

“MARK ... AVOID”
(Lest the hearts of the simple be deceived)
Romans 16: 17-18

ORIGIN OF THE CLC

Abbreviations

ALC – American Lutheran Church, now TALC – The American Lutheran Church
CLC – Church of the Lutheran Confession
ELS – Evangelical Lutheran Synod
LCMS – Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod
SC – Synodical Conference
WELS – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
ULC – United Lutheran Church, now LCA – Lutheran Church in America

Romans 16: 17-18

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Our Origin – Right or Wrong?

The CLC is today a recognized church body. But that, in itself, does not justify its existence. The questions that demand answers are these: Were the members of the CLC obedient to the Word of the Lord when they **“marked and avoided”** their former brethren? Are they obedient today – after more than ten years – in continuing their separate, lonely way? Could it be that we deceived ourselves and are living in self-deception? Did we firmly believe, at the time, that we were acting in obedience to the Word of the Lord, while actually being motivated by the flesh? Are we maintaining our separate stance today because of pride, or bitterness, or stubbornness, while we continue to search for justification in the Word for what we have done and are continuing to do? If so, we were and are schismatics. Then woe be to us! This is an extremely practical matter. It concerns our daily living in the sight of God, with one another, and over against our former brethren. Either we are living day after day in obedience and so ought to be strengthening one another, or we are living in disobedience and ought to be admonishing one another unto repentance. The Word of our Lord and recent history will give the answers.

Unity – Necessary for Fellowship

The scriptural principle that governs the issue under consideration is simple: First agree in the Word of God, then worship and work together as brethren in the Lord. Our Lord has instructed us to make disciples of all nations by teaching them **“to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded You”** (Matthew 28:20). He never, at any time or in any way, indicated that any of His words were unimportant, or would not be fitting for some future time, or could and should be altered, adjusted, or corrected by man. Quite the contrary! Jesus told us that we could remain in fellowship with Him and others, as His disciples, only by following the simple standard that He set: **“If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed”** (John 8:31). St. Paul expressed the same principle, that agreement in what is believed and practiced is the necessary basis for fellowship, in his letter to the strife-torn congregation at Corinth: **“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”** (First Corinthians 1:10).

Unity Broken – Fellowship Terminated!

Again the governing scriptural principle is both clear and simple. In Corinth the unity was threatened, and that

severely, by the intrusion of error. Such attacks upon unity in the Word are to be expected in the church militant, for Satan never ceases to rage against that glorious unity in the Word which the Holy Spirit is able to create among sinful men despite the fact that they are so inclined to error. In Corinth error intruded, but did not take root. But when error takes root in this way, that men arise who publicly teach and defend something that is contrary to any Word of the Lord and when others support such false teachers, then the unity has been broken and fellowship must be terminated.

This is the consistent remedy that Scripture prescribes for the protection of **“disciples indeed,”** especially **“the simple”** - against those who peddle error in the church. Paul drew an Old Testament warning to the attention of the Corinthians: **“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord”** (Second Corinthians 6:17; Isaiah 52:11). Paul laid this warning upon the hearts of the Romans: **“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them”** (Romans 16:17). Our Lord warned very simply: **“Beware of false prophets”** (Matthew 7:15). The false ecumenical movement, both ancient and modern, consistently despises and ignores these warnings of the Lord. In our day we have seen how former strong confessional Lutheran churches have compromised the Truth, joined hands with those who cling to error, and so have become heterodox – simply by failing to avoid those who teach otherwise than God's Word teaches.

Unity – Achieved

The Lord led the forefathers of the Missouri Synod (LCMS) out of the Truth-denying, unionistic atmosphere of the church in Germany to found in the new land of America a church body dedicated to the defense and preaching of God's eternal Truth for man's salvation. The LCMS helped the Wisconsin Synod (WELS) to arrive at an orthodox confessional position. The small Norwegian Synod (ELS) survived the Opgjoer (Settlement) of 1917 and aligned themselves with Missouri, Wisconsin, and the Slovak Synod in the Synodical Conference (SC), which had been formed back in 1872. Down through the decades into the thirties the SC stood as a confessional bulwark against the liberalism of the United Lutheran Church (now LCA) on the extreme left of Lutheranism and against the untiring maneuvering of the American Lutheran Church (now TALC) to bring all Lutherans together into a working fellowship.

