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WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?
A Discussion on the Controversy between
The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
and
The Church of The Lutheran Confession
Concerning the Interpretation of Romans 16:17
and its Application in the WELS Convention Proceedings
Between 1955-1959

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OUTLINE

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PREFACE

I write this preface to explain why I have chosen to write on the controversy concerning the doctrine of fellowship between the CLC (Church of the Lutheran Confession) and the WELS (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod), and how it specifically applies to the history of the 1955-59 WELS conventions. Ever since I was introduced to the existence of the CLC through a student leaving Northwestern College (WELS) for Immanuel Lutheran College (CLC) I have been curious as to what the difference(s) are between the two church bodies. This interest was heightened when two of my brothers-in-law, who are devout and sincere Lutherans, men for whom I have the utmost respect, changed their membership from WELS to CLC.

Since that time I have been studying the issue at hand. I have spoken with CLC pastors, corresponded with them, read their theological and official documents, and have also spoken to my two brothers-in-law. There has been one consistent thread throughout - the examination of the proceedings of the 1955-59 WELS conventions. Without fail, reference was made to the proceedings of these conventions, and I have found that any fruitful discussions can only occur when the history is known. I must add, though, that I do not believe that doctrinal discussions should rotate around or even include a study of a church body's history, but should only focus on the pertinent Scripture passages and present practice and teaching. Yet having said that, I do believe that it is profitable to study the aforementioned conventions so as to be prepared to explain the Synod's actions, and if the situation warrants, to defend them.

This task is difficult. On the one hand the CLC states that the WELS's proceedings show the "leaven of false doctrine." On the other hand the WELS declares that their proceedings are in line with their doctrine, and that their doctrine concerning fellowship is the same as that of the CLC. This apparent discrepancy might explain why, after thirty years, no consensus has been reached between the WELS and the CLC concerning the doctrine of fellowship. This frustration is described clearly when you compare the

following two statements, one by a CLC pastor and one by a WELS pastor. On the one hand Pastor Mark Bernthal (CLC) speaks with these words, "For the life of me I cannot understand why the WELS leaders still say they do not understand the doctrinal difference between our synods. We have had many meetings, written many articles and talked in private to many pastors and members."¹ On the other hand Pastor John F. Brenner (WELS) says, "In essence then, there was really no doctrinal difference between us and those who formed the CLC except for the "time-table" that would set the exact time when dealing and admonishing must end and severance of fellowship must take place."²

The genesis of the CLC can be attributed to the many gifted men who left the WELS over this controversy. They include the former president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Prof. Edmund Reim, Rollin Reim, Winfred Schaller, David Lau, and many others whose pictures are hanging in the halls of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I have often looked at them, at men who might have been brother public ministers, if the Lord chooses to use me as a public proclaimer of his Word. This paper is an attempt, one of many, to explain what caused these men to protest, terminate fellowship with their brothers, and form their own church body. May God direct me in this effort.

Soli Deo Gloria

¹ Pastor Mark Bernthal, letter, 6-28-94, p2.

² Pastor John F. Brenner, letter, 7-11-94, p2.

SECTION ONE

The passage of Scripture which is at the heart of this controversy, Romans 16:17, is given below in both the Greek and its varied translations:

Παρακαλω δε υμασ, αδελφοι, σκοπειν τουσ τασ διχοστασιασ και τα σκανδαλα παρα την διδαχην ην υμεισ εμαθετε ποιουντασ, και εκκλινετε απ ' αυτων (UBS, 3rd Ed.).

I urge you brothers, 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 (NIV).

I urge you, fellow Christians, to take note of those who cause disagreements and cause people to fall [from faith] by going against the teaching you learned. Turn completely away from them (NET 2nd Ed.).

Now I beseech ye, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them (KJV).

Ich ermahne aber euch, liebe Brueder, dass ihr achtet auf die, die da Zertrennung und Aergernis anrichten entgegen der Lehre, die ihr gelernt habt, und weichet von ihnen (Die Heilige Schrift, nach der deutschen Uebersetzung Martin Luthers).

From this point on all the passages will be taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

“The constituting convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference met at Oberwesel, Germany, from April 27 through 29, 1993...Eleven churches from all corners of the world gathered to share and celebrate a common faith and mission. Repeatedly throughout the convention it was stressed that this unity of doctrine and purpose was the work of God’s Spirit alone.”¹

Unity of doctrine is what the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference is based upon, but unity of doctrine was not always true of the old Synodical Conference. In the 1955 proceedings of the WELS, Committee No. 2 prepared historical notes concerning the doctrinal differences which had arisen over the years between the WELS and the LC-MS (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) who were both members of the Synodical Conference. The following is a summary:

- 1938--Missouri’s St. Louis Resolutions join its **Brief Statement** with the ALC’s (American Lutheran Church) **Doctrinal Declaration** as a joint settlement of past differences. The ALC’s Sandusky Resolutions view the **Brief Statement** “in the light of” their own **Doctrinal Declaration**.
- 1939--The WELS adopted the following; “Not two statements should be issued as a basis for agreement; a single joint statement, covering the contested doctrines thetically, and antithetically and accepted by both parties of the controversy, is imperative, and, furthermore, such doctrinal statement must be made in clear and unequivocal terms which do not require laborious additional explanations.” Proceedings 1939, p60.
- 1941--Missouri’s Ft. Wayne convention instructs its Committee on Doctrinal Unity to prepare a single document of agreement with the ALC. WELS adopts a statement against the LC-MS’s participation in the military chaplaincy.

¹ *WLQ* vl 90, No. 3, Summer 1993, p218.

- 1944--LC-MS and ALC publish a single document, the **Doctrinal Affirmation**. LC-MS abandons former position on Scouting.
- 1949--WELS addresses six questions to the LC-MS: (1)Lutheran Men in America, (2)Cooperation in Welfare Agencies, (3)Cooperation with the National Lutheran Council, (4)first Bad Boll, (5)the booklet "Scouting in the Lutheran Church," (6)applicability of Romans 16:17 to all errorists, whether Lutherans or not.
- 1951--The reply of the LC-MS to the above questions is said to be "in part conditional, in part incomplete, and sometimes evasive." (1951 Proceedings, p145.) The WELS also rejected the **Common Confession** agreed upon by the LC-MS and the ALC in 1950.
- 1952--At the Synodical Conference session at St. Paul, Minnesota the delegates of the WELS declared themselves in a state of confession because they felt that the issues (cf. above, 1949) had not been met at all.²

While meetings and discussions were being held between the WELS and LC-MS, and actions were being taken at conventions of both synods, the Northwestern Lutheran published news items informing the members of the WELS on what was going on among the various Lutheran churches, and the Conference of Presidents of the WELS had eleven tracts published addressing pertinent doctrinal issues facing Lutheranism. These tracts were informative in nature and their goal was not only to clarify the doctrinal positions of the WELS to its members, but also to distinguish and refute the doctrinal positions of other Lutheran churches. They dealt with various issues like Scouting, Cooperation in Externals, and Election. Tract number 5 deals with the doctrine of Inspiration and how it is defined by the American Lutheran Church (ALC) in its **Declaration and Common Confession**. When you read the Common Confession (which was adopted by the ALC and LC-MS in 1950), on the surface all seems well, and it reads like an

² *WELS 1955 Proceedings*, p82,83.

orthodox Lutheran statement of faith. The following is a quote from the Common Confession as recorded in Tract Number 5, *If The Trumpet Give An Uncertain Sound*:

Through the Holy Scriptures, which God caused to be written by men chosen and inspired by Him, God instructs and assures us regarding His will for us. The Holy Scriptures constitutes His Word to men, centering in the revelation of Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ for our salvation. Through the Holy Scriptures God continues to speak to men in all ages until the end of time. He speaks as the infallible and unchanging God, Whose message to mankind never changes. Since the Holy Spirit by divine inspiration **supplied to the holy writers content and fitting word** [emphasis mine], therefore we acknowledge the Holy Scriptures in their entirety as the inspired Word of God. His Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that His Word is true, that He will keep all His promises to us, and that our faith in Him in not in vain.

In 1938 the ALC at its Sandusky convention adopted its so-called *Declaration* in which for the first time we meet with the expression "content and fitting word."...Two years later, in 1940, the ALC joined the United Lutheran Church (ULC) in subscribing to a document known as the *Pittsburgh Agreement* in which the expression "content and fitting word" again occurs...But while these words can be understood as teaching the Verbal Inspiration of the Bible, they can also be understood in another sense. For already in 1938 the ULC at its Baltimore convention officially stated that it could not accept the Missouri Synod's teachings regarding Verbal Inspiration...We might add that already in 1937 an official periodical of the ULC declared: "It is, of course, no secret that Verbal Inspiration is not taught in some of the seminaries of the ULC." So while the ULC uses the expression "content and fitting word" when speaking of Inspiration, it has been publicly declaring since 1940 that **this expression does not mean Verbal Inspiration as taught by the Synodical Conference** [emphasis mine].³

This is but a taste of what was being disseminated during this time when words and positions were being carefully inspected and delineated. Pastor John F. Brenner gives a short and concise explanation of the intersynodical problems during these years (1940s and 50s).

