

Fellowship: What It Is and What It Implies

[NOTE: The nature of what follows is that of a ‘filled-in outline’. In October of 2008, I was graciously invited to speak at St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church of Richland Center, Wisconsin for one of the “Academy Day” events which Pastor Frederick Davison has provided for the edification of the lambs and sheep of Christ in his care. I had an outline of the day and a list of quotes I wanted to use (and the books from which I intended to quote)...and not much else. Immediately upon my arriving home, I started to make a ‘purified transcript’ of what I said (i.e., throwing out most of the bad humor), as I intended to use it as a resource for speaking at the 2009 Winter Free Conference in Burnsville, Minnesota. Since my paper for that conference (which was, after all, more of a formal paper, rather than a wide-ranging conversation with laity such as what follows) turned out to go in a very different direction (as the topic and circumstances dictated), I’m glad that I sat down to do this...and that I published it piece-by-piece online for criticism. I only wish I had been able to complete the entire presentation in print at that time, as I believe that the latter portion of what follows has suffered from the lack of immediacy and, at the same time, the good humor and lack of a ‘tone of demanding’ that were in the actual presentation. For those for whom this ‘pseudo-transcript’ is being published—those attending the 2009 Theological Conference of The Augustana Ministerium—my main desire is that you read the section on “My Sin in Kansas City,” though the rest of this paper actually flows from that article, as well, and leads towards my Burnsville conference paper, “Guilt by Association,” all of which together are a reflection on the writings on fellowship by, especially, Marquart and Elert, and which will form the basis for our discussion in May of 2009 in Kearney, Missouri. I beg all Greek scholars tolerance of my protracted presentation of the ‘koin-’ root that was done for the sake of those who do not know the language. Further, please remember that the following is neither a ‘Bible study’ nor a treatise nor by any means an exhaustive or scholarly treatment of the subject (no footnotes, etc.): it’s just me ‘talking’; quite often, a basic agreement in doctrine is assumed, as such existed in the group for which it was crafted (and, one would think, here among ‘us’), so that some foundation on which the arguments are based is thought already to exist.]

“Fellowship: What It Is and What It Implies.” You would think that we would not need to define such things among Lutherans, since all that we need to know and to do was long ago settled...but such is not the case. *In fact, it can be said that a lack of understanding of the Doctrine of Fellowship is the cause of all the turmoil that you see in the Church around you*, so that it even touches you in the once thought impregnable fortress of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, even in your own district and circuit.

Even though I am no longer in the LCMS, I feel that turmoil nearly every day because of my role in helping suffering pastors in connection with The Augustana Ministerium as well as in facilitating discussion for pastors and laity across the country. More, I feel it precisely because I *am* no longer in the LCMS, and that has provided a whole new area in which I have to watch myself: my relationship to orthodox Lutheran pastors who still *are* in the LCMS. Why has your pastor invited me here to speak today? I believe that it is in part, at least, because I have tried to walk a fine line...and failed miserably, in one wide open public event that we will speak about in some detail a little later. I can speak what may seem like hard words simply because they are hard for me, too...just like when I have to condemn

a particular sin from the pulpit knowing full well that the sin I'm condemning is just as attractive to me as it is to anyone in the pews. The correct doctrine of Fellowship is not rocket science, but correctly applying it can sometimes feel as hard to live with as if we'd built our house on the launch pad at Cape Canaveral; the heat and the noise are hard to bear. But, once again, "a lack of understanding of the Doctrine of Fellowship is the cause of all the turmoil that you see in the Church around you."

Now, certainly, some will say, "No, it's the Doctrine of Christ," or, "No, it's the Doctrine of the Church," or of Justification, or of God, or of Man, or of the Office of the Ministry...or, simply, that it is the effect of sin in the world...and I won't really argue right now about what the *foundation* of the problem is, or what the greatest modern error is at this point (yes, sin causes it all, and all of it is tied into the Doctrine of Justification...which means it intimately involves all of the articles of the faith, some more in one location than in others); my statement is, rather, this: it is the neglecting or misunderstanding the Doctrine of Fellowship that leads believers in Christ who desire to be faithful to His Word and to His mission for the Church often feeling the most pain coming from those who are closest to them in their confession of faith—the members of their own church body.

