

# A REPORT TO THE PROTEST COMMITTEE

*By Carl J. Lawrenz*

[Circa 1959]

The Standing Committee on matters of Church Union shares the deep concern of the Protest Committee for all the brethren in our midst who have been led by their consciences to protest the 1957 resolution of our Synod concerning our relations with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and who consequently are also in protest against the continued discussions which the Union Committee is carrying out in the joint meetings of the doctrinal unity committees of the Synodical Conference.

We would like to remove what troubles the protesting brethren and allay their apprehensions, so that they might again be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with us in upholding our testimony on the divisive issues which have arisen between our Synod and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. We feel the deep urgency for this all the more keenly because we are convinced that we still have a common stand with all the protestors on the issues themselves; thus we long for an understanding with them.

This longing arises, first of all, out of a deep fraternal concern for our protesting brethren, whose continued fellowship is not a light matter with us. But our longing for an understanding arises likewise out of a deep need of our own, as members of our Synod's Union Committee in pursuing the responsibility which our Synod has placed upon us of continuing our discussions with Missouri. For as we continue our effort to break through with our stand on the issues in the Synodical Conference we would appreciate the full support also of our protesting brethren, instead of having our testimony weakened in the eyes of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod by the appearance that there is no longer harmony and unity in our midst on the stand that we represent over against Missouri. Moreover, we deplore any needless disharmony in our own midst that would discourage and arrest a growth of understanding in our own Synod concerning the divisive issues present in the Synodical Conference, concerning their continued seriousness, and concerning the great need of resolving them.

Because of these considerations we would plead with our protesting brethren that they would give full thought to what we in turn feel constrained by our conscience to say in respect to some of the main points of their protests.

## I

### WHAT WAS THE IMPORT OF OUR SAGINAW RESOLUTION?

One point that seems to be basic in the protests of a great number of brethren is this that they are convinced that our Synod was disobedient to the Word of God in holding the vote on the Saginaw resolution up for a year. It is their conviction that the Synod placed the Missouri Synod under the judgement of Rom. 16:17f. by the unanimous adoption of the preamble and then arbitrarily postponed for a year the avoiding which should certainly follow immediately when an individual or a body has been placed under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. We can understand that the conscience of anyone who thinks of the Synod's action at Saginaw in this manner would be troubled.

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

As a Synod we indeed stated in the preamble that on the basis of all the fruitless, official discussions with Missouri, its past convention resolutions, and the final *Lutheran Witness* articles of President Behnken, Rom. 16:17f. would have to be applied. Yet the Synod resolved not to vote, not to reach a decision on this resolution, until the Missouri Synod had had another opportunity to speak in delegate convention. Our Synod

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

What our Synod therefore held in abeyance at Saginaw 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, 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 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.

Now we need to remember that when we found unclarities in the wording of the Missouri Synod resolutions on the CC in 1950, the very resolutions that we were asked to evaluate, and that when we met with different interpretations on the part of Missouri Synod constituents, we operated exclusively with the official interpretation given by its Praesidium, its Doctrinal Unity Committee, and its subsequent conventions. We need to do the same thing in respect to our own synodical resolutions. When, upon our Union Committee's evaluation of the Missouri Synod's St. Paul convention resolutions, our Synod at Watertown took up the Saginaw resolution anew, it resolved to hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolution in abeyance until the next convention, not merely the matter of breaking fellowship.

At our convention at New Ulm in 1957 our Synod again held the judgment of Rom. 16:17f in abeyance. Neither at Saginaw, not 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.

We earnestly feel therefore that there need not end there should not, be a division between us on this point. We are not finding fault with those who at Saginaw did not understand the resolutions in this way, who were earnestly troubled, and who therefore felt constrained to express this in the form of a protest. But a synod does have a right to interpret resolutions through its praesidium and through its subsequent conventions; and the nature of a resolution that it has previously passed will from time to time make it necessary for a synod to exercise that right, so that there may be clarity; and we shall want to welcome that clarity, even though we may personally feel that another interpretation had better warrant than the one that has officially been given and that now obtains.

## II.

### **IS THE APPLICATION OF ROM. 16:17f. TO THE MISSOURI SYNOD SIMPLY A MATTER OF OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD?**

Others among our protesting brethren may be ready to grant the previous point that on the basis of the official interpretation which now obtains both the preamble and the resolution of the Saginaw report were held in abeyance. They question, however, whether our Synod at Saginaw, or at the two subsequent conventions, had

any right to hold that judgment in abeyance: They question whether the matter of applying Rom. 16:17f. to Missouri leaves room at all for any human judgment, and thus whether it could properly be put to a synodical vote in the ordinary sense in which such a vote calls for the expression of a human judgment. For them the application of Rom. 16:17f. to the Missouri Synod is simply a matter of obedience to the Word of God. Hence they are inclined to think of the synodical vote in terms of a confession which merely expressed willingness or unwillingness to be bound by God's Word. Since they see an unwillingness to be bound by the Word of God, though not necessarily a conscious one, in the majority vote of our Synod, they have been led to protest against it.