Intersynodical problems with the LC-MS went way back to the subject of the Church and Ministry (Kirche und Amt). Things started boiling up during WW 2. LC-MS participated in the Military Chaplaincy. U.S. government rule - "We will not tolerate narrow-minded sectarianism. The chaplain is the spiritual adviser to all in his command regardless of the individual's creed." During this time the LC-MS cooperated with ALC in servicemen's canteens. They had joint worship services with open communion.

Then the LC-MS opened its doors to the Boy Scouts of America with their basic principle of work righteousness plus unionist practices of having ecumenical worship services at their rallies.

In the progression of things came the negotiations with ALC towards church union which produced the Common Confession. I might add that the LC-MS's Laymen's

³ *If The Trumpet Give An Uncertain Sound*, Tract No. 5, 1954, p1-3.

league made a statement that if the LC-MS's clergy could not accomplish union with the ALC, they would take over the negotiations and accomplish it!⁴

Included in this listing of doctrinal tension and conflict, and pertinent to the subject at hand, was a document drafted by 44 pastors and professors of the LC-MS in September, 1945, called *A Statement*. This was not an official document of the LC-MS, but it was sent to all LC-MS pastors by the authors with an accompanying letter. Theses four and five concern the doctrine of fellowship:

FOUR

We believe that the ultimate and basic motive for all our life and work must be love - love of God, love of the Word, love of the brethren, love of souls.

We affirm our conviction that the law of love must also find application to our relationship to other Lutheran bodies.

We therefore deplore a loveless attitude which is manifesting itself within Synod. This unscriptural attitude has been expressed in suspicions of brethren, in the impugning of motives, and in the condemnation of all who have expressed differing opinions concerning some of the problems confronting our Church today.

FIVE

We affirm our conviction that sound exegetical procedure is the basis for sound Lutheran theology.

We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17, and 18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction, based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America.

We furthermore deplore the misuse of First Thessalonians 5:22 in the translation "avoid every appearance of evil." This text should be used only in its true meaning, "avoid evil in every form."⁵

In view of all of this discord among the member synods in the Synodical Conference as illustrated by the preceding information, the Synodical Conference appointed two committees to deal with the problems that had arisen. One committee was to deal with intersynodical relations, and the other was to deal with the chaplaincy issue and "all other matters relating to the doctrine of the call, the ministry, and the church where there has been disagreement with the aim of achieving complete unity."⁶ Prof. E. C. Fredrich

⁴Pastor John F. Brenner, letter, 7-11-94, p1.

⁵ *WLQ* v1 43 No.1, January 1946, p58-59.

⁶ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1944, p61.

comments on the effectiveness of these two committees with these words, “Neither Synodical Conference committee achieved any notable success in healing the breaches. Usually the committees themselves split along synodical lines and often issued dual reports. Synodical Conference conventions tended to reflect the same division.”⁷

Finally, after much study of the issues at hand, and after many meetings with the doctrinal committees of the LC-MS, the report of Floor Committee No. 2 of the 1955 WELS convention (Report of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union) stated the following in its preamble:

“We of the Wisconsin Synod in our convention of 1953 with heavy hearts had to declare that the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod by affirming 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.*”⁸

The words in italics are taken from the proceedings of the 1953 Synod convention and describe the strained relations between the WELS and LC-MS. The WELS, in its 1953 convention, declared itself *In Statu Confessionis* according to the Word of God with these words quoted in the *Quartalschrift* “That while during the period up to the next meeting of the Synodical Conference we, in view of President Behnken’s [LC-MS] offer, still anxiously and prayerfully await an indication that the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod will not persist in the present stand as set forth in Point 1, we remain in a state of confession. [emphasis mine]”⁹

⁷ Fredrich, E. C. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992, p202.

⁸ *WELS 1955 Proceeding*, p85.

⁹ *Quartalschrift*, vl 50 No. 4, October 1953, p284.

The extensive preamble of the Floor Committee of the 1955 convention continued, reiterating the divisions caused by the LC-MS by its various practices, and then it (Report of the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union) presented the following resolution to the 1955 WELS convention:

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.¹⁰

The preamble [brief outline of the doctrinal deviations of LC-MS] of the standing committee was accepted unanimously, but the resolution calling for a recessed session of the Convention in 1956 to take final action on the resolution (cf. above) to terminate fellowship with the LC-MS was adopted by a standing vote of 94 to 47. There was a protest with 44 delegates (voting and advisory) against the adoption that the termination of fellowship be finalized at a recessed session of the Convention in 1956.¹¹

SECTION TWO

It was at this time that the controversy concerning the interpretation of Romans 16:17 came to a head. In a booklet entitled *The Church of the Lutheran Confession: Our Place Among the Lutherans* Pastor David Lau states the following:

The question of separating from the LCMS was brought to a vote in WELS conventions in 1955, 1956, 1957, and 1959. The vote indicated that the members of the WELS were divided on the question of terminating fellowship with the LCMS, although almost all of them were in agreement (at least since 1955) that the LCMS was "causing divisions and offenses" contrary to the Scriptural doctrine. In all of the above-named conventions the

¹⁰ *WELS 1955 Proceedings*, p86.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p87.

WELS voted not to terminate fellowship with the LCMS, even though our Lord requires Christians in Romans 16:17 to “avoid” those causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine they have learned. This vote not to terminate fellowship with the LCMS was really an act of disobedience to God.

In the years from 1955 to 1961 several congregations and individuals, both pastors and laymen, withdrew from the synods of the Synodical Conference. They did not want to be partakers of the errors that were being tolerated.¹²

These words are the reason for this paper. From Pastor David Lau’s words, it is clear that those in the CLC inseparably join the WELS teaching of Romans 16:17 to the resolutions of the 1955, 1956, 1957, and 1959 WELS’s conventions, and as I indicated in the preface, will not discuss the former without the latter. Therefore what follows will be a review of the proceedings of the WELS conventions referred to above by David Lau..

1955 - (Saginaw) The Standing Committee In Matters Of Church Union issued a preliminary and a supplementary report. To understand what the voters voted on it is advisable that we hear what they did.

In The Preliminary Report they [Standing Committee] stated:

RESOLVED: That with deepest sorrow, taking notice of the fact that the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we, in obedience to God’s injunction to avoid such, **declare the fellowship which we have had with said synod to be terminated** [emphasis mine].¹³

The members of the Standing Committee recommended IN ITS PRELIMINARY REPORT that fellowship be terminated. It is important to note that. It is also important to note that The Standing Committee itself introduced this preliminary report with the following words:

Your committee has made a careful study of all the factors pertaining to the present state of our relations with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. We are mindful that new intersynodical committees have been appointed, with the specific understanding that these appointments do not extend beyond the time of our next convention, thus leaving our Synod free to determine its further course according to the information that will then be at hand.

Reports of these new committees will be made available to our Standing Committee shortly before the time of our convention and will be incorporated in a supplementary

¹² David Lau *The Church of the Lutheran Confession: Our Place Among the Lutherans* p3.

¹³ *WELS 1955 Proceedings*, p79.

report of the Standing Committee. Since this would allow no time for preliminary study by our Conferences or Districts, and since the members of our Synod are entitled to all possible information as to the thinking of our committee at this time, we herewith submit the following Preliminary Report. **It should go without saying that this report and its recommendations are subject to revision, if the findings of the new committees should reveal a substantial change in the present intersynodical situation** [emphasis mine].¹⁴

The Standing Committee, based on the information before them at that time, and without the benefit of the reports of the various intersynodical committees, recommended termination of fellowship with the LC-MS. Yet, they did state “that this report and its recommendations are subject to revision, if the findings of the new committees should reveal a substantial change in the present intersynodical situation.” What constitutes “substantial change?” What entails subjective judgment for substantial change in one person’s eyes may not be so in the eyes of another. So the question arises, did the Standing Committee see “substantial change?” Did the Standing Committee see enough change to warrant a continuation of the ongoing protesting fellowship, and thus override its first impression in the preliminary report? To find the answer to that question we must look at the SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT.

The Supplementary Report states the following:

1. Regarding the Synodical Conference Doctrinal Committee

This committee took up discussion of the Common Confession. It was necessary for our 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 statement. 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** [emphasis mine].”...

We affirm our position that the Mo. 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 (Common Confession, Joint Prayer, Scouting, etc.)” **has brought about a break in relations, and that our Synod, bound by the Word of God, should now declare itself on the matter** [emphasis mine].

We still fervently hope and pray that the testimony which we have brought on the basis of Scriptures will bear fruit.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p77-78.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p80 and 82.