Unity – Disrupted

The ALC had always held one hand out to the liberal LCA, while beckoning with the other to the conservative SC, especially the Missouri Synod. The ALC could function as the historic agent for bringing the liberal and conservative branches of Lutheranism together because they believe “that is is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines” (1938 ALC Sandusky Resolutions). Until 1938 Missouri held firm to its confessional position, and that of the entire SC, that agreement in all that the Bible teaches is necessary before worshiping and working together in spiritual matters. But in 1938 a crack appeared in the confessional position of Missouri. They began to move towards the position of the ALC that, perhaps, complete agreement was not absolutely necessary in all the so-called “non-fundamental” doctrines. It took the ALC from 1938 to 1969 to widen the crack sufficiently to bring about a declaration of fellowship with Missouri. During the course of those years Missouri lost her heritage of being an orthodox, confessional Lutheran Church and succeeded in drawing the synods affiliated with her into error. So it is, for error is content, at first, only to get its foot in the door, but does not rest until it has crashed through. The obvious lesson: Resist the beginnings!

Reaction – Testimony!

At the time the crack in Missouri's confessional wall seemed so small and to most quite harmless. But there were those faithful witnesses who took the Word of the Lord seriously that **“a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”** (Galatians 5:9). Men within Missouri immediately arose to challenge this intrusion of error – which was but another example of Satan's tried and tested method of creating doubt as to the clarity and authority of the Word of God. The Wisconsin Synod reacted to Missouri's error immediately – though somewhat inadequately – in its 1939 convention. The ELS also began to sound the alarm. Thus already while the error was infiltrating, and immediately thereafter, testimony was made for the Truth and against the errorists and their errors. About a decade and a half later this testimony against errorists was weakened when it was changed into a process of admonishing weak brethren – a process that finally resulted in the suspension of fellowship with the LCMS by

the ELS in 1955 and by the WELS in 1961.

CLC Involved

How could the CLC be involved in events that occurred before the CLC came into existence? Many of the members of our church body weren't even born in 1939. Many others were too young to be personally concerned or involved in these church union matters. But all must realize that already in 1939 there was a definite response and reaction to the intrusion of error into Missouri's confessional platform, and thus into that of the SC. The ELS and the WELS began to bear witness for the Truth and against the errors of their big brother, the Missouri Synod. Many of the members of the CLC were either actively or passively – through their leaders – involved in this testifying. Their faith reacted to the intrusion of error.

Great efforts were made to educate the people as to what the Scriptures actually taught, what the old errors were, and how they found cover in the new confessions that were supposed to settle them. At the same time every avenue that was open was used to testify to Missouri concerning her errors – in private study groups, in district and synod conferences and conventions, through official committees, and in the sessions of the SC. Thousands and thousands of pages were written in official correspondence, official publications and convention reports, special pamphlets, and endless private correspondence.

The leaders of the CLC who have passed on to their eternal reward, as well as many of the present clergy and lay leaders, participated in all this activity. We were at that time members of the WELS, the ELS, or the LCMS. We were contending for the Truth against the intrusion of error. We were testifying to the Missouri Synod which had permitted the scriptural standard of complete agreement in doctrine as the necessary basis for fellowship to be modified. Room was made for disagreement in some of the so-called “non-fundamental” doctrines. We were encouraging our brethren to reject the error and repudiate the errorists. We were so testifying by the spoken and written word, through speeches and votes at conferences and conventions, by “vigorously protesting fellowship,” and in every and any way that the situation allowed.