In view of their conception of the import of the synodical vote that was taken, we can indeed understand their protest. Yet, here again we plead with our protesting brethren to face the question: Is there not an area of human judgment involved before a Christian comes to the conviction concerning a brother who has fallen into error that he can no longer treat him as a weak brother, to whom he owes further patient admonition, but that he must now be treated as a persistent errorist, from whom the Lord bids him to withdraw all further fellowship? Yes, we ask them to face the question: Is there not an area of human judgment involved before a church body comes to the conviction concerning a sister synod which has become involved in error of doctrine or practice that it is now no longer to be made the object of further patient admonition, but that it is now to be treated as a persistently erring church body, with whom further fellowship must be terminated.

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

We will surely all grant that when we deal with an individual erring brother in our congregational work, we know of no simple mechanical formula by which we can come to the conviction that he now ceases to be a weak brother and must be regarded and treated as a persistent errorist. We know that we can come to such a conviction only by earnest and prayerful use of our Christian judgment in evaluating all the detail and factors of the case. We also know that if a whole congregation is to reach a decision as to what to do with such an erring brother, they must jointly come to the conviction by the use of their Christian judgment that everything that can be done in the way of admonition has been carried out and that therefore there is nothing left but to part ways with him. Even so, they are not all likely to come to this conviction at one and the same time. Surely then when a church body has become involved in error, a church body in which there will always be a number of different trends in evidence and striving for mastery, one trend supporting the error and fostering it, another still testifying against it, it will take an even richer exercise of Christian judgment to come to a decision in the matter. If not only an individual is to come to a conviction concerning such an erring church body, but a whole synod of Christians is to come to that conviction and is to express it jointly, all involved will have to exercise their Christian judgment. Here again it is not at all likely that they will all come to this conviction at quite the same time. All these considerations will be kept in mind in dealing with erring individuals and church bodies.

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 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,.

Yet to become unwilling to abide by the prevailing judgment, they would have to be convinced in their own conscience that they could bring and did bring conclusive proof that the judgment which had prevailed was necessarily wrong and sinful. For if their own judgment had prevailed, they, too, would have expected those who had not yet come to the conviction that a termination of fellowship was called for, to abide by the

prevailing judgment or to be firmly convinced in their own conscience that they could and did offer conclusive proof that a reverence of fellowship at this time was wrong and sinful.

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 us 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.

### III

#### **WAS THERE ANY WARRANT FOR HOLDING THE JUDGMENT OF THE SAGINAW RESOLUTION IN ABEYANCE AFTER THE ST. PAUL CONVENTION?**

Granting even the previous point, our protesting brethren may probably ask: Was there anything in the answer of Missouri at their St. Paul convention that warranted holding the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. upon the Missouri Synod in abeyance at Watertown, and again at New Ulm?

At Saginaw our Synod had stated in its preamble that all the evidence before us at that time through the Missouri Synod's past convention resolutions, and the stand of its official committees and its praesidium, would necessitate our placing the Missouri Synod under the judgment of Rom. 16:17f. Hence the past forums of discussion were discontinued, and a resolution to terminate fellowship was drawn up to be acted upon after having received the answer of another delegate convention of the Missouri Synod.

After evaluating pertinent St. Paul resolutions of the Missouri Synod as they pertained to membership in the Lutheran World Federation, to the CC, and to Intersynodical Relations, the majority of our Union Committee, including some who at Saginaw had strongly advocated a break, recommended to our Synod "not to close the door to further discussions at this time" but prayerfully to await the outcome of added efforts at attaining unity in the issues, efforts for which the Missouri Synod had pleaded in its convention resolutions, and in the meantime to hold our Saginaw resolution in abeyance (Proceedings, Recessed Session of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Convention, 1956, pp. 52-57).

Through the St. Paul convention a change had been brought about in one of the divisive issues listed in our Saginaw report, namely in the CC. Our Union Committee stated in its St. Paul evaluation that the pertinent resolution of the Missouri Synod had in essence supplied the action which our Synod had specifically requested in its objections to the Missouri Synod's 1950 resolutions on the CC. What was meant was this that the Missouri Synod had set the CC aside as a settlement of the past controversies between the Missouri Synod and the ALC in the doctrines treated therein.

Our Synod at Watertown let this change in the status of the CC be one of the factors that induced it to hold the Saginaw resolution in abeyance until the next convention. Yet our Synod did so, pending further confirmation on the part of the Missouri Synod that our Synod's evaluation and understanding of the pertinent resolutions were correct.