According to the supplementary report which contained the various reports of the different intersynodical committees, there was seen “a step, at least, in the right direction, or as someone else called it, a ray of hope.” The evidence does indicate that there were some who saw or perceived a change in the LC-MS’s position. To some, this might have been all they wanted to see, it could have been the “substantial change” desired, for others not. But this is speculation. What is not speculation is that the Standing Committee at the end of the supplementary report stated that the LC-MS had brought “a break in relations” and that the Synod should now “declare itself.” This is not the strong wording of the preliminary report, but is the wording of the 1953 Synod Convention which stated that there was a break in relations between the WELS and LC-MS, and that the WELS was *In Statu Confessionis*. There are contained in the combined report of the Standing Committee of Church Union (the preliminary and supplementary reports) TWO views propounded. They are as follows:

PRELIMINARY REPORT -- Terminate fellowship.

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT -- Ray of hope.

With these two different views (drastically different views as the former describes the LC-MS as a persistent errorist, and the latter as an erring brother), The Floor Committee was to deliberate and propose resolutions to the Synod. What happened? In short, the Convention unanimously adopted the preamble of the Floor Committee which summarized the history of the LC-MS and it’s deviation from sound doctrine as discussed in the first section of this paper. The Convention also adopted the resolution calling for a recessed session of the Convention in 1956 to take final action on the resolution to terminate fellowship with the LC-MS. The resolutions (previously quoted) are as follows:

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.

In the first resolved it states “we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.”¹⁶ The action called for by these words is explained farther in the first Resolved when the reasons for this recommended course of action is given: “This continuance 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.” In other words, the committee acknowledged that the LC-MS was guilty of error, but that the Synod should continue “watching out” *In Statu Confessionis* until the LC-MS has had an opportunity to respond.

A reminder of the passage in question is in order, Romans 16:17, *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.* As stated immediately above, this “watching out” was the patience and forbearance in love which the WELS showed its sister synod by giving the LC-MS the opportunity to express itself at its 1956 convention. By the above resolution the WELS was stating that at that time (1955) the LC-MS was a doctrinally erring church body, and that the error being taught was in danger of terminating fellowship between the two church bodies. There were questions to be answered, though, clarifications of certain positions which the LC-MS was propounding. Therefore the WELS declared to the LC-MS in 1955 that she was still in a state of protesting fellowship (stated officially in 1953). The delegates did not want to rush into judgment (that the LC-MS was persistently holding to error) when there was still hope (cf. supplementary report), yet they wanted to protect God’s Holy Word (cf. introduction to the resolutions) and themselves from false teaching and were stating that if the LC-MS remained unchanged in its error and kept on causing dissensions and offenses they would have no choice but to judge them as persistently holding to error and avoid, keep away, terminate fellowship (cf. preliminary report). Therefore, the delegates asked for a recessed convention in 1956. This intervening

¹⁶ *WELS 1955 Proceedings*, p86.

year was to give The Standing Committee on Church Union an opportunity to study (“watch out”) the LC-MS’s June 1956 synodical resolutions and present their findings and recommendations to the WELS August 1956 special convention.

It should be stated that the above explanation is not held to by the CLC who have explained the WELS proceedings of the 1955 convention differently. Prof. Edmund Reim (CLC) explains:

It [report of the Floor Committee] added a long paragraph specifying the “divisions and offenses” with which Missouri was charged, and culminating in the statement that this “has brought about a break in relations and that our Synod, bound by the Word, should now declare itself on the matter.” This same committee even formulated a resolution, that “we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod,” (page 86). The force of all this was fatally weakened, however, by the stipulation that this resolution be presented to a recessed convention in 1956. But the diagnosis had been made, on the basis of evidence that was nowhere spoken of as being incomplete. And so the fellowship (“vigorously protesting,”) with constant negotiations (“admonitions”) continued through the inconclusive “recessed convention” of 1956, as well as the regular sessions of 1957 and 1959, until in 1961 the step of termination was finally taken.¹⁷

Both of the interpretations are possible as one reads the resolutions of the 1955 WELS Convention. There is no question on that. On the one hand, the majority (based on the vote - 94 to 47) of the WELS delegates interpreted the resolutions by explaining that there were questions as to whether the LC-MS was demanding recognition for its error or not. The evidence was not incomplete, as Prof. E. Reim states, but then again there were questions in the minds of the Floor Committee and the delegates as to whether “our brother or brothers are no longer holding to their error in weakness but with persistent determination,”¹⁸ especially since they had read the supplementary report which had said that the members of one of the intersynodical committees had seen a “ray of hope, a step in the right direction.” They therefore decided to continue “watching out” to determine beyond question whether the LC-MS was persistently erring in doctrine. There was, however, among all, the consensus that the LC-MS was guilty

¹⁷ *Journal of Theology* vl 5 No 5, December 1965, p37.

¹⁸ Pastor Wayne Mueller, letter, 7-10-94.

of error. On the other hand others interpreted the resolutions to mean that the LC-MS was guilty of persistent error, and that there should now be, as The Standing Committee had resolved in the preliminary report, a termination of fellowship between the two synods. Needless to say, there exists a discrepancy between the interpretations. To those who take the latter view (that the resolutions are stating that the LC-MS is a church body which is a persistent errorist, that further admonition would be of no further avail, and that termination of fellowship should begin immediately), those espousing the former view are seen as not heeding the Scriptures but heeding human wisdom. When that is inverted, the other is accused of being unloving, anti-admonition, and legalistic.

To come to a conclusion as to what the delegates meant to say (or said) it is prudent that we hear their words in the resolutions of the 1956 WELS convention as the same delegates returned to act upon the information gathered in the intervening year.

1956 - (Watertown) There were 15 new replacement delegates at this convention, plus one additional delegate. There were six protests. The report of Floor Committee No. 4 (President's Report) stated this concerning the protests:

These protests deal with our relationship to the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and especially with the 1955 Saginaw resolutions to hold final action in abeyance until this recessed convention. These protests contain many a fine preachment to our Synod. A reading of these protests, however, would require considerable time. They may be summarized in the statement that "avoid them" in Romans 16:17 does not permit delay, but as soon as the "divisions and offenses" are "marked." - Pastor Hilbert Schaller's protest also declares him in a state of confession over against our Synod.¹⁹

Immediately below the above statement The Floor Committee stated the following, "The attitude of our Synod in its relation to the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and toward the 1955 resolutions is in a state of flux."²⁰ As already mentioned, there were differing opinions toward the WELS's relation to the

¹⁹ *WELS Proceedings, 1956*, (as contained in the 1956 Northern Wisconsin District Proceedings), p50.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p50.

LC-MS and toward the 1955 resolutions. If the understanding of the WELS's relationship with the LC-MS was flowing, not fixed in the minds of some, and this was also true of the 1955 resolutions, who then defines them?

According to the Bylaws of the WELS, section 1.05 (president), part (b):

The president shall officially represent the synod and promote the best interests of the synod. **He shall exercise supervision over the official conduct of all officials of the synod, supervise the execution of synodical resolutions,** oversee the total synodical operation, particularly to insure that it is true to its mission and objectives, **and that it is being conducted within the framework of the synod's stated standards for doctrine and practice.** He shall function in every way as the head pastor and chief executive officer of the synod [emphasis mine].²¹

The president is responsible for the resolutions adopted by the Synod, that is to say, he is to make sure that they comply with the Scriptures. This too is the responsibility of the Council of Presidents. Before we broach the subject of what the official interpretation was, it would be well to mention here that The Floor Committee No. 4 (President) also resolved that a special Protest Committee be formed to answer the given protests. These protests were also read by members of Floor Committee No. 2 (Standing Committee).

The report of the Standing Committee on Church Union (which was the same as the 1955 Standing Committee with the exception of then President E. Reim who resigned as secretary and was replaced by Pastor O. J. Siegler who along with President E. Reim protested against the adoption of that portion of the 1955 resolution which called for a final vote on the termination of fellowship in 1956) stated the following after a lengthy report analyzing the LC-MS's 1956 Proceedings:

In making these proposals, the sister synod [LC-MS] expresses an earnest desire of reestablishing the former unity of spirit. In the light of all that has been presented in this evaluation, **we are of the conviction that our Synod ought not to close the door to further discussions at this time** [emphasis mine]. We will need to determine which particular forum of those proposed would in our judgment seem [to] hold out the greatest hope of success in resolving the issues still remaining. It is also our conviction

²¹ *WELS Constitution and Bylaws*, 1994, p4.

that while we prayerfully wait the outcome of these added efforts at attaining unity on these issues, we hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance.²²

After Floor Committee No. 2 considered all the reports, memorials, protests and other communications they:

[I]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]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."²³

The convention adopted the above by a roll call vote of 108 "yes" votes to 19 "no" votes. Considering all of the information the question must be asked, "Why the substantial difference in margin between the votes of the 1955 Convention and the 1956 Convention?" As was already stated, there was "flux" among the delegates as to what was voted on in 1955. This flux had been stopped, and the WELS position clearly expressed, and as indicated by the vote, approved.