Words, Yes! Action, No! Disobedience

Gradually some of those who were in the front lines of all of these efforts to bear witness over against erring Missouri began to feel a bit uneasy. The testimony had been given, but the preaching, teaching, and defending of the errors continued. Error was not checked, but multiplied! At the same time the will and determination to “**come out and be separate**,” to “**avoid**,” seemed to be lacking. The tempo and intensity of testifying against the errors of Missouri increased in both the WELS and the ELS. Intersynodical relations became THE ISSUE. But a new dimension appeared in the struggle – the split between those who wanted to continue testifying in words and those who felt it was high time, or long past time, for such testifying to be converted into the testimony of action – the “**avoiding**” of Missouri who was openly teaching otherwise than God's Word teaches and so was guilty of causing divisions in the church. The 1955 Saginaw Convention of the WELS unanimously indicted Missouri as follows: “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.” When the same convention postponed action on the resolution to “terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod” until a recessed convention the following year, the WELS was publicly charged with disobedience by many of its own members, both clergy and lay members.

Disobedience Justified! Confusion!

No charge is more painful to heretofore orthodox teachers and an orthodox church body than the charge of disobedience. The WELS reacted to the charge by attempting to justify its words and deeds.

The 1956 convention tried to silence the charges of disobedience by resolving to “hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance.” It was reasoned that if the synod had not officially “marked” Missouri as a causer of divisions and offenses, she could not be accused of disobedience for failing to “avoid” Missouri. The 1956 convention lived on “rays of hope” – that Missouri would turn from the error of its ways – but by 1957 those “rays of hope” had faded. The floor committee presented the convention with a resolution “that we now suspend church fellowship” with Missouri, but the resolution lost by sixteen votes. So the convention was left with no

resolution regarding the synod's relations with Missouri. A hastily drawn resolution was adopted – to continue “vigorously protesting fellowship” with Missouri. But the Word of God on which the resolution was based called for termination of fellowship – Romans 16: 17-18. An artificial and unconvincing “official interpretation” became necessary to make this obvious disobedience appear to be obedience.

Between the 1957 and 1959 conventions a document appeared, called “A Report to the Protest Committee.” It put into reasonable words Wisconsin's justification of its continued fellowship with Missouri despite the fact that it had been public knowledge for any Christian, who had been following the course of events, that Missouri was and had been for years causing divisions in the church by teaching contrary to the Word of God. The key statement in this document was the proposition that “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.” Notice the emphasis on “admonition”! Testimony for the Truth and against the errorists and their errors was now looked upon as being “admonition” directed against erring or weak brethren. This involved some mental gymnastics. Missouri was no longer to be looked upon as that church body – which had provided such glorious confessional leadership to the entire Lutheran Church in America. She was being mentally labeled and factually and retroactively treated as a group of “weak brethren,” who had to be helped along to see the truth and repent of the error that they had embraced in weakness.

To repeat again: St. Paul urges us to watch most carefully to determine whether someone is, in fact, teaching error and so is causing divisions in the church. If that be the case - “**avoid**” them! The new theology had the practical effect of urging the membership of Wisconsin to observe very carefully Missouri's reaction to all the admonition brought to bear on her to determine whether she would turn from the error of her way or continue therein. Only after this exercise of judgment could Missouri be “**marked**” and “**avoided.**” *

* The WELS representatives have in recent years disavowed this interpretation of the “termination” passage quoted above. But a historical review of the official statements and policies of the WELS during the 1955-1961 period substantiates for us the interpretation we have given.

In the 1961 convention a majority of 124 to 48, or 72%, reached the opinion or judgment that an “impasse” had been reached in regard to all admonition. Missouri was duly “marked” and suspension of fellowship declared. The “whereases” that lead up to and give the reasons for the suspension resolution reflect all the frustration that had been experienced during the previous twenty and more years of admonishing that finally ended in an “impasse.” But the action of suspending fellowship was presented as obedience to Romans 16: 17-18 – which says not a thing of admonishing. Again there was obvious conflict between the supporting “whereases” and the passage upon which the resolution of suspension was based. This called for another “official interpretation,” which was given privately to officials of the CLC (at Mankato, November 10, 1962).

