listed in our Synod's 1953 resolutions in themselves still remain unresolved, yet

WHEREAS, The resolution of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, declining membership in the Lutheran World Federation, is an excellent statement of Scriptural principle and policy, and lays a better basis for a discussion of the principles of church fellowship and their application; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod resolved "that hereafter the Common Confession (Parts I and II) be not regarded or employed as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowships with other church bodies"; and

WHEREAS, We understand this to mean that thereby The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's 1950 resolutions concerning the Common Confession have been set aside (Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1951, page 117, Resolution No. 14, the first and third Resolved); and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod recommended that committees preparing doctrinal statements take note of the suggestion to make fuller use of antithetic statements; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod gratefully acknowledges "every fraternal expression of concern and guidance in matters of doctrine and practice" from brethren in the Synodical Conference; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That we concur in the suggestion of our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to "hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance" until our next convention; and be it further

RESOLVED, That our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union continue to evaluate any further developments in these matters.

II

WHEREAS, We are not ready to stand committed to the contention "That the Common Confession, one document composed of Parts I and II, be recognized as a statement in harmony with the Sacred Scriptures and the Confessions,"[which is what the LC-MS had, just that year in 1956, declared they believed] inasmuch as the document failed to settle the doctrinal controversies which the Church was assured had been settled by it; and

WHEREAS, We deplore the specific resolutions which our sister synod passed on the issues of Scouting and military chaplaincy; its stand on prayer fellowship; and the fact that several other issues were not acted upon at all, e.g., the communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council; be it

RESOLVED, That our fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod be one of vigorously protesting fellowship to be practiced where necessary in the light of II Thessalonians 3: 14 and 15: "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

III

BE IT RESOLVED, that our Synod take part in the suggested conclave of theologians and take immediate steps to help arrange such a gathering of theologians to allow for a full discussion of all unresolved issues; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Praesidium and/or the Standing Committee on Church Union be authorized to make arrangements that the issues which disturb the unity of the Synodical Conference be thoroughly discussed and considered on the basis of God's Word; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That our representative work in close cooperation with our brethren of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, which fully shares our doctrinal position.

Action by the Convention: The report was adopted by a roll call vote of 108 "yes" votes to 19 "no" votes.

APPENDIX - C

1957

REPORT OF THE FLOOR COMMITTEE ON UNION MATTERS

Dear Brethren:

Lord, let Thy Word be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Order our steps in Thy Word. Amen.

Your Floor Committee on Union Matters presents the following report:

In 1955 our Floor Committee No. 2 (Reports and Memorials, Saginaw, 1955, p. 84-85) reported:

"For years our Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States has patiently admonished The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the fear and love of God, seeking to win her from the path that leads to liberalism in doctrine and practice.

We of the Wisconsin Synod in our convention of 1953 with heavy hearts had to declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod by reaffirming its acceptance of the Common Confession and by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices "has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister Synod."

This was unanimously adopted by our Synod in convention in 1955.

As a result our floor committee No. 2 at the 1955 convention of our Synod felt constrained to offer the following resolution to the convention:

That whereas the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Final action on this resolution was postponed to the recessed convention of our Synod held at Watertown, Wisconsin, in August, 1956, to give The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself at its convention at St. Paul in June 1956.

The recessed convention of our Synod at Watertown, Wisconsin, in August 1956, which followed the convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in June 1956, concurred in the suggestion of our Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union "to hold in abeyance the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions" until our 1957 convention.

Our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union reports to us:

"... we cannot come to the conviction that the answers given by the Praesidium of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod do full justice to the spirit and intent of the pertinent St. Paul resolutions as they appeared to the majority of your observers..."

And

"... we must recognize the difficulty of the Joint Union Committees thus far to agree on an antithetical premise, and the problem presented by the fact that the Missouri Synod representatives were not ready to declare issues between us divisive."

And

"... the controversial issues still remain wholly unresolved and continue to cause offense."

And

"While we saw a hopeful sign in the excellent statement of Scriptural principles of church fellowship on which The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in 1956, declined membership in the Lutheran World Federation, this hope has been dimmed by the fact that on an official basis The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has, since the 1956 convention in St. Paul, involved itself in just such cooperative programs 'in actual church work, e.g., joint... educational endeavors,' of which it said in its resolution that they would involve it 'in a union in spiritual matters with groups not in doctrinal agreement with us.' "

Since we now find that The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod still upholds resolutions and condones principles and practices which deny the Scriptural truth expressed in Article 28 of its own Brief Statement of Doctrine:

"Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Pet. 4:11; John 8: 31, 32; 1 Tim. 6: 3, 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7: 15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16: 17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2: 17-21." (Bold type in original.)

we feel conscience-bound to declare publicly, that these principles, policies, and practices create a division between our synods which The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod alone can remove. Until these offenses have been removed, we cannot fellowship together with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as one body, lest our own Wisconsin Synod be affected by the same unionistic spirit which finally weakens and destroys all true doctrine and leads to indifference and liberalism concerning Scriptural truth; therefore be it

Resolved, that we now suspend church fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16:17,18, until the principles, policies, and practices in controversy between us have resolved in a thoroughly Scriptural and mutually acceptable manner, and be it further

Resolved, that we declare ourselves ready to continue discussions with representatives of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with the aim and hope of reestablishing unity of doctrine and practice.