What was approved, what was expressed? That in 1955 the WELS was strongly admonishing the LC-MS, declaring it to be propounding false doctrine, and that if, upon further investigation, it was seen to be unchanging and demanding recognition for its error, the WELS would have to terminate fellowship with the LC-MS. When and if that would happen was dependent upon the LC-MS. It would be difficult to understand the 1955 proceedings in any other way. If the majority in 1955 meant otherwise and truly had decided that the LC-MS was guilty of "holding to their error with persistent determination" and that the WELS should terminate fellowship at that time (1955), why didn't they terminate fellowship? There is only one possible answer to the above hypothetical question. The majority of the WELS delegates had succumbed to false doctrine and refused to heed the command of the Lord. Thus, we come to the pivotal

²² *WELS 1956 Proceedings* (as found in the 1956 Northern Wisconsin District Proceedings), p57.

²³ *Ibid.*, p60,61.

question - was the action of the WELS in 1955 and 1956 in accord with Romans 16:17? Again, it would be well for us to review the passage in question, *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.*

Simply, the answer to the above question is no. The reason for that answer is that the WELS was “watching out” at that time under the guidelines of 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15. They had not yet determined the LC-MS to be persistent errorists or judged it to be determined in its error. Therefore, the judgment “held in abeyance” was the judgment that the LC-MS was determined in its error. The WELS was only “watching out.” But before we progress with this explanation, it would be well for us to examine the Conventions of 1957 and 1959.

1957 - (New Ulm) The Standing Committee reported on the ongoing doctrinal discussions with the LC-MS and stated their findings to date, “We have studied the answers given by the Missouri Synod Praesidium in reply to the questions which had been submitted by us [cf. p2]. We feel constrained to point out that these answers have seriously impaired the basis on which our 1956 Synod Convention held its 1955 resolution in abeyance and resolved to enter into further discussions with the Missouri Synod.”²⁴

The Nebraska District Pastoral Conference in a memorial stated the following “Therefore, since the LC-MS tolerates, advocates, and persists in error, and since it is obvious we are no longer walking together, we urge our Synod to carry out the above-mentioned Saginaw resolution.”²⁵ There were similar memorials written by five other parties urging the Synod to sever fellowship with the LC-MS, and one memorial stating “We wish to express one wish, namely, that you will be able to recommend in the light

²⁴ *WELS 1957 Proceedings*, p134.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p137.

of the truth of God's Word that the Wisconsin Synod should not sever relations with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod."²⁶

The report of Floor Committee No. 2 (Church Union) declared the following:

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.... We feel conscience-bound to declare publicly, that these principles, policies, and practices [of the LC-MS] 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 been resolved in a thoroughly Scriptural and mutually acceptable manner, and....²⁷

The action by the synod was not to adopt the report of Floor Committee No. 2 by a standing vote of 61 to 77. Eight delegates abstained from voting. A note was added at the end of the portion of the proceedings entitled "Action by the Convention:"

(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.)²⁸

At the close of the proceedings is a report from the Protest Committee. This committee held 9 meetings, and opportunity was given to the protesters to meet with the committee. The following are excerpts from that report.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p141

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p143.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p144.

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. It is in part from such an unclear state of affairs that the greater number of these protests before us have resulted, though two protests, by the same author, antedated the Saginaw Convention. However, they too result from a similar state of affairs.

3. Timing and human judgment appear to be basic sources of the difference of opinion in our circles concerning the problem at hand.

5. While it may be true that in the area of timing and human judgment, which many in our circles feel exists in the matter, some error may have occurred on the part of the Synod, yet we would plead that the protesters in charity, trust that there was an honest uncertainty at Saginaw concerning Missouri's having received ample opportunity in convention assembled to react to the testimony which our Synod had given since Missouri's 1953 convention.²⁹

Again, it must be admitted that there was confusion among the delegates concerning what was going on in the 1955 convention. Yet the delegates were agreed on one thing as David Lau said at the beginning of this section, that the LC-MS was guilty of causing divisions. This brings to discussion whether Romans 16:17 enjoins admonition or not, but that will be taken up in the next section. We must first take up the 1959 Synod Convention before we move on to the various statements on the interpretations of the passage in question.

1959 - (Saginaw) The memorials, reports, and resolutions were many. There were five memorials; one urging the WELS on in the course it had taken, another urging that if the LC-MS did not clearly answer the presented questions in 6 months, the WELS should terminate fellowship. A third urged the convention to terminate fellowship, and a fourth urged the convention not to be hasty and allow for more time, effort, and prayer. The fifth memorial entitled *A Call for Decision* was a reaction to a letter and a document called *A Report to the Protest Committee*. The aforementioned document [*A Report to the Protest Committee*] was written by Prof. Carl Lawrenz on behalf of the Protest Committee and is

²⁹ WELS 1957 Proceedings, p147,148.

addressed to those who were protesting the 1955,56 and 57 resolutions of the WELS. The Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union delivered its reports on the ongoing discussions with the LC-MS. Each synod's union committee, in January 1957, had appointed two men to draft doctrinal statements for three different areas: (1) Atonement, Justification, and the Dynamic of the Christian Life (Scouting), (2) Scripture (Revelation, Inspiration, Principles of Interpretation, open questions) and Eschatology (Antichrist), and (3) Grace, Conversion, Election, and Church and Ministry (Fellowship, Unionism, Chaplaincy, Discipline) [cf. WELS 1957 Proceedings, p131]. The WELS doctrinal statements concerning the second list of topics [cf. above] were read and unanimously accepted.³⁰

In conclusion then, the above will serve as a brief outline to the history surrounding the controversy concerning the interpretation of Romans 16:17. It would be well for us to remember that the WELS was treating the LC-MS as an ailing sister, using the heroic measures common to the ER doctor, to sustain the doctrinal purity in what was once a healthy body. What was the disease or the disasters that brought the LC-MS into such desperate circumstances? They had slowly forsaken the Scriptures. How long will the ER doctor attempt his heroic measures to bring the person back to life? Until the body does not respond to the known treatments. Likewise, the WELS attempted to use heroic measures to patiently turn the LC-MS back onto the path of sound Scriptural teaching. How long did the WELS use these heroic measures? As long as the body responded to the known treatments of willingness to adhere to the truth of God's Word. The following section will deal with the interpretations of Romans 16:17 as given by the WELS and the formers of the CLC at the time of the controversy under discussion.

SECTION THREE

³⁰ *WELS 1959 Proceedings*, p186-211.

The position of the formers of the CLC will be addressed first with statements of the WELS following. The following is an excerpt from a Memorial written by Pastors John Lau, Paul Pruetter, and Jonathan Schaller, to the 1957 WELS synod convention in New Ulm, MN.

The Wisconsin Synod became guilty of disobedience to the clear Word of God in delaying the action which would logically follow such an indictment [cf. resolution of 1955 Convention calling for a recessed session of the Convention in 1956 to take final action on the resolution to terminate fellowship with the LC-MS] -- namely, "avoiding" the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. God's command was clear, in spite of the human reasoning that said, "This resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences," (1955 Wis. Proc., p. 86) Synod's disobedience has been defended by the assertion that Romans 16, 17-18 does not state that the "avoiding" must follow immediately upon the "marking." One can only answer that neither does the passage declare that a year must elapse before the "avoiding". By the very nature of St. Paul's words in the passage under discussion, it is obvious that, after one has marked and noted an individual who causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which he has learned, he has no reason for delay in obeying God's clear command: AVOID. Any delay is subjective thinking and not condoned by Scripture.³¹

The following is an excerpt from a paper written by Pastor Paul Nolting (CLC) in 1965 for his congregation. His reason for writing this document is given by him when he says "But if our separation was of God, then another course makes its demands upon us...Then we must fortify ourselves in the Truth. Then we must teach our children to know the reasons that compelled us to do in obedience that which we have done and are continuing to do."³² This excerpt is a portion of the section which deals with the 1955 WELS Synod Convention. He begins by quoting President Oscar Naumann (WELS):

"For those of us who have been closest to these problems, it appears quite definite that we must now obey the Lord's Word in Romans 16:17." [underlining contained in Nolting's paper] (Proceedings, page 13.)

It is quite obvious that President Naumann was expressing himself in the language of Romans 16:17. As the head of the synod and its chief representative in all inter-synodical dealings, he had "marked" Missouri as a causer of divisions and offenses and was of the conviction that the situation demanded application of the "avoid" of the same passage. But immediately in the next paragraph President Naumann introduced a phrase that was destined to dominate the thinking, much talking, and no acting of the next half dozen years -- "ray of hope." That elusive, phantom "ray of hope" dulled the thinking and paralyzed the will of the synod. Another ominous note appeared in the second last paragraph of the President's report:

³¹ *Holding Fast the Faithful Word*, 1957, p22.