Our Synod at Watertown indeed admitted that in the practical.. issues, all of which involved a unionistic trend, there had not yet been a change- evident in the Missouri Synod's stand. It was, however, heartened by the Missouri Synod's earnest plea to discuss these matters anew, and this all the more since the Missouri Synod had made a fine expression of fellowship principles in declining membership in the Lutheran World Federation.

In the interval of a year between our recessed convention at Watertown and our 1957 New Ulm Convention, the Synodical Conference had established a new form for the renewed discussion of the controversial issues, namely, the forum of the doctrinal unity committees of the four constituent synods This joint committee had set up a mutually satisfactory program for discussing the issues. It had not found it possible to establish as a common premise that all the issues which we had listed in our charges against the Missouri

Synod were in their very nature divisive, since in several instances that in itself seemed to be a point of controversy. It had, however, pledged mutual willingness to come to grips with all the controversial issues without equivocation or evasion.

The actual discussion of the controversial issues had not get progressed far enough at the time of the New Ulm convention to permit any conclusive judgment as to whether they would be successful. The presentations on Scripture, Revelation, Inspiration, to the extent that they had been discussed, seemed to hold out the promise of agreement.

Upon our Union Committee's request the Missouri Synod Praesidium had supplied answers to further questions concerning the import of a number of St. Paul resolutions of the Missouri Synod, also those affecting the CC. At the time of our New Ulm convention our Union Committee felt that even these answers still left something wanting in full clarity. The majority of our Union Committee was, however, of the opinion that these answers did sustain our Synod's evaluation of the Missouri Synod's CC Resolutions at St. Paul, while a minority in our Union Committee did not find itself able to share this opinion. On the other hand there were a number of endeavors in which official committees of the Missouri Synod were currently active, particularly in connection with the Lutheran World Federation Convention, which seemed to point to a continuation of a unionistic trend and raised grave apprehensions in the minds of our delegates at New Ulm. Still the majority of our representatives at the New Ulm Convention were of the conviction that not enough had happened since Watertown to warrant reversing the resolution passed there to hold the Saginaw resolution in abeyance.

#### IV

### **WHAT JUSTIFICATION IS THERE FOR CONTINUING OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH MISSOURI NOW?**

Some of our protesting brethren, who are still willing to let the New Ulm decision of our Synod stand, although it did not represent their own judgment, nevertheless ask: What have the subsequent meetings of the joint union committees revealed that still justifies a continuation of the discussions?

As far as the CC is concerned, we have, in the opinion of the Union Committee, received further assurance in the meantime from the Missouri Synod Praesidium that the St. Paul resolutions on the CC do mean that the CC is no longer to be regarded or employed as a settlement of the controversies that existed between the ALC and the Missouri Synod. It was explained that not merely the fact that the ALC may soon cease to exist as a separate church body, but also the fact that the ALC has been willing to settle for the unacceptable United Testimony of Faith and Life in merging with the ELC and the UELC has led the Missouri Synod to conclude that the CC would now no longer be adequate as a settlement of the past controversies and hence can no longer serve as a functioning document for establishing church fellowship with anyone.

Our Union Committee did not feel a need of pressing for an answer to the question whether the Missouri Synod is now also ready to admit that the CC also at no time during 1950-1957 was an adequate settlement of the past controversies. It is our conviction that what our Synod was concerned about since 1950 was this that the CC had official status in Missouri as a settlement of the past controversies in the doctrines treated therein. As long as that official status of the CC obtained, we were conscience bound to testify concerning the inadequacy of the CC as such a settlement, lest the confessional stand of the Synodical Conference on the pertinent doctrines be undermined and made uncertain. If the CC now no longer has that official status of a settlement of the past controversies between the ALC and the Missouri Synod, the inadequacy of the CC ceases to be a controversial issue in this respect.

There is, however, still this fact to be considered that the status of the CC in the past, with its inadequate statements, could have weakened and undermined the Scriptural understanding of the doctrines involved in our own circles and also made it unclear to those outside of our Synodical Conference circles whether this body as a whole still holds to the full Scriptural position on these doctrines as this was true in the past. For this reason it remains a vital part of the program of the Joint Union Committees to set up, both thetically and antithetically, a

detailed joint confession on these articles, e.g. inspiration, justification, conversion, election, Antichrist, Church and ministry, articles concerning which we held that they had not been set forth adequately in the CC. We feel that this method will do more to reestablish within and without our circles just where the Synodical Conference stands confessionally on these doctrines than would even a resolution of a Missouri Synod Convention stating that the CC was an inadequate settlement in 1950.

Our Joint Union Committees are ready to present such a comprehensive joint confession on Scripture and inspiration to the August convention of the Synodical Conference and are convinced that it speaks clearly in all the matters not adequately covered by the pertinent treatment in the CC. Our Union Committee has hope that similarly satisfactory joint statements on other doctrines involved in the CC issue can be drawn up.