As an example, are you really emotionally torn up about John Travolta and Tom Cruise being a part of the Scientology cult? If you like them as actors, it may well disturb you...but, does it disturb you as much as having family members who can't commune with you? As much as having a district president of the LCMS publicly saying that prayers to idols (that is, to demons) have made him and other suffering people "stronger than [they] were an hour ago"—stronger, though they had just dishonored the Christ? As much as having that District President send a letter to a layman in Indiana telling him that Christians and Muslims both worship the same 'God'? As much as having that DP attack your pastor for protecting that layman and telling the truth about what the DP said and about what God's Word says? Those who are 'close' to us, those with whom we share a common bond or suppose that we share a common confession can bring us *far* more pain than someone whom we *know* is 'different', that is not 'one of us'; I *expect* the pope to teach falsely, but I shouldn't have to think that one of my seminary classmates does...and that his church body (even when it was *my* church body) would *let* him.

Another brief example: when you hear of the Mormon cult down in Texas marrying pre-teens to older men, you're probably angered. When you hear of Roman priests molesting altar boys, you're sickened and consider it a shame. But, what if it were a Missouri Synod pastor or teacher in the next town that was caught doing something like this? Perhaps a pastor whom you and your children enjoyed seeing at circuit events? No doubt, your stomach would be churning, especially as you searched your mind for any possibility that he had spent any time alone with your children. When the BTK Killer in Kansas was announced to be 'Lutheran', we waited in turmoil, hoping that the reporters would finally say, "ELCA." With the school shooter in Paducah, KY, LCMS members were sickened when they had to admit, "Yeah, he's one of ours..." *He went from Confirmation to mass murder in under four years...*

Those who are closest to us affect us differently from those who are not so close; those who are officially linked to us affect us yet more profoundly. If our neighbor's wife commits adultery, we are saddened; if our own wife does so, our heart is ripped in two.

That's a good illustration with which to leave the illustrations, because our relationship with Christ is pictured as a marriage in the Bible (Ephesians 5:22–33; Hosea 1:2): we are Christ's Bride...thanks be to Him that He washes over our infidelities, cleansing us from them by His blood! Yet, what is it that

the *world* sees—us as cleansed by Christ or us in all the filth of our sin? Perhaps you have seen the bumper sticker: “Jesus, save me from Your followers!” We are known by our worst acts and we are known by those with whom we are associated and, wrongly or rightly, considered to be just like them—that is, by whatever is the worst thing that they do or allow. Such things can muddy the message of Christ, leaving people with the wrong ideas so that they do not have the strength and comfort that God desires for them. When it comes to questions of fellowship, then, we have to be careful that the message of Christ that we wish to proclaim is not only not compromised by anything that *we* do, but that it is not compromised by anything done by those with whom we are in fellowship.

Y’know...I *like* that sentence; I think I’m going to repeat it right now, and then again, I’m going to repeat it later: When it comes to questions of fellowship, then, we have to be careful that the message of Christ that we wish to proclaim—indeed, that He has *given* us to proclaim!—is not only not compromised by anything that *we* do, but that it is not compromised by anything done by those with whom we are in fellowship.

Of course, before we can really talk about that in the way that we ought, we must define just what is meant by this word ‘fellowship’. Some think of it only in terms of friendliness or ‘like-mindedness’ in a generic sense. Such thinking, though, relegates ‘fellowship’ to the thinking and feeling of *men*. Such cannot be the case for us, since God Himself uses this term and establishes by His usage what we are to understand by it. The Greek of the New Testament uses the word ‘koinonia’...it uses it both of the relationship of the believers of whom the Bride of Christ consists and of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus. It is interesting to see that some translations of the Bible render this Greek word as ‘fellowship’ and some as ‘communion’ (and some as ‘sharing in’, for that matter). We find it in 1 Corinthians (10:16), when St. Paul says that the cup of blessing which we bless is the ‘koinonia’ of the Blood of Christ and the bread that we break is the ‘koinonia’ of the Body of Christ. What does this mean? Some misunderstand the ‘sharing in’ translation to assert that in the Lord’s Supper *we* share in the Body and Blood; we *do*, but that’s not what it says! We *do*, because, as the text says, the *bread* ‘shares in’ Christ’s Body—that is, it is ‘in communion with it’, it is *united to that Body in such a way that you cannot separate the Body from the bread!*