³² *LEST WE FORGET*, Pastor Paul Nolting, 1965, p2.

“We implore the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us as we try to decide in the face of all the reports whether the Lord would now have us apply His definite command “Avoid them!” or whether we still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished so many years.” (Proceedings, page 14.)

This paragraph almost seems like the “two steps forward, one step backward” technique. Testify boldly, but keep the back door open for retreat! Does Scripture make contrary demands of us in a given specific situation? Does man have to assume the role of God and determine which Word of God should be obeyed? If so, man replaces God, and human judgment regulates obedience to God. Regretfully, these things developed from the seed planted in this part of the President’s report.³³

Both of the above quotes state that the WELS disobeyed the Word of God when they did not “avoid” the LC-MS after having “marked” them. Their (CLC) conclusions are based on (1) their interpretation of Romans 16:17, and (2) their interpretation of the synodical proceedings and official documents. Paul Nolting says “Thus after the President in his report, the Standing Committee in their report, the Floor Committee in its report, and the entire convention by its unanimous adoption of the Preamble of the Floor Committee report HAD MARKED Missouri as a causer of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine, the convention refused in DISOBEDIENCE to adopt the complementary action of terminating fellowship with Missouri.”³⁴

As already stated, the members of the CLC, as seen above, declare that the WELS disobeyed God’s Word when they did not immediately sever fellowship with the LC-MS after having found them guilty of causing divisions, guilty of persistent error. As shown in the quoted statements, the WELS was declared to be using human judgment to define doctrine and not the Word (cf. Nolting’s words above, “If so, man replaces God, and human judgment regulates obedience to God. Regretfully, these things developed from the seed planted in this part of the President’s report.”) Therefore, by not immediately “avoiding,” the WELS was replacing the Word of God with human judgment. This charge is made in the document *Holding Fast The Faithful Word* which has already been quoted but warrants repetition, “The Wisconsin

³³ *Ibid.*, p6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p7.

Synod became guilty of disobedience to the clear Word of God in delaying the action which would logically follow such an indictment -- namely, "avoiding" the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. God's command was clear, in spite of the human reasoning that said, "This resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences." (1955 Wis. Proc., p, 86)"

All of the above accusations against the WELS are based on a presupposition: That the WELS in 1955 had resolved that the LC-MS was guilty of persistent error. The following is the WELS reply to that accusation given by Prof. Carl Lawrenz in *A Report to the Protest Committee* which was sent to all WELS pastors and teachers. The Protest Committee was formed to inform, aid, and answer those in the WELS who were protesting the action of the WELS concerning the LC-MS and the doctrine of Fellowship. In it Prof. Carl Lawrenz defends the WELS position on the basis of (1) the (WELS) interpretation of Romans 16:17, and (2) the interpretation of the synodical proceedings and official documents. Prof. Lawrenz takes up the latter first when he writes:

What our Synod therefore held in abeyance at Saginaw was not merely the "avoiding," the breaking of fellowship, enjoined in Rom. 16:17f. but also the conclusive application of the very judgment of this passage, namely the judgment that the Missouri Synod was persistent in causing divisions and offenses [emphasis mine]. 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.

Who would want to say that the Saginaw [1955] resolutions did not leave room for greater clarity? But those who were there know the lengthy debate and discussion that was devoted to the problem and are conscious of the fact that the final decision was made in the closing hours of the convention. Thus they understand that there was no opportunity for editorial revisions in the interest of full clarity. The above interpretation given to the Saginaw resolutions is the only one that can make any sense. This was therefore also the official interpretation that was given to them by our Praesidium, by our Union Committee in its St. Paul report, and by our subsequent synodical convention at Watertown.³⁵

³⁵ *A Report to the Protest Committee*, Prof. Carl Lawrenz, 1958, p2.

Prof. Lawrence underscores what has already been noted in the second section of this paper, namely that **the WELS held in abeyance not only the judgment to terminate fellowship with the LC-MS, but also the judgment that the LC-MS were brothers who were holding to their error with persistent determination.** It should also be noted that the preamble to the Saginaw resolutions were unanimously approved. The approved preamble did not state that the LC-MS was guilty of false doctrine. Rather, it made the following statement "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."³⁶

Prof. Lawrenz further stated the following:

At our convention at New Ulm in 1957 our Synod again held the judgment of Rom. 16:17f in abeyance. Neither at Saginaw, nor at Watertown, nor at New Ulm, did our Synod vote on whether it wanted to be obedient to Rom. 16:17f. No synod of Christians could presume to vote on such a matter. It did vote on the question whether in the Missouri Synod we have a church body falling under the indictment of Rom. 16:17f., which calls for a breaking of fellowship.³⁷

The above statement concurs with President Naumann's statement in the WELS proceedings when he said that "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."³⁸ Therefore, as Lawrenz declares above, the LC-MS was, using the words of Romans 16:17a , guilty of causing offenses, but were not looked upon by the WELS as persistent errorists. In otherwords, the reference to Romans 16:17 was only used to describe what kind of offense our sister Synod was causing, namely offenses contrary to the Scripture. Lawrenz continues to explain this:

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

³⁶ *WELS 1955 Proceedings*, p85.

³⁷ *A Report to the Protest Committee*, Prof. Carl Lawrenz, 1958, p3.

³⁸ *WELS 1957 Proceedings*, p144.

doctrine or practice, is not yet in itself a reason for terminating church fellowship. Rather both facts may still be inducements for practicing this fellowship most vigorously in efforts to overcome the error and its defense. **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.**³⁹

The above statement of Lawrenz's delineates that after you have begun to "watch out" there is no injunction to immediately sever fellowship with that person or church body. This was questioned by 30 men who wrote a memorial to the 1959 convention (already noted) called *A Call for Decision*. In it they say "This statement [cf. above] is basic to the entire issue which called forth the document [*A Call for Decision*]. We hold that it is false and unscriptural, and that the argument based upon it is rationalistic and untenable."⁴⁰ The authors then proceeded to offer a replacement statement which states "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 (Galatians 2:11-14)."⁴¹ As these men believe that this is "basic to the entire issue" it would be good for us to compare the two statements.

Termination of church fellowship is called for:

- I. [Lawrenz] when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail.
[*A Call for Decision*] when Scriptural correction has been offered and rejected.

- II. [Lawrenz] and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error.
[*A Call for Decision*] and the erring brother or church body have continued in their error despite admonition.

³⁹ *A Report to the Protest Committee*, Prof. Carl Lawrenz, 1958, p4.

⁴⁰ *WELS 1959 Proceedings*, p210.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p210.

In part I Lawrenz says that when Scriptural correction or admonition is rejected, namely of no further avail (“profit, advantage, benefit” - Websters 2nd Edition), and when (part II) the erring brother or church body continues in their sin despite admonition and thus demands recognition for their error, then termination of church fellowship is called for. Both statements are saying the very same thing, and complement each other very well. What then is the difference? The men who wrote *A Call for Decision* state “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.”⁴²

As shown above, Lawrenz is saying what *A Call for Decision* is saying but in a different manner. There is human judgment involved in both statements. Lawrenz says that termination of fellowship occurs when “admonition is of no further avail”, and *A Call for Decision* state that termination of fellowship occurs when the “evidence shows that despite admonition the erring has persisted and does persist in holding his error.” Again, both are saying the same, but from different angles. Lawrenz looks at the evidence and comes to the conclusion, on the basis of that evidence, that despite admonition the erring brother has persisted and does persist in holding his error. In *A Call for Decision* the evidence “shows them” that despite admonition the erring brother has persisted and does persist in holding his error. How does the evidence “show” except that on the basis of the evidence the person has to come to a sanctified human conclusion?

The authors of *A Call for Decision* also stated as quoted above that “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.” Prof. Lawrenz answers that statement in a letter to Pastor Rollin Reim, one of the authors of *A Call for Decision* and says:

⁴² *Ibid.*, p210.

Let me ask: Are you really willing to maintain that with the words “reach the conviction that admonition is of no further avail” I am actually holding a brief for gaining a conviction by some kind of clairvoyance concerning the future fate of admonition that one has given or giving? That I am not talking about the future fate of admonition, its future failure or success in getting the erring brother to see his error and to depart from it, should be evident from what follows in the sentence: “and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error.” Note, that I am not saying: will demand recognition. I am not speaking of what the erring brother will do or might do. I am speaking of what he is doing now to show that “admonition is of no further avail.”⁴³

Prof. Lawrenz explains above that his conviction that admonition is of no further avail is based on the evidence that the erring brother or church body **demand**s (present tense) recognition for their error. It is the determination of this writer that the authors of *A Call for Decision* came to their conclusion that the WELS was propounding that “the action required by Romans 16:17 depends upon clairvoyance, namely the ability to determine the future fate of admonition,” because they did not read the word FURTHER in it’s context. Despite Prof. Lawrenz’s letter of clarification the formers of the CLC continued to declare that the WELS depended upon some clairvoyance to determine the future fate of admonition. This is seen in the following quotes from pastors in the CLC.