In the Scout issue the extensive discussions of the Joint Union Committees have not yet progressed beyond this that the points of agreement and the points of disagreement have been drawn up and will be presented in a further report to the Synodical Conference. Also here the mutual pledge to come to grips with the issues without evasion or equivocation has been in evidence in the discussions.

The area of fellowship principles and fellowship practice, involving also the issue of Church and ministry, remains to be taken up. Our Synod has repeatedly asserted at its various conventions that it sees a unionistic trend at work behind all the controversial issues that have arisen between it and the Missouri Synod. Since our Union Committee also agrees with this view, it is also of the opinion that our real work of resolving the issues will face us as we come to grips with the matter of fellowship principles and the issues of Church and ministry, and that, until we have thoroughly discussed these matters and are able to evaluate the outcome, it will be impossible to come to any definite convictions concerning our future fellowship relations with the Missouri Synod. It is my opinion that until that time the members of the Union Committee would not feel free in their conscience to terminate these discussions, now that they have been initiated and carried on with an evident willingness to come to grips with the issues.

(This report was drawn up for the Protest Committee upon the request of the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union. On June 16, 1958, it was sent to the Protest Committee without a previous opportunity of presenting it to the Committee on Matters of Church Union for approval. On October 21, 1958, the Union Committee, however, reviewed this report and adopted it as the report of the Committee. The Union Committee also resolved to have copies of this report prepared and sent to all pastors and male teachers throughout the Synod.)

Carl Lawrenz, Chairman of the Executive Committee

**Excerpt from a personal letter of March 17, 1959, which Prof. Carl Lawrenz sent to Rev. Rollin Reim in response to a copy of A Call For Decision received from R. Reim. This excerpt was read to the 1959 Synod Convention during the discussion of A Call For Decision.**

“Let me asks 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 conviction by some kind of clairvoyance concerning ‘the future fate of admonition’ that one has given or is 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.’

“I will say that after reading your Memorial I did go to Webster to see whether I had possibly misused the English expression. Webster defines the expression ‘of avail’ as ‘advantage toward success,’ as ‘usefulness for a purpose.’ That is exactly what I meant. Of course, the desired success and the purpose sought is this that the erring brother see his error and depart from it. But what I am to be convinced about is not whether my admonition will be crowned with success or will realize its purpose. This is something that only God knows; it is not something about which I can gain a conviction in advance. As long as an errorist continues to live, I will never presume to assert that God will not affect this purpose or grant such success. The conviction that I want to gain pertains to the further usefulness of my admonition toward this purpose, the further advantage of admonition toward such success. The conviction that I want to gain is whether in God’s eyes the giving of further admonition is still useful and advantageous, still the activity that He is asking me to carry out. In other words, I too am speaking of my recognition as to whether or not the erring brother or church body has rejected the Scriptural correction that has been offered.

“Without trying to exhaust possibilities, let me clarify the matter by several illustrations. If you should realize that in dealing with an erring brother you have talked past each other, that the issues between you have not really been fully clarified as yet, but that the opportunity is there to clarify the issues and to come to grips with them, then, I am sure that you would not be ready to say that Scriptural correction has been rejected would mean the same thing in saying that I am convinced that the admonition is still of avail. – If on the other hand the erring brother has had the full benefit of your Scriptural correction, understands what you have to say and why you say it, but demands recognition for his error, then you would say that he has rejected the Scriptural correction offered to him; I would mean the same thing in saying that I am now convinced that Scriptural admonition is of no further avail, that is, it has no further usefulness for helping the situation. – Or, to add a third illustration, even if the issues between you and the erring brother have not been satisfactorily clarified, but he show that he does not see a need to give further thought and consideration to your correction as he holds to his course, you would say that the evidence shows that despite admonition the erring brother persists in holding to his error, that he has rejected the Scriptural correction offered. On the same evidence I would say that I am now convinced that admonition is of no further avail, that is, I am convinced that God no longer considers admonition the useful thing on my part in this situation but now points to severance of fellowship as the course that He wants me to follow.

“All three illustrations ought to show that we seek to say the identical thing though we employ different terminology.” The way you express it requires Christian judgment as well as it does in the in manner in which I say it.

**Carl Lawrenz**

by Carl Lawrenz

Points carried out/at the Saginaw Convention, August 13, 1959, with reference to the “Call for Decision.”

1. Rightly understood the two statements pitted against each other in the “Call for Decision” mean the same thing.
2. The contested sentence in the Report to the protest committee is not unscriptural, but it was not by itself meant to be a comprehensive statement on termination or fellowship.
3. Our Synod has not followed a new set of Fellowship Principles since 1955. Also previously it acted according to the same principles.

Later note; An improved wording of the contested sentence would be:

Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition serves no further purpose since the erring brother or church body demands recognition for his or its error.