We want it to be known that we do not hereby consider members of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as heathen and publicans, but that we are dealing with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as a corporate body.

We will continue to support the joint projects of the Synodical Conference until arrangements made necessary by the foregoing resolution can be completed.

We are grateful to the Lord of the Church for the unity which existed between our Wisconsin Synod and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for so many years, and we pray that He will grant a complete return to the unity of doctrine and practice which formerly existed between us.

Be it finally

Resolved, that the president of our Synod send copies of the report as adopted by this convention to the president of the Synodical Conference and to the presidents of the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference.

Action by the Convention:

The motion to adopt the report of floor Committee No. 2 failed to carry by a standing vote of 61 to 77. Eight delegates abstained from voting.

The following resolutions pertaining to matters of Church Union were adopted by the Convention:

WHEREAS, our Synod, after long and patient debate, voted not to suspend fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod at this time, therefore be it

Resolved, that we continue our vigorously protesting fellowship over against The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, because of the continuation of the offenses with which we have charged the sister synod, Romans 16:17,18, and be it further

Resolved, that we continue our doctrinal discussions with the union committees of the synods of the Synodical Conference in an effort to restore full unity on the basis of the Word of God, and be it finally

Resolved, that we ask our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to keep the membership of our Synod informed concerning the progress of these discussions.

(Note: Our protesting fellowship is to be carried on in accordance with the Scriptural injunction in II Thessalonians 3:14 and 15, as the Synod resolved in August 1956. See Proceedings, recessed Session, Thirty-third Convention, Watertown, Wisconsin, August 21-23, 1956, Report of Floor Committee No. 2, Part II. The reference to Romans 16:17 and 18, was made, not to define our fellowship, but only to explain the use of the word "offenses." O. J. Naumann.)

APPENDIX - D

MEMORIAL

A CALL FOR DECISION

To:

The Delegates of the 35th Biennial Convention
The Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States
Assembled at Saginaw, Michigan, August of 1959
c/o President O. J. Naumann, Chairman
The Reverend Theo. Sauer, Secretary

Brethren:

Under date of June 27, 1958, a letter signed by the members of the Protest Committee, Wisconsin Synod, was addressed to "The Protesting Brethren of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States."

The letter was in large part based upon, and contained an endorsement of, a document which accompanied it and which was subsequently sent to all pastors and teachers of our Synod under the title, A Report to the Protest Committee.

The latter document, under Section II, third paragraph, page four in our copy, the following sentence appeared:

"Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error."

This statement is basic to the entire issue which called forth the document. We hold that it is false and unscriptural, and that the argument based upon it is rationalistic and untenable. We ask the Synod to disavow it.

For the purpose of clarifying our objection, we submit the following as a true and correct statement of the doctrinal issue involved:

Termination of church fellowship is called for when Scriptural correction has been offered and rejected and the erring brother or church body have continued in their error despite admonition. This is the persistence which distinguishes an errorist (Romans 16:17, 18) from an erring brother (Galations 2: 11-14).

We reject as unscriptural any interpretation or application of Romans 16:17, 18 which expressly or by implication equates the action required by this passage with that enjoined in Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:11-13, or any other passage of Holy Writ dealing with excommunication. The persistence implicitly defined in Romans 16:17 is not to be measured by the impenitence of those who persist, but by the fact of their persisting, and the word "avoid" is not identical in meaning, scope or direction with the term "excommunicate". It is manifest that one cannot excommunicate an entire church body, or declare it to be impenitent.

In consequence, we also reject the principle which accords to human judgment the task of determining when Romans 16:17, 18 applies "conclusively" to an individual or a church body, and requires "a conviction that admonition is of no further avail". No such provision is to be found in the text. It is imported from passages dealing with the gaining of an impenitent sinner and is utterly irrelevant here. To adduce it is in violation of accepted principles of Bible interpretation. In Romans 16:17, 18 the sole responsibility of human reason is to recognize the fact that the erring one continues in his error while rejecting previous admonition.

We reject the notion that the action required by Romans 16:17 depends upon clairvoyance, namely the ability to determine the future fate of admonition. One who persistently causes divisions and offenses is marked, not when we are convinced "that admonition is of no further avail," but when the evidence shows that despite admonition the erring has persisted and does persist in holding to his error. The text demands Christian awareness, not divination. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

We affirm that a rejection of admonition is the equivalent of a demand for recognition of error. We disavow as sophistry any effort to restrict the concept of persistence to an instance where a formal demand for acceptance of error is made. The text speaks of cases where, Scriptural admonition having been disallowed, the error continues to be propounded and practiced.

We herewith implore our Synod to recognize both the Scriptural validity of this our confession and the untenable nature of the "termination of fellowship" thesis advanced by the Synod's Protest Committee. We affirm that the document entitled "A Report to the Protest Committee" is in its nature and content divisive, despite its conciliatory tone, because it does violence to clear Scripture. In its historical presentation, the Report distorts plain, documented facts relative to the action of the Saginaw convention of 1955. We consider this distortion of historical facts to be a lesser offense, however, than the abuse of Scripture upon which it is based. Against this we are bound to contend for the truth.

Respectfully submitted on February 8, 1959,

by: (there follow thirty names as signatories)