The first quote is from a paper written by Pastor Paul Nolting (also an author/subscriber to *A Call for Decision*) when he writes:

There are different ways of expressing the nature of the error in this controversy, for example:

- Continuing to admonish as brethren within the bonds of fellowship those who have been recognized as errorists.
- Failing to terminate fellowship with those manifestly causing divisions and offenses in the church.
- Making the outcome of the admonishing process THE FACTOR that determines whether fellowship should be continued or terminated.
- Evaluating reaction to admonition instead of observing adherence to error to determine whether or not fellowship should be terminated.
- **Judging the present in the light of future probabilities and possibilities or ignoring the facts and realities of the present in the hope that the future will bring improvement in conditions [emphasis mine].**⁴⁴

⁴³ Prof. Carl Lawrenz, letter, 3-17-59.

⁴⁴ *LEST WE FORGET*, Pastor Paul Nolting, 1965, p14.

The following quote is written by Pastor John Ude (CLC) and again demonstrates that the CLC still insist that the WELS bases its action required by Romans 16:17 upon its ability to determine the future fate of admonition.

The question I'm asking is if the human judgment is remaining the servant or becoming the master. The servant says: God has declared this to be false, he is teaching, defending, promoting it, therefore he is a false teacher. The master says: God has declared this false, however I can not reach the conviction that he is going to continue teaching it, therefore he is not a false teacher. The servant says: God calls me to restore the brother overtaken in a sin, though this man slipped up big time, yet he listened to the word of God in repentance, therefore we are to restore him. The master says: God calls me to restore the brother overtaken in a sin, therefore we will continue to consider this man a brother, though he refuses to recognize his error. Note you will search in vain for any scriptural basis for referring to someone as a weak brother who after scriptural admonition is still defending, promoting, or deliberately continuing in error or sin.⁴⁵

As already noted in this paper, according to the WELS Proceedings, 1957, Romans 16:17 was only used to describe the "offenses" of the LC-MS. In other words, the WELS did not see the LC-MS as a persistent errorist, as someone "refusing to recognize his error [cf. above quote]," but as a weak brother guilty of error, and thus under the admonition of 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15. The WELS was stating that it was "watching out." From the above quotes, the CLC sees the WELS as using human judgment as a master because the WELS recognized that the LC-MS was guilty of offenses but did not label it as a persistent errorist^s and consequently avoid. John Ude infers that the WELS based its decisions on the unforeseen future, the "ray of hope" (words used by President Naumann in 1955). Again from the material already discussed above, the WELS refutes any such accusation as stated by Prof. Lawrenz in his letter to Pastor Rollin Reim. The "ray of hope" was based on evidence in the present which encouraged the admonishers (voters at the WELS Conventions) that the admonition (presented questions and doctrinal discussions) was being heeded (by the LC-MS). The "ray of hope" was not clairvoyance, but was hope based on the evidence presented which showed the majority of the voters at the WELS Synod Conventions that at that time the LC-MS was not, in their judgment, persistently erring church body, and thus under the indictment of 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15 . On the basis of that evidence, and on the

⁴⁵ Pastor John Ude, Letter, 10-20-92, p2-3.

grounds that they did not see the LC-MS as persistent errorists, there remained the hope that the LC-MS would continue to heed more admonition and would be willing to amend its doctrine.

There is one question of interpretation concerning Romans 16:17 on which all of the above discussion rests. It is: DOES ROMANS 16:17 INCLUDE ADMONITION?

Let us again review the passage in question:

Παρακαλω δε υμασ, αδελφοι, σκοπειν τουσ τασ διχοστασιασ και τα σκανδαλα παρα την διδαχην ην υμεισ εμαθητε ποιουντασ, και εκκλινετε απ ' αυτων (UBS, 3rd Ed.).

I urge you brothers, 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.

Prof E. Reim in an article written in the Journal of Theology (CLC) entitled ADMONITION AND ROMANS 16 states the following:

When such efforts at brotherly admonition have been made and have nevertheless been rejected - whether in so many words or by deliberate adherence to the error - then one must come to the reluctant conclusion that this is indeed the very situation which the Apostle had in mind, that one is dealing with causers of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine that we have learned.

It is this rejection of admonition that has made the identification not only possible but positive. Now one can "mark" with certainty [emphasis mine]. Now nothing is to be gained by further delay, by a process of marking. To call for further admonition now would be like a surgeon calling for further tests after he knows that he is dealing with a ruptured appendix, like postponing isolation measures when the plague spots have plainly erupted.⁴⁶

Prof. Reim is speaking of the word σκοπειν which is a present infinitive. C. M. Kuehne (CLC) translates it as follows.

In our passage, Paul is asking the Christians to keep on (present infinitive) paying close attention to those who are causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which they themselves have learned. **This involves a careful and critical observation of them - something similar to what John speaks of in his first epistle: *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world (4:1).*** We have in the σκοπειν of our verse a

⁴⁶ *Journal of Theology*, December 1962, p8.

call for constant alertness. The NIV translation, “watch out for;” is a happy choice [emphasis mine].⁴⁷

In Prof. Reim’s discourse it seems as though admonition precedes and is excluded from Romans 16:17. From his article he says that when the admonition is of no further avail, or as he says “When such efforts at brotherly admonition have been made and have nevertheless been rejected,” **then** one comes to Romans 16:17 and “mark” with certainty. From what C. M. Kuehne writes (cf. his explanation of σκοπεῖν) it seems like he is at odds with Prof. Reim and what has been the CLC interpretation of Romans 16:17. Kuehne says that the word σκοπεῖν “is an activity whereby believers in Christ are to be constantly alert for those who are causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of God’s Word.”⁴⁸ The same document just quoted continues to say:

We do not believe that *skopein* in the context of Romans 16:17 specifically and directly enjoins admonition. This does not deny that admonition, as enjoined in other passages of Scripture, will normally take place concurrently with the watchfulness that is implicit in the *skopein*.⁴⁹

Prof. Reim says there is no place for admonition in Romans 16:17, but that the passage describes the labeling of a false teacher and the following separation. Yet, the CLC now state that admonition can certainly be enjoined with the “watch out” of Romans 16:17. But in an official publication of the CLC entitled MARK..AVOID.. Origin of the CLC (authorized by the Coordinating Council, approved by the Praesidium and the Board of Doctrine of the CLC) the following is stated,

Does the “marking” that St. Paul urges us to do in Rom. 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

⁴⁷ *Journal of Theology*, March 1988, p14,15.

⁴⁸ *CLC THESES AND ANTITHESES ON THE ROLE OF ADMONITION IN THE TERMINATION OF FELLOWSHIP WITH CHURCH BODIES*, February 1990.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

offenses” in the church, or whether one is dealing with such who have inadvertently fallen into error.⁵⁰

The above is ambiguous. Romans 16:17 can either involve admonition or not. Yet the above statement says “No,” and then backs down and says “Maybe.” Prof. Reim says that admonition precedes Romans and is excluded from it, but Kuehne says that Romans 16:17 does allow and permit admonition. Needless to say, there seems to be some conflict and confusion.

What does Romans 16:17 say about admonition? Prof. Armin Panning speaks to this point with these words:

To summarize: In its present tense **skopein** speaks of an activity that has some duration. The text does not specify how long. It is the activity of watching or observing, which may be accompanied by other action. The verb itself does not specify by commanding one type of accompanying action or forbidding another. The situation observed during this process of observation admits of one or the other of two outcomes: It will or will not change. If there were no possibility of change, if all were an accomplished fact both for the observer and the observed, then there would be no point in Paul’s strongly urging (**parakalo**) them to watch (**skopein**).

If there is a correction of the situation that resulted in dissensions and offenses, then Paul can follow with the imperative *aspasasthe* and thus urge the Romans to greet or welcome the former trouble-maker. If the situation does not change, if the errorists remain unreconstructed and keep on making (*poiountas*) dissensions and offenses, then Paul and the Romans have no choice but to resort to the imperative of another verb, i.e., *ekklino*.⁵¹

As stated above by Prof. Panning, and also in the *CLC Theses and Antitheses on the Role of Admonition in the Termination of Fellowship with Church Bodies*, admonition can and does take place concurrently with the “watching out.” As was stated in the second section of this paper, the WELS was admonishing the LC-MS (2 Thessalonians 3:14,15) as part of the “watching out” because they felt, based on the evidence placed before them at that time, that the LC-MS was not a persistent errorist. The WELS was “watching out” to see if the LC-MS was truly defending and teaching error and refusing to heed further admonition. When the LC-MS, to the minds of the WELS, showed itself as an unrepentant errorist, they separated.

⁵⁰ *MARK...AVOID... Origin of the CLC* Eau Claire, WI: The CLC Bookhouse, 1986.