The “official interpretation” revealed the inroads of error against which we had been and are protesting. On the one hand we are being asked to understand the supporting reasoning, which emphasizes the frustrating efforts at admonition, as simply providing historical background and to believe that the convention acted in good faith, in obedience to Romans 16: 17-18. On the other hand we have before us the fact that the “obedience” was by a 72% majority vote. In addition we have the fact that neither the official Proceedings of the convention, nor – to our knowledge – the official church papers of the WELS reported any disciplinary action against those who voted against “obedience.” Does not this contradiction confirm the charge of the CLC? The situation called for careful observation of existing facts, followed by the action of obedience. The WELS converted that situation into one that called for evaluation of the effectiveness of admonition over an extended period of time, with the final decision reduced to an exercise of human judgment by a majority of delegates at a given convention.

What Stands Between Now?

Ten and more years have passed since the time of all the action. Regardless of how or why or when they did it, the WELS and the ELS have finally separated from Missouri. They have done what the CLC says the Word of God demanded much sooner. Is it now just a matter of the CLC saying the WELS and the ELS should have acted sooner, and of the WELS and the ELS saying that the CLC acted “too hastily”? If we have separated and are today remaining separate from our former brethren for such a reason, we truly would be schismatics – people who separate not in obedience to the Word, but according to the dictates of the flesh.

We consider it a token of divine grace that both the WELS and the ELS have finally separated from heterodox Missouri. But the question that still must be faced is this: Did they suspend fellowship for the right reason? The CLC charges, and that regretfully, that in the twenty-plus-year period following 1938 the initial response of testifying against the errors of Missouri was gradually changed into a process of admonishing Missouri as weak brethren. This became the all-absorbing concern of the synod. As the leaven of error continued its evil work, the doctrine of fellowship became corrupted – specifically in the area of terminating an existing fellowship. If this evaluation accurately reflects the facts of history – as we are certain it does – both the WELS and the ELS have become guilty of false doctrine while separating from erring Missouri. If this charge stands, the leaven of error is continuing to work in both the WELS and the ELS. We believe that the official statements and actions of both the WELS and the ELS reveal the case to be as follows:

Area of Agreement

Both the WELS and the ELS and also the CLC agree that the Lord wants only His Word preached and taught in the church, that error must be combated when it arises, and that the Word of God demands that true disciples separate from any and all who **“cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned”** (Romans 16:17).

Area of Disagreement

The disagreement revolved about the problem of identifying people as errorists when they arise among brethren. The WELS seems to contend that the disagreement is a matter of human judgment as to WHEN the conviction or judgment is reached that those who have introduced error come under the indictment of Romans 16: 17-18 – that is, become such who are **“causing divisions and offenses”** in the church and so must be **“avoided.”** The CLC contends that the disagreement is not a matter of human judgment as to the WHEN but rather a matter of disagreement as to HOW a person or persons are to be identified as such who are **“causing divisions and offenses,”** and hence must be **“avoided.”** Doctrine is involved, not just human judgment. The disagreement can be subdivided as follows:

A. Intrusion of Error – How?

Towards the end of the of the 1939-1961 period the WELS was compelled, by dissent from her own ranks, to justify her continued fellowship with Missouri despite Missouri's errors. The WELS assumed the stance of admonishing Missouri as weak brethren. Thus the WELS retroactively took the position that the intrusion of error into orthodox Missouri was due to weakness and/or inadvertence, and that hence the situation called for admonition, which inevitably became a lengthy process because of the difficulty in dealing with a large church body. The CLC has labeled this diagnosis and prescribed cure “the weak brother approach.”