[At this point is inserted an excursus on Jesus’ grammar in the Institution narrative: in short, Jesus so sees the consecrated Bread as His Body that He uses ‘touto’ for ‘this’ instead of ‘tautos’, the word that goes with ‘body’ by grammatical gender, instead of with ‘bread’, even though it is bread that He is holding and distributing...thus showing that this Bread is ‘not plain bread’ (to borrow from Luther’s words concerning the water of Holy Baptism), but such Bread as has been ‘overshadowed’ by the Body of Christ. Note to grammarians: cf. Blass, Debrunner, and Funk with regard to gender attraction: such is *not* normal for demonstrative pronouns (as opposed to, say, relative pronouns; sorry, I don’t have the section reference at hand...this is from memory and, while I assert that my memory is correct, I’m not footnoting this as any sort of scholarly paper). (I can flesh this out elsewhere for those who so desire; as far as I can recall, I have not put this argument into print before, as I’d hate to have it given the ‘short shrift’ that my time constraints often dictate, so I usually reserve it for oral presentation. I don’t know of anyone who has presented an extensive argument—whether pro or con—on this, either, or I would simply point you to it. Suffice it to say that Jesus’ going against normal usage is not without purpose, but agrees with His unnecessary use of ‘estin’ to declare emphatically that what He holds in His hand is

His very Body...and, oh, yeah, as Scripture elsewhere explicitly testifies, it happens still to be bread, too...)]

At any rate, we see from this matter of the word ‘koinonia’ being used with reference to the Lord’s Supper that just as the Body of Christ is united to the bread in such a way as to inseparable (even in Jesus’ own mind), so is it with the Christians. We are *that close* to one another, that intimately connected, whether we ‘feel’ it or not. Simply put: Fellowship = Communion: You are as close to those with whom you share an altar as the Body of Christ is to the Bread in Holy Communion; you are as close to all in your church body as the Blood of Christ is to the Wine.

You may ‘feel’ better about the first of those two propositions than you do about the second. Indeed, the second may make you a little nauseated if you know what all sorts of things are going on in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. But, we’ve jumped a step ahead of where we should be...we are talking about the fellowship of confession; we need to step back, now, and see something more basic—the *foundation* of all right thinking about fellowship: *In one sense of the word*, you are one with *all* believers in Christ—living on earth or living in Heaven. This is the comforting truth that Luther emphasizes in his discussion of the Third Article of the Creed in the Large Catechism, when he describes the Holy Christian Church as “the community of believers.” *In one sense of the word*, you are intimately united to those saints who have preceded you into Heaven, whether your parents or children, your spouse, or Sts. Peter and Paul. But, *how?*

In one sense of the word, you are united to—you are in koinonia with—all true Christians because you are *koinonoi* in the same *koinon*. (Uh-oh...he’s going to give us a whole list of Greek words, here, isn’t he?) You can hear the relationship in the words, right? *koinon, koinonoi, koinonia*...and let me give you just one more: *koine*. *koinon, koinonoi, koinonia, koine*. Let’s work with the last one. *koine* is the term for the specific ‘kind’ of Greek used in the New Testament. It is different from the Greek used by the philosophers, different from Homer, different from the poets and playwrights. Less than two centuries ago, some called it “Holy Ghost Greek,” because it was unlike anything found in earlier Greek...but then, archaeologists began to find examples of the same sort of Greek in the strangest of places: business correspondence! What does *Koine Greek* mean? **Common Greek!** The language of the New Testament was found to be the *common* Greek that was used by those who had to do business in Greek (because it was the language of the Empire), but who were not ethnically or culturally Greek themselves. Now, ‘common’ doesn’t necessarily mean ‘bad’. Koine Greek is somewhat simpler than ancient Greek, because it made very little use of certain things that are not found in other languages; it was the *universal* language, the *common* tongue.

Okay, that was a long-winded way of getting to the point: *koinon, koinonoi, koinonia, koine*...they all have to do with *commonality*. *koine* is *common*; *koinonia* is *having or holding something in common*, a *koinonos* (the plural of which is *koinonoi*) is *one who partakes in the thing held in common*, and a *koinon* is *the thing you have in common*. Again, “*In one sense of the word*, you are united to—you are in koinonia with—all Christians because you have the same *koinon*.” You are in fellowship with all true Christians—are ‘in common’ with them—because you *have Christ in common*: you are one with them, because you are one with Christ, having received the *things* of Christ, the ‘holy things’, the Gospel and the Sacraments. It’s like electricity and an ‘electrocution chain’: if someone is being electrocuted and you touch him, what happens? You become part of the chain and the electricity flows through you, too. If you are united to Christ through faith and I am united to Christ through faith, then

you and I are united to one another, as well, even if you and I never meet this side of Heaven. Thus, in Galatians 3 (26–28), St. Paul says of us Baptized, “You are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus... you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Thus, we are ‘one with’ all who share this faith. Now...let’s go out and find out just with whom all we are in this fellowship!