⁵¹ *Romans 16:17*, Prof. Armin Panning, January 1988, p6,7.

How does one determine the exact point at which a church body crosses the line between weakness and willful error? Pastor Wayne Mueller answers:

By the same means by which we determine the exact moment of presence in the Sacrament and the exact moment when one comes to faith: i.e., we don't. The Bible identifies no exact point in time at which a church body becomes heterodox, nor does the Bible identify a point in time at which an orthodox church body must identify another church body as heterodox and separate from it. The Bible stipulates the criteria by which heterodoxy must be judged, but provides no prescription for determining the exact point at which that judgment must be made.

However, this is not to deny that the time comes and passes when God calls us to make a judgment and separate. "Mark and avoid" is a clear command for action. Although that verse does not specify the point in time, it does make it clear that a point in time comes when brotherly admonition ends separation from errorists begins.⁵²

From the above evidence, it is clearly seen that both sides insist that termination of fellowship is called for when a church body has rejected the offered admonition and have continued in their error demonstrating that further admonition would be of no benefit, and that they are causers of divisions and offenses. What then is the difference between the two church bodies? The history and its explanation, specifically the history of the WELS conventions of 1959-1961.

SECTION FOUR

To date the resurrection of the history of these conventions has brought a number of doctrinal discussions to a stand still. What follows is a brief summary of the history of the doctrinal discussions which took place from the 1960s to the 1990s between the WELS and CLC concerning the doctrine under discussion.

In 1964 President Albrecht (CLC) and the CLC Board of Doctrine stated in its convention report that:

We know of no other way of determining whether there is any substance to our charges of "deviations (on the part of Wisconsin) from the Scriptural doctrine of Church Fellowship, and the doctrine of the Clarity and Authority of the Scriptures, as well as

⁵² Pastor Wayne Mueller, letter, 7-10-94, p2.

instances of violation of the Sanctity of the Call” **except a careful joint review of the official documents and actions of the Wisconsin Synod between 1955 and 1961** [emphasis mine].⁵³

The above statement was arrived at after two meetings were held between the WELS and CLC, one on November 10, 1962 in Mankato, and the other on January 2-3, 1964 at South St. Paul. President Naumann wrote the following in a letter dated April 6, 1965 which he addressed to the CLC, “Our Commission had in mind that your evaluation of our Synod’s resolutions, actions, and official interpretations during this period (1955-1961) became the basis for the very issues which led to the separation between many of the present members of the CLC and our Synod - and that a restudy or reexamination of these years would seem to hold little promise of a more fruitful discussion at this time.”⁵⁴

Another meeting was held between the WELS and CLC on March 1, 1966 at the Holiday Inn, Minneapolis. A better understanding of the other’s position was obtained, and the WELS asked that the next meeting of the two committees be restricted to a discussion of the doctrinal statements of the two respective church bodies; Theses on Church Fellowship (WELS), and Concerning Church Fellowship (CLC). Another meeting was held on December 19-20, 1966.

When President Naumann asked on January 26, 1968, by letter, that the CLC define the alleged doctrinal deviation of the WELS, the CLC Doctrinal Committee responded in April of the same year with an extensive reply. The reply was based on the history of the WELS as is seen when they say, “Moreover, the error had become evident in the synod’s dealing with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the years 1955-1961, as well as in the previous years.”⁵⁵ Again the CLC used a misinterpretation of the WELS proceedings to define the WELS doctrinal deviation. It is interesting to note that the CLC Committee on Doctrine in its supplementary report to the 1968 CLC convention states the following:

⁵³ CLC Convention and Doctrinal Correspondance, President John Lau, p7.

⁵⁴ President Oscar Naumann, letter, 4-6-65, p3.

⁵⁵ CLC Convention and Doctrinal Correspondance, President John Lau, p26.

B. If indeed we are to honor the repudiation of the alleged error as set forth in (3), we would need to be further assured, either that the earlier statements and actions of the WELS which espoused and defended that error are also now repudiated, **or that we have incorrectly defined the error contained in those statements and actions** [emphasis mine]. For error there was, both in expression of principle and in practice. If that error is now rejected by the WELS, we have cause for great rejoicing.⁵⁶

In 1968, Robert Reim was elected president of the CLC, and so ensued a new effort for meetings between the two church bodies. Previous talk by the CLC and WELS of an impasse in discussions was put aside, and correspondence between Presidents Reim and Naumann intensified. On July 18-19, 1972, in Milwaukee, a meeting between the two church bodies was held. The result of this meeting was that the impasse previously spoken of came to be. It should be noted here that the 1973 Convention of the WELS stated the following:

Whereas our Commission agreed with the conviction expressed by the CLC representatives that continued discussion on this matter at that meeting would serve no purpose; 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; and be it finally
 Resolved,
 b) That we ask our Commission on Inter-Church Relations to avail itself of any new opportunities to resume discussions with the CLC board of Doctrine, as conditions warrant.⁵⁷

The above statement has caused much confusion between the WELS and CLC. During the previous doctrinal discussions the WELS had said that there really was no doctrinal disagreement between the two church bodies, and the WELS continues to assert that. Yet the above statement from the 1973 WELS proceedings show that the WELS had not reached an agreement on the doctrine under discussion. Is the WELS saying two things? No. The WELS in convention was expressing its regret that the discussions had not yielded a reconciliation or an understanding between the WELS and the CLC - that they had

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p29.

⁵⁷ *WELS 1973 Proceedings*, p93.

failed to reach an agreement on the doctrine under discussion. It is illogical to say that no doctrinal agreement was arrived at, and yet in the same breath say that there is doctrinal agreement. Yet that was the case. The WELS did not see a difference in doctrine, but a difference in application, especially in regard to the 1950s and 1960s and the WELS discussions with the LC-MS.

For more than ten years there were no official meetings between the WELS and the CLC. The CICR (WELS-Committee on Inter-Church Relations) makes mention in the minutes of its April, 1984 meeting, that there were a number of contacts between WELS and CLC pastors.⁵⁸ On April 16, 1985 a free conference was held in Ellensburg, Washington, between seven WELS pastors and nine CLC pastors. The group of 16 pastors drew up a document entitled *The Separation Principle of Church Fellowship*. The group of pastors studied the Scriptures and arrived at the following document:

When we recognize people as causing doctrinal divisions and offenses, our course of action will be to avoid them (Romans 16:17,18; Titus 3:10).

We do not see this as necessarily involving a separation in secular matters (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

I. The Unity of the Spirit.

1. When the Apostle Paul spoke of the "unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3), he was referring to the spiritual unity which is created by the Holy Spirit in the holy Christian Church (Una Sancta).
2. This unity exists among all believers, wherever they may be, whether they are few or many in number.
3. This unity is a unity of faith, and is preserved in the same way that it was created, namely through the Word of God. Therefore
4. Following the Word of God will always serve to promote the "unity of the Spirit;" and
5. To go contrary to the Word of God, even with the intention of promoting the unity of the Spirit, is to attack the unity of the Spirit.

II. The Application of the Separation Principle of Church Fellowship

1. If there is a concern that someone is teaching falsely within a fellowship, it is of the utmost importance that Christian love be exercised when ascertaining whether doctrinal error is actually being taught (2 Timothy 2:23-26; Ephesians 4:15).
2. If error is defended or tolerated, despite admonition given in Christian love, our course of action will be to avoid the errorist (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10).
3. The endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" of Ephesians 4:1-3 does not militate against the "avoid" of Romans 16:17-18, but rather complements it, whether the avoiding is applied to one person, a group, or a synod.

III. Our Motivation for Applying the Separation Principle.

⁵⁸ *CICR Minutes*, 4-7-84, p2.

1. Loving obedience to our Savior-God, who first loved us (2 Corinthians 4:14);
2. Concern for our own faith (2 Timothy 2:16-18, 2 Peter 2:1);
3. Loving concern for the souls of those from whom we have separated (James 5:19-20).⁵⁹

The above document was the impetus for a renewed round of discussions between the WELS and CLC. On January 13-14, 1988, in Eau Claire, the WELS and CLC doctrinal committees met, and papers on Romans 16:17-18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15 (written by men of both synods) were discussed. According to the CICR minutes it was agreed that the papers and results of the meeting should not be published immediately.⁶⁰ Yet the CLC published both of the papers delivered by the CLC writers in their March issue of the *Journal of Theology*. Later CICR minutes state:

President Mischke reported that he has not heard from President Fleischer (CLC) since our January 1988 meetings...disappointment was also voiced re the CLC's publishing (cf. March 1988 issue of *Journal of Theology*) of their essays which we heard at Eau Claire, especially Prof. C. M. Kuehne's, whose applications apparently were directed against WELS. For if something has been put into print, you feel bound to defend it. Consequently this will make any future discussions that much more difficult. It was reiterated that on the agenda of our next meeting with the CLC must be the role of admonition in the dealing of one church body with another. It was agreed that to show that WELS is bargaining in good faith Pres. Mischke will contact the CLC.⁶¹

Despite this, the discussions continued and were very thorough in their approach. As already noted, the discussions were based on the exegesis of the pertinent passages, including the one under discussion in this paper - Romans 16:17. The CICR drew up and worked on theses and antitheses concerning fellowship which were to be presented to the CLC. These were to be presented first to the joint group (WELS and ELS) for review.⁶² It should be noted here that the WELS thought it best that the ELS join the doctrinal discussions with the CLC, and thus extended an invitation to the ELS which was accepted.