The WELS thus labored under the tension of two conflicting principles: “... the great debt of love which the Lord would have us pay to the weak brother, and His clear injunction to avoid those who adhere to false doctrine and practice and all who make themselves partakers of their evil deeds.” * But the intrusion of error into the long-established confessional position of an orthodox church body – over the strenuous protests of its own members, despite her recent rejection of all previous efforts to achieve fellowship without unity, and contrary to her own recently reaffirmed confessional position (*Brief Statement*, 1932) – can hardly be attributed to either weakness or inadvertence. The 1938 convention of Missouri, which took the first step to bridge the gap between the LCMS and the ALC at the expense of the Truth, acted with deliberation and responsibility. To judge otherwise is to disregard the facts of the case.

* Lawrenz, Carl. “The Scriptural Principles Concerning Church Fellowship,” *Quartalschrift*, Vol. 51, No. 4, p. 290.

We hold that “the treatment due a weak brother is entirely out of place when dealing with responsible leaders.” ** We also hold that “while it would be a violation of brotherly love to treat weak brethren as though they were deliberate errorists, it would be a denial of the truth to deal with deliberate errorists as though they were weak brethren.” ** In 1938 Missouri took a calculated step away from its former confessional platform that agreement in all the doctrines of Scripture is necessary for fellowship. In 1969 the goal of fellowship with TALC was

achieved on the platform that full agreement in all scriptural doctrine is not necessary. Beginning at the mid-fifties, but thinking retroactively and continuing until 1961, the WELS dealt with Missouri as a “weak brother.” This approach led the WELS astray.

** Meyer, John, “Do the Recent Declarations of the A.L.C. Warrant the Establishment of Fraternal Relations?” *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 264 and 268.

The situation became more confused when the WELS attempted to distinguish between the erring leaders of Missouri and the supposedly uninformed, allegedly unconsenting, and hence innocent lay members of Missouri. However, when the errors of a church body have been officially endorsed, they become the burden and responsibility of all her members – unless they are publicly disavowed. To suspend fellowship with the leadership of a synod while admonishing her constituency as “weak brethren,” within the bonds of fellowship, is disorderly.

B. Intrusion of Error – By Whom and to What End?

Whenever error arises in an orthodox church body, two questions need to be asked: By whom? And, To what end? If the error is spoken by a “**simple**” (Romans 16:18) Christian because he just doesn’t know or is confused or made a slip of the tongue, then patient admonition is called for – which takes the form of instruction in the Word of Truth. Such a person was “just talking.” He wasn’t trying to instruct anyone or gain a following. But when teachers in the church – either clergy or laymen, and when duly informed conventions and responsible leaders of church bodies speak error, the situation is different. Such speak as teachers and spiritual leaders whose aim is always to gain a hearing, to win disciples or followers. The Lord says of such, “**Beware!**” St. Paul urges us to “**avoid**” such, lest they “**deceive the hearts of the simple**” – the common man in the pew and the children. Wisconsin followed an approach that led them to treat the responsible leaders of Missouri as though they were learners, weak brethren. False prophets frequently give every appearance of being willing to listen and learn – provided they are left free to continue teaching their errors. This is the way of the unionist, not the weak brother.

C. Marking – Admonition?

Does the “**marking**” that St. Paul urges us to do in Romans 16:17 involve admonition? The simple answer is “No.” The Romans passage does not speak at all of admonition, for the important point is that those teaching and preaching otherwise than God’s Word teaches be avoided – isolated – for the protection of the flock. Concern for the errorist is a secondary matter. In actual situations that arise admonition ordinarily precedes the “**marking**,” but may be involved in the “**marking**” to the extent that it is necessary to ascertain whether one is, in fact, dealing with persons who are “**causing divisions and offenses**” in the church or with such as have inadvertently fallen into error.

In the historical situation of the WELS dealing with the LCMS from 1939-1961 admonition was not used merely to ascertain whether the LCMS was, in fact, teaching contrary to the Word of God. A new purpose became apparent. Admonition was deemed necessary to determine whether the erring would repent of their errors or persist in them. Only after this exercise of admonition did the WELS arrive at the conclusive judgment that the LCMS was guilty of “**causing divisions and offenses**.” Thus the “**marking**” was, and according to this principle, is to be artificially delayed until the outcome of the process of admonition can be determined. And so the welfare of the “**wolf**” is placed ahead of concern for the “**sheep**.”