How do we do that? All we have to do is find out who has saving faith in Jesus...and who does not... This ‘one body’ of Christ, the Church, consists of all believers in Christ and *only* believers in Christ. St. Paul asks what fellowship light has with darkness...and, of course, the answer is, “none.” So, to perfectly show what God’s Church is, we have to identify all the believers and unbelievers, so that we are able to declare with whom we are and with whom we are not in fellowship...but, we can’t because we can’t see into men’s hearts. Their actions may give a ‘clue’, and yet, the one who ‘looks most Christian’ may just be the best hypocrite there is and the one who looks like the greatest of sinners may actually have saving faith in Christ, but is struggling against the devil, the world, and the flesh in a way that doesn’t seem to be producing much in the way of visible results. What shall we do? Jesus prays in John 17 that we would all be one just as He and the Father are one...and we want to be one with all believers and *show it* to the world...but since we can’t absolutely know who is and who is not a believer, what shall we do?

First, we shall rejoice in the fact that one day we *will* know who is a true believer and who is not. When we get to Heaven, that will be one of the greatest blessings: being perfectly united with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Second, we shall look to God’s Word for another way to manifest this unity in the world. There, we find that Jesus says that His “disciples indeed” are those who continue in His Word (John 8:31–32); those who “keep My words” are those of whom Jesus testifies that they love Him (John 14:23). Since we can’t find every believer and be sure that we have only believers, our Lord has given us one outward thing to look to that is determinative of fellowship: what do they teach and confess?

While, *in one sense of the word*, you have fellowship with all believers in Christ simply because you are all joined to Him, in the sense we will be exploring today—the outward expression of fellowship—we are to restrict ourselves to those who ‘keep His words’, those who “speak the same thing,” as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:10, are united in their proclamation of what God’s Word teaches, so that there are no divisions among them; for those who will not walk in this one true path of doctrine, St. Paul says that we are to “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”

I reckon, as we draw near to the end of this section, we’d ought to go ahead and use the words that appear on the schedule regarding what this section is about: *unitas* and *concordia*. Thankfully, these are *not* new concepts for us: we have already discussed them. This “one sense of the word” in which all Christians are united is called *unitas* by theologians; it is the internal unity of the Church, a matter of faith and not sight, something that we confess exists even though we won’t see it until we depart this life. *Concordia*, on the other hand, is something that we can figure out simply by the fact that in a more doctrinally faithful era the Missouri Synod used this word to name their teaching institutions—their colleges and seminaries. *Concordia* is *unity of teaching*, something that we *can* see...but, unfortunately, usually *don’t*. *Concordia* is *harmony*...that singing with a voice that is united even while each singer is singing his own proper part. Something would be *discordant* or in *discordia* if the various singers weren’t tied together by that love for Jesus with which the Holy Spirit blesses us, namely, that we

always seek to “keep [His] words.”

So, *unitas* we can't see, and *concordia* is that for which we must look and strive and teach. *Concordia* is a matter of confession, that which we testify as being our cherished belief, that which is at the heart of ‘who we are’. *Concordia*, then, can be seen and heard. We can find out if someone is in concord with us by seeing if he confesses the truth like we do. We can ask him what he believes...and we can also hear and see what he teaches and practices. Sometimes, these do not align. Indeed, *often* they do not align. People will tell me that they believe exactly what I or my parish has confessed, with regard to the Lord's Supper, perhaps, or abortion or homosexuality, or the authority of God's Word—or, and this is a big one in our dry county in northern Arkansas, regarding what God's Word says about the use of alcohol...but when they are questioned a little more, they have no problem with the fact that they belong to churches that teach the exact opposite. They'll claim to believe as we do regarding the Lord's Supper, yet hold membership in a church that denies Christ's gift. They'll claim that they believe the Bible to be God's Word, entirely without error, and they'll continue to listen to their Episcopal priest tell them that Palm Sunday *couldn't* have happened the way the Bible says. They'll *know* that the Bible condemns drunkenness, not the having of a beer (much less the use of wine in the Lord's Supper!), yet they'll attend a Baptist church in which the pastor would surely excommunicate them if he only knew (he has been known to refuse to eat *rum cake!*). If your church membership contradicts the words coming out of your mouth, what are we to believe? Should I believe what such a person tells *me* in *private* today, or what he *publicly confesses* every week by his church membership?