⁵⁹ *CICR Minutes*, 9-27-86, p2.

⁶⁰ *CICR Minutes*, 1-14-88, p1.

⁶¹ *CICR Minutes*, 4-21-88, p4.

⁶² *CICR Minutes*, 9-21-89, p5.

Meetings were held on January 31-February 1, 1990 in Milwaukee involving representatives of the WELS, CLC, and ELS. President Daniel Fleischer (CLC), stated the following in a letter addressed to all CLC pastors:

It was the consensus of all present that encouraging progress had been made in understanding one another. Therefore it was agreed that 3 men from each synod meet in an effort to draw up a single document treating [of] the termination of fellowship between church bodies.⁶³

The President's Report to the June 18-22, 1990 CLC Convention gives a review of what happened at and after the meeting of the subcommittees of the WELS, CLC, and ELS:

After the meeting of the subcommittees on April 5,6, 1990, here at Immanuel, the study document was presented to the respective plenary boards. The WELS suggested some editorial changes and approved the study document. They were prepared to send it to their respective district conventions should it be approved by the other two committees. The ELS reaction was similar.

The Board of Doctrine of the CLC met on May 22, 1990, to review the subcommittee presentation. Included in the meeting were men who had been serving as essayists at the request of the Board. The full board concurred that the study document was faithful to Scripture on the subject so far as it went. However, it felt compelled to inform the WELS/ELS, "We regard as necessary that a preamble similar to that offered by the representatives of the CLC at the April 5,6, 1990 meeting be added to the joint statement before we can accept it as a positive step toward the settlement of past differences."⁶⁴

Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch, the chairman of the CICR, replied to the above with the following words in a letter to Pastor Robert Reim, the chairman of the CLC Board of Doctrine:

We find some encouragement in the emphasis you are putting on the fact that you are asking for a similar preamble. We would hope that the suggestion we made would be in line with this request. It was our understanding that we agreed at the outset of these discussions that the '50s and '60s were a time of confusion, as one of your board members called it, in which things were said and done on both sides that were unfortunate. It was not our intention, as we understood it, to review all those things, but to see where we are at today and hopefully find ourselves in agreement.⁶⁵

⁶³ President Daniel Fleischer, letter, 2-90.

⁶⁴ *CLC 1990 Proceedings*.

⁶⁵ Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch, letter, 8-8-90

The most critical statement made in the above quoted letter was when Prof. Gawrisch said that, "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?"⁶⁶ This is the fulcrum on which everything balances. After a study of the Scripture the WELS and CLC found themselves in agreement, but ^sas soon as the matter of history was broached the discussions fell apart. The CLC state that there is a doctrinal difference between it and the WELS, but the WELS disagrees. President Daniel Fleischer (CLC) wrote the following to President Carl Mischke (WELS):

In discussions initiated with the hope of finding agreement upon which a former fellowship might be re-established, we believe that it is not sufficient simply to agree in principle. We believe that any suggested agreement in principle must be tested by a study of official statements and practice. Official statements and practice at variance with any doctrinally correct agreement must be rejected so as to remove any possibility of ambiguity, or contrary interpretation.⁶⁷

The discussions came to an end in 1992. Official representatives of the WELS and the CLC came to an agreement on the doctrine of fellowship as evidenced by the Joint Statement. What then is the difference? If the difference is doctrinal then it follows that either the WELS or CLC representatives were not honest during the discussions. If that is not true, then another possibility is that one or the other synod has changed in its position on fellowship over the years. A final possibility, the one that this paper propounds, is that there never was a doctrinal difference, but that there was a difference in the application of the doctrine. The difference lies then in the history, specifically that surrounding the WELS relationship with the LC-MS in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p2.

⁶⁷ President Daniel Fleischer, letter, 6-21-91.

CONCLUSION

What then is the difference? The CLC see the difference as this:

We reject any interpretation of Romans 16:17-18 which, in the name of Christian love, would make the avoiding of causers of divisions and offenses contingent upon the subjective judgment that admonition is of no further avail and that an impasse has thereby been reached.⁶⁸

This is the position that the CLC attributes to the WELS. This position has been refuted in the preceding sections and warrants no further discussion other than a reminder that the WELS was *In Statu Confessionis* during the ensuing conventions (1955-1959) under the basis of 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15. Therefore the WELS would and does concur with the above statement of the CLC. The WELS came to the judgment that the LC-MS was a causer and defender of false doctrine in 1961 at which time it terminated fellowship. Yet the question does remain: What is the difference? If the CLC teaching is in accord with the most recent paper by Prof. Kuehne on Romans 16:17 in their *Journal of Theology*, then one must say that there is no difference in doctrine, in teaching. The difference lies in the interpretation of the WELS Conventions of 1955-1959, on the interpretation and explanation of historical events.

The title for this paper "What Is The Difference?" is in many ways a response to the CLC paper and pamphlet "There Is Still A Difference." That paper does not begin with an analysis of Scripture and what the Lord has to say on fellowship but begins with the history of the WELS conventions of 1955-61. Thus, the writer of the article begins with a presupposition which he has derived from his interpretation of the WELS conventions, and then compares it to Romans 16:17. His false presupposition is at odds with Romans 16:17, and so he therefore concludes that the WELS is guilty of false doctrine. I intentionally followed the writers basic outline and came up with a different conclusion.

What then is the difference? The difference between the WELS and the CLC lies in the interpretation of the WELS Conventions of 1955-59 (and '61). Discussions between the two church bodies will continue

⁶⁸ CLC THESE AND ANTITHESES ON THE ROLE OF ADMONITION IN THE TERMINATION OF FELLOWSHIP WITH CHURCH BODIES, February 1990.

to fail and be frustrated as long as the aforementioned history is brought into the discussions as is seen from the previous section. It is the opinion of this writer that a consensus would have to be arrived at between the WELS and CLC as to the official and proper explanation of the WELS proceedings of 1955-1959 before any serious discussion can proceed. Since the CLC has its genesis from these conventions this writer cannot see the CLC not bringing them into the discussions. Thus the standstill. The WELS wants to come to an agreement on the basis of the Scriptures alone and present practice, the CLC on the Scripture and the history of the WELS conventions of 1955-61.

Having studied the issue at hand I would like to add some personal thoughts. The proceedings of the 1955 WELS Convention lack clarity and are open to misinterpretation. Likewise the proceedings of the 1973 WELS Convention. If these resolutions were given to almost any pastor or layman in our synod, they would become confused because it seems like the synod is not faithful to its position on fellowship or is saying one thing and meaning another. Doctrinal statements must always be clear and simple, to the extent that they cannot be misunderstood

The CLC continually points^y to the 1955 Synod Convention (and others), and by using its plain language will insist that the WELS erred and is guilty of false doctrine. The CLC have^{has} repeatedly asked for an examination of these conventions, and the WELS has always refused to bring them into the discussion, and I believe rightly so. Agreement in matters of doctrine should only come after thorough discussion of Scripture. If there is agreement, then it is proper and God-pleasing to unite in fellowship. If there is no agreement, then it is proper and God-pleasing to remain separated. I conclude this paper with these words written by Prof. Lawrenz in *A Report To The Protest Committee*:

This is what our Synod sought to do at Bethesda, at Saginaw, at Watertown, and at New Ulm. In each case the majority of our synodical delegates, while recognizing the divisive nature of the issues, were not yet able to come to the conviction that everything had been done in the way of patient admonition [2 Thessalonians 3:14,15 - my interjection] and that the Missouri Synod must now be treated as a persistently erring church body, henceforth to be avoided. Those voting in the minority, and others who did not happen to have voting rights at the conventions, did not share that judgment, and no one can deprive them of their right to their own judgment.

We dare never forget that it is the Lord who has also drawn us together with other Christians in congregations and synods, and that in dealing jointly with those with

whom the Lord has drawn together we cannot simply foist our judgments, no matter how correct we may think they are, upon our brethren, nor can we break away from our brethren if our judgments are not shared by them when we think that they ought to be shared, as long as there is no open disobedience to God's Word in evidence on their part. From what has previously been said, it should be needless to say that it is a different matter when one is convinced that he can conclusively show that the prevailing judgment which he is asked to endure is clearly wrong and sinful.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *A Report To The Protest Committee*, Prof. C. Lawrenz, 1958, p4,5.

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