D. Identifying Causers of Divisions

The CLC contends that St. Paul urges us simply to keep the eye riveted on anyone departing from sound doctrine to determine whether or not he is, in fact, professing, teaching, and defending error. In the case at hand the WELS finally, after more than twenty years, arrived at the conclusive judgment that Missouri was guilty of causing divisions in the church. How did they arrive at this conclusion? By observing the response of Missouri to all their admonition. (See “Whereases” of the 1961 Resolution.) When all efforts at admonishing were of no further avail, when they failed to achieve the hoped-for end, when they reached an “impasse,” then and then only

could and were the causers of divisions and offenses conclusively identified. Since the decision was completely a matter of human judgment, it could not but be – as it was – the decision of a majority. More than a quarter of the delegates at the 1961 convention still thought the admonishing should continue.

E. Marking, but Not Avoiding

The question is whether one can “**mark**” a church body as being guilty of “**causing divisions and offenses**,” but yet continue admonishing her within the bonds of fellowship. The official Proceedings of the conventions of the WELS clearly reveal that the WELS exhaustively “**marked**” Missouri as an erring church body in 1953, in fact ever since 1939, but continued admonishing her within the bonds of fellowship until 1961. This course of action was rationalized and defended on the grounds that the “**marking**” was not yet conclusive, that there allegedly were new “rays of hope,” that “a debt of love” remained to be paid, and that the continuing fellowship was “vigorously protesting.” Many present members of the CLC participated in this contradiction of “**marking**,” yet fellowshiping. But the CLC has disavowed this as error and has returned to the simple scriptural position that the “**marking**,” enjoined in Romans 16:17, is to be followed by the “**avoiding**” – without a time lapse allowing for a process of admonition and without artificially delaying the official, conclusive “**marking**.”

F. When? Or How?

Both the WELS and the ELS have accused the CLC of acting hastily. (One might well ask: Where does Scripture advocate a leisurely reaction to the intrusion of error or the activities of errorists?) Thus the entire dispute has been made to appear at its worst as nothing more than impatience and rashness on the part of the CLC or at its best as a mere difference in human judgment as to WHEN the separation from Missouri should have taken place. The WELS points to the obvious fact that there was no agreement in the CLC as to the WHEN – some having pleaded for a break in 1953, more in 1955, while many agreed to go along with the “admonitory process” in 1956, some leaving after 1957, and the rest after 1959.

The members of the CLC freely confess that they too were misled by the false emphasis on the WHEN. Historically speaking, the break should have been made much sooner. But the CLC contends that making the WHEN the big issue has resulted in two harmful effects. First, the whole issue has been reduced to the realm of human judgment. The voting record of the conventions on the issue reveals this – the 1961 convention finally attaining a majority for suspension, after previous efforts had failed. Second, the false emphasis on the WHEN has become a smokescreen which has covered a small, but vital change in the doctrine of the termination of fellowship. The reason for terminating fellowship has been changed from the observable fact that someone is causing divisions and offenses, that is, preaching, teaching, and defending error, to a majority decision that the admonishing of the erring has reached an “impasse.”

The Leaven at Work

The most glaring example of this doctrine in practice, which is characterized by admonishing “**causers of divisions and offenses**” within the bonds of fellowship, can still be seen within Missouri. The object lesson is the disappointing posture of the “conservatives” within Missouri. Small groups and individuals have from time to time left Missouri, but the majority of her “conservatives” have been protesting, publishing, admonishing, memorializing, testifying, politicking, waiting for the next convention and then bemoaning its actions – all since 1938 without ever getting around to the simple obedience of “**coming out**” and “**being separate**” – “**avoiding**” Missouri. Three decades of “**marking**” Missouri, while at the same time living in disobedience to the exhortation to “**avoid**” them, has produced spiritual anemia, the inability to will to act in accordance with one's profession.