Your church membership (and synodical membership) is your confession of faith more than what comes out of your mouth is.

And, yet...what he tells me *might* be what he really believes!

But, how will I know? What he wishes to tell me is compromised by *his associations!* What did we say before? “When it comes to questions of fellowship, then, we have to be careful that the message of Christ that we wish to proclaim—indeed, that He has *given* us to proclaim!—is not only not compromised by anything that *we* do, but that it is not compromised by anything done by those with whom we are in fellowship.” When it is, we ask with St. Paul: “If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare for battle?” (1 Cor. 14:8) That is, St. Paul says, our message must be clear, or no one will know what we *really* mean. What do we really teach if, for example, we condemn abortion as contrary to God's Holy Word, but then allow an abortionist to remain a communicant member in good standing? A step farther: What do we really teach if we condemn abortion, but we are in fellowship with those who have no problem with it, if a pastor (and congregation) in our church body, for example, continues to keep a man in membership for *decades*, in spite of the fact that throughout this time he is instrumental in pushing a pro-abortion agenda in the United States Senate? (When that was the case in the LCMS, I don't recall *anyone* ever bringing charges against that pastor—myself, shamefully, included.) What does it say when we are ‘in communion’ with such a man, with such a pastor, with such a congregation?

[NOTE: At this point, a break was taken and when we resumed, the preceding paragraph was repeated and we continued as follows.]

“Oh, but he's so far away!” we might complain. “How is it our business to say anything against this pastor or senator?”

We are *in fellowship with him*; fellowship is communion; we are *intimately united with him* whether we ever meet him or not; those who see him and know that he and we share a ‘brand name’ will understand this closeness whether we ‘feel’ it or not; thus, if we let his confession stand unchallenged, it is rightly reckoned to be *our* confession, as well. “Your confession is not just what you teach, but what you allow.” By allowing this pastor and senator to remain in fellowship with you while impenitent is to add their error to your own confession; if you can tolerate it, if it is an acceptable alternative, or if you refuse to step up and say that it is a ‘deal-breaker’ for them to hold to their unscriptural teaching, then you are saying either that you’re not entirely sure that it is unscriptural or that you don’t care that much—that Jesus’ saying that we are to teach everything He has commanded us to teach (Mt. 18) and to keep His words (John 14:23) is just not that important...that friendships or relationships between men are more important than *either* of those person’s relationship with Almighty God. The fact is, if you *really* loved the errorist, you would show him what God says about his error...and if he persisted in it and would not repent, you would show him more strongly, by telling him that he was removing himself from fellowship with you because he was dishonoring Christ.

I confess, I did not love that senator or his pastor enough to overcome my cowardice and speak God’s truth *to* them and *against* them; I failed to enlist his district president (supposedly ‘one of the good ones’ in the LCMS—I heard him referred to in that way again within the last month or so, in fact) to bring him to see his sin; I failed to purify my own confession: I simply remained in communion with these known false teachers (or, at least, false teaching senator and enabling pastor), so that every person who heard what the senator taught had a right to assume that I taught the same thing. After all, we both had the same four letters after our church name in the phone book.

Now, no, I didn’t analyze my silent complicity in this way while I was engaged in it—when 6,000-plus other pastors are also guilty of the same sin, one tends not to notice it—but in retrospect, it is quite clear to me how I failed. Again, while I think of it, it is quite easy to seek to justify my inaction on the basis of my youth and his experience, on the basis of being in different districts, on the basis of the ‘climate’ in the LCMS at the time that would have simply had me seen as ‘another Ft. Wayne troublemaker’, and on the basis of my own congregational struggles at the time, as those I served would not have understood my activity. In a human court, all of these things might, indeed, be mitigating factors in judging my guilt...but in all honesty, I simply didn’t love God and neighbor enough to put my self-interest aside and do what needed to be done. So, I remained in communion with him—was tied with him at the altar, as both of us would have been allowed to commune at, for example, a synodical convention—and, thus, his confession (that liberalizing abortion laws was a good idea) was mine.

I wish that were the only example.

Unfortunately, I could go on for hours about the falsehood I have confessed by being in communion with those who confess falsely, sharing in other men’s sins (1 Timothy 5:22). When one is in a body where false teachers are tolerated and he neither brings the false teachers to repentance, nor the body to stop its toleration, nor declares fellowship to be suspended between them and him (either through a formal state of confession or through separation from that body), their sins are his.