Is this same spiritual anemia at work in Wisconsin? We have been assured that the 1961 convention acted in obedience to Romans 16:17. The official Proceedings of that convention report that a goodly number voted against that “obedience.” Yet the Proceedings record no disciplinary action against those who disobeyed by voting against a resolution that was declared to be an act of obedience. One might frankly ask: Is discipline breaking down in the Wisconsin Synod? Are divergent and conflicting opinions being tolerated in an area of

doctrine? Is the WELS following the pattern of the LCMS – when they failed to discipline the signers of the “Statement of the Forty-Four”? Is the leaven at work?

Obedient or Schismatic?

We return to the question with which we began. Certainly no one thought or spoke or acted without sin in all those interpersonal clashes during those hectic years. We sorrowfully confess such sin and plead with all our former brethren for forgiveness. But in the matter of separating from and remaining separate from our former brethren, we firmly believe that we were led and continue to be led by the Spirit of God in the obedience of the Truth. We disavow the charge of being schismatics that is implied in the suggestion that we acted “hastily” or for other reasons of the flesh.

Further Confession

In addition to personal weaknesses in interpersonal relations, we confess that many in the CLC were either actively or passively responsible for forming, implementing, supporting, and defending the policies that led both the WELS and the ELS along a by-path that led to error in the doctrine of the termination of fellowship. This sin we have privately and publicly confessed. In this matter we did sin against the majesty of God’s Word. We were guilty of leading others astray. We pray for forgiveness and grace to be faithful to His Word.

Further Testimony

Now that the heat of battle has cooled we believe that it would be most profitable for members of the WELS and the ELS to re-examine the history since 1938 and review the official resolutions and statements of their respective synods. In all the strong cross-currents of those years the emphasis was shifted ever so slightly, here and there, with the result that the doctrine of the termination of church fellowship was corrupted. We seek no “pound of flesh,” no satisfaction in “being right.” We seek but the glory of our God and faithfulness to His Word.

Separation for the Sake of Preservation and Propagation!

We are walking our separate way because we want the saving truths of the Gospel preserved unto ourselves and our children and their children. We are continuing our lonely way so that when we go into the world to make disciples of all nations, we have the Truth to preach and teach. The salvation of our souls and of the souls of others is at stake. Error refuses to remain isolated. It tends to work its way through the body of doctrine in its effort to destroy the heart of the Gospel – justification through faith in Christ Jesus. Error also infects people – with spiritual anemia that causes its victims either to despair of ever knowing the Truth or to become too weak to stand up for the Truth. Error is content at first but to be tolerated. Then it seeks equality with the Truth, and finally it demands complete control. We separated from our former church bodies to guard ourselves and our loved ones against soul-destroying error and to remain what we were called to be – faithful witnesses of our Lord.

To this end help us, Lord Jesus. Amen.

[Note: This is a reprint of a pamphlet prepared for Pastor Paul F. Nolting, who was at the time living in West Columbia, South Carolina, and serving as secretary of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. It was authorized by the Coordinating Council of the Church of the Lutheran Confession and was approved by the Praesidium and the Board of Doctrine of the CLC. The Board of Doctrine of the CLC reported at the 1970 CLC convention: “We recognize the need and look forward with great anticipation to the appearance of Pastor Nolting’s historical review of the circumstances that gave birth to our church body.” At the 1972 CLC convention the Board of Doctrine reported: “During the first year of the biennium the Board of Doctrine occupied itself with the study of Pastor Paul Nolting’s work on the pamphlet, *Mark and Avoid – Romans 16: 17-18. Origin of the CLC*. This was approved by the Board upon final revisions and editing.” The 1970 CLC convention responded to this report by declaring: “We acknowledge with thanks Pastor Paul Nolting’s pamphlet, *Mark ... Avoid, Origin of the CLC*, as a useful historical contribution and a doctrinally correct presentation.”]