That may seem to call for radical action, but, really, it doesn’t. It doesn’t call for one to be hasty in doing what is right and concluding that it is hopeless and that complete separation is immediately necessary. It simply declares the reality of the situation in its true severity, making it clear, I hope, that

inaction is *not* an option (or, not a *godly* option, at any rate).

Yet, again, all of this is amazingly clear in retrospect; I wish that such things were clear immediately when they confront me, yet, even now there are times when the clear theology meets a seemingly ‘fuzzy’ situation, and failure comes all too easy. Such was the case with “My Sin in Kansas City”...

[NOTE: The following first appeared in our parish newsletter in July of 2008.]

I sinned in Kansas City.

You probably didn’t need me to tell you that; surely, you remember from studying the Small Catechism that I sin every day, just as you do. As Luther points out there, through his “Christian Questions with Their Answers,” I know that I am a sinner because I look at the Ten Commandments and know that I have not kept them.

There is something more to this statement, though: I sinned *publicly* while I was in Kansas City...and I sinned publicly in a room full of pastors...and most of those I sinned in front of and against *didn’t even realize that I had sinned*. I wasn’t entirely sure of it myself...but my conscience bothered me, and since I had committed to doing something, I thought it better to follow through on what I had committed to, and to re-study the matter when I had the opportunity to do so. Our Lord was merciful to me, both in granting me the time to study this and in providing me with a pastor who questioned me about it, so that I didn’t put that study off to some indefinite time in the future. From that study, I have concluded that what I did—and what others had counseled me to do in the past—was *not* a matter of ‘not having the doctrine down right’, but of misapplying the historical precedent that ‘informed’ my actions. In the end, however, both would have led to the same error.

To state something clearly before we go on—something that I have quoted to you all before—in the words of St. Augustine, “I will err, but I will not be a heretic.” That is, I will make mistakes, I will misspeak, and so on...but, by the grace of God, I will not *remain* in such things, because He will compel me back into a study of His Word and of the Confessions of His Church and of the application of the same by those who came before me and who are smarter than I am.

As I tend to live in such a way that almost everything I do is visible to a large crowd of people (and because I have a large group of pastors that I run most things in front of, some of whom I think would like nothing more than to find me in error), there is very little I do that is not re-studied, modified, and improved within hours or days of my first conceiving it. Those who are regular in Bible class know this to be the case, as we will often take time to refine something that could have been better said the Sunday or two before. In this particular case, the Lord so compelled me to such study through a note from an LCMS pastor that read (in part):

“Eric, your homily was wonderful. I thank you for those words. However, would the two of you [Note: he refers to the pastor who hosted the conference and to me] please help me to understand how that service was not unionism?”

My response to this pastor was brief, but comprehensive, and I’m going to reproduce most

of it here, deleting some names, inserting clarifying comments [in brackets], and so forth.

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First, regarding my participation, from ‘my’ point of view [before the event].

I had been invited to preach in 2005, as well, and shied away from it, since I was already independent and did not want to become ‘an issue’. At the time, [a member of The Augustana Ministerium whose theology and judgment have long been respected] said that it wouldn’t *be* an issue, since participation in a prayer office in this way was not considered an issue during the ‘free conferences’ of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. [Note: I nonetheless did not preach in 2005, as I did not want any challenge to my preaching there to compromise or overshadow the founding of The Augustana Ministerium.] With some lack of ease, nonetheless, I took his words as being better informed than my reason and conscience in the matter, and found the invitation [this May] to address the topic [of living in a post-synodical era] homiletically to be acceptable. Entering my reasoning, along with [the aforementioned TAM member’s] words in 2005, were such as these:

At the Intersynodical Free Conference at Detroit during April 6–8 of the same year[,] Synodical Conference participants had spoken out forthrightly against opening the next free conference planned for Fort Wayne with joint prayer. They did so with the testimony that public joint prayer would be an expression of church fellowship and thus would give the false impression that all present were united in a common faith and that the doctrinal differences which still obtained among the various participants were of no further vital significance. Yet the fact that Missouri Synod pastors closed the free conference at Jackson with a joint devotion, while the Missouri Synod pastors present at the Detroit conference opposed joint prayer, does *not* reveal a varied judgment on the matter of prayer fellowship within the Missouri Synod. Both instances reveal a conscientious and responsible application of the Synodical Conference’s Scriptural position on Church Fellowship.

Also those participating in the intersynodical discussions at Detroit were there for the purpose of striving to reach doctrinal unity with other Lutherans not in fellowship with them. Yet it was evident from the discussions to the Synodical Conference men that many participants at this free conference were not yet one with them in doctrine, that for the time being they were still staunchly defending the un-Scriptural confessional position of the church bodies to which they belonged. Hence, in spite of the willingness of these men to discuss the doctrines in controversy, they still had to be recognized as persistent errorists, and joint worship with them would be displeasing to the Lord.

At the free conference at Jackson[,] Missouri Synod men, however, showed that they also knew how to apply the Synodical Conference principles of Church fellowship in an evangelical manner to *an altogether different situation*, one in which they were dealing with men whom the discussions had clearly revealed as confessional brethren, brethren who were struggling with past weaknesses and who were intent upon correcting mistakes into which their own church body had fallen in the past. In both instances we have the kind of application which our Wisconsin Synod has advocated

in its Theses on Church Fellowship, rather than a mechanical application of rules.

[Carl Lawrenz, “The 1904 Free Conferences in Michigan,” emphasis mine]

However, as the time of the office drew near, I became increasingly uncomfortable with the decision. I could not in good conscience leave [the conference host] ‘high and dry’, but, yes, the unmistakable echo in my brain was, “This is a Missouri Synod service.”

Now, granted, while I have ‘been in fellowship with no one’, I have taken a view of the relationship between [our parish] and others as a matter for the pastors involved to resolve in the following manner: “If you’re willing to get kicked out of your church body for standing up against your DP [District President], Jerry [Kieschnick], and the bunch, and are, indeed, willing to come under fire for serving my parishioners, I am willing to serve yours, as well.” I have taken that as a compromise that recognizes that there are orthodox guys in Missouri who would like to leave, but *can’t*—e.g., can’t give up the insurance, let’s say, because a spouse or child is currently under medical care that cannot be covered in any other way; having added in the neighborhood of \$6,000 (more, I think) to my personal indebtedness for medical costs just since this past August, I am extremely sympathetic to that situation...yes, there are days when I long for the fleshpots of the Concordia Plan.

However, the more I look at this procedure, the more it looks to me like there is at best a weak shade of difference between what I have reasoned and the obscenely open Communion policy of Jack Cascione [who simply welcomes anyone in good standing with any LCMS, WELS, or ELS congregation to the altar]. In short, from my perspective, my being in any such sort of agreement with LCMS guys is akin to the LCMS being in fellowship with the Latvian church or Finnish [state] church...i.e., the LCMS being in fellowship with the LWF [Lutheran World Federation], which is, really, the LCMS being in fellowship with ELCA.

Thus, other than this instance, since July of 2007 I have been pulling back—and pulling my parishioners back—from the provisional agreements I had reached with various pastors back in 2004-2005. I had hoped that August 2007 would be the great exodus from Missouri, but I have seen Missourians simply become more and more entrenched. When this ‘opportunity’ presented itself, however, based on [the above-referenced TAM member’s] previous assurances, my understanding (or lack thereof) of the ‘free conference’ scenario, my thought that I was preaching not being preached to (and, yet, how *stupid* that is; not that [the conference host] is a Methodist by any stretch of the imagination, but could you really see me thinking this way if he *were* a Methodist? Of *course* not! Again, how *stupid* of me!)... [such considerations led me to accept the invitation *in spite of the fact* that the liturgist would be the LCMS-member conference host.]

All of which is to say that I had theological ‘reasons’ in view but, in the end, my view of them was colored by my own [need to say what I said in the brief homily (the only one, I think, to meet the conference’s host’s desired goal of six minutes in length!)]. Some may read the Lawrenz paper, above, and consider [my trusted colleague’s] words, as I did, and seek to justify my actions...but the more I reflect upon [those actions and the correct words in that paper], the more I see my preaching there as *giving an unclear witness*.

As a brief theological treatise [during some other part of the conference, what I said] would have been okay; as a sermon in an office led by a pastor who is in a heterodox church body, even though he is personally a contender for orthodoxy, it was questionable at best. It was one of the few parts of the conference that came out well on tape, but I won't be posting it to the website because, among other things, no, you *shouldn't* have to fight against TAM's example when contradicting the actions of JF [Jesus First], etc. I am truly sorry that I put you in that position; I am sorry that I agreed to preach, when I should have done what I did during the other offices: not participated at all...

...Again, I am sorry that this has had to trouble you as it has troubled me; while some might seek to justify it (and I could probably present the above in a much more compelling way), I have to conclude that the appearance of (non-existent) fellowship my participation gave did, indeed, amount to unionism, and that my concern for [the conference host] should have simply led me to hand him my manuscript and say, "*You're going to have to do it; this is wrong.*" [I wish I would have thought of that before the prayer office, instead of when writing this letter to this pastor, as that is exactly what I would have done.]

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This may seem to some like a 'little thing', but the fact is that the tiniest transgression that one notices and then hides or refuses to admit was wrong is a *massive* sin, indeed...because to do so is to seek to minimize one's sin, instead of receiving the forgiveness Christ earned that washes it away entirely. Again, how can an error be 'little' if it is not repented of and therefore ends up being repeated by others or used by others to justify more blatant sins? No, this is a sin that must be confessed, renounced, and avoided in the future.

The error and uncertain witness involved really boils down to this: not that I co-officiated with a false teacher, but that I demonstrated for this orthodox Lutheran pastor and all those who witnessed the event my tacit approval of their remaining in fellowship with errorists. That is something that we just *cannot* do. That is why we do not simply invite LCMS members (or others) to the Lord's altar here; no matter how in tune with the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions they might otherwise be, they still refuse to give up their association with false teachers, declaring by their actions that they 'prefer' such an association over being associated with us and our pure confession of God's Word.

Now, that seems like some hard language, but remember what I wrote to that pastor, above: I understand the very real situations that exist and I sympathize greatly with those enduring them...but sympathy doesn't change the reality. They belong to a false-teaching church body; we are 'independent'.

Of course, that is part of the problem: being 'independent' seems like it allows you to associate with whomever you choose, 'making it up as you go along'. But that's really not correct. Instead, it means that you have to have a *higher* standard...one by which you really can't practice pulpit and altar fellowship with *anyone*, except for a few other 'independents' that you happen to find here and there...and then, really, you have to make sure that *they* are not sharing an altar with anyone that *you* are not, etc.

That's why, in the early history of the Church, the bishops of the various localities (the 'senior pastors' over a town's or province's parish) communicated with and met with one another and formally recognized one another as a) being correct in doctrine and practice and b) not being aligned with anyone who taught or practiced in error. Doing this set up boundaries that allowed one to know who should or should not be communed or from whom one should or should not receive Communion. The policy simply was, "If my bishop will commune your bishop, you and I can commune together."

Everything we see in today's church bodies originally came from such thinking. The LCMS, for example, was formed by those who agreed doctrinally so that they could accomplish together what they couldn't do as well apart. Unfortunately, as often happens when a body becomes 'institutionalized', the first principle has been forgotten and all that remains is the outward bureaucratic shell. (Well, a little lip service is paid to doctrinal unity, of course, but their officials regularly proclaim that it exists, even while there is evidence all around that there is no such thing.) It leaves us wishing for another association to arise, one in which the pastors again bind themselves to one another *purely on the basis of the confession of faith*... one in which the pastors have seen the dangers of massive expansion and centralization of physical assets (buildings, radio stations, etc.), and plan every move with due concern for not allowing such things to lead to a compromise of doctrine and practice.

So far, I know of one group of pastors who has aligned themselves with one another on precisely this basis, a group in which the concern is for serving every parish in the best possible way, where pastors are instructed and admonished in accord with God's Word in the sort of loving and fraternal way that seeks their improvement and their conformity to the Scriptures, rather than their removal or their conformity to a bureaucracy's agenda... a body that, had I belonged to it in May, would have said with a united voice, "You really don't want to do that; you'll send a confusing message that you will greatly regret." That body of pastors is The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America (ELDoNA), and I ask you to pray and study with me over the next few months, as we consider whether ELDoNA is where our future association lies.

The time has come for us to be truly accountable for what we teach and do here at Holy Trinity. While it is true that if I were to teach gross error it would be spread all over the internet within a day or two of my sermon or newsletter article being posted, I am concerned about our lack of personal contact with other pastors leaving us open to become parochial, even schismatic, 'silently'. Coupled with the need to be in league with a group that is pure in its confession for the training of your *next* pastor, it is time for this discussion.

So far, my newsletter article.

My decision in May of 2008 was informed by 'Missouri Synod tradition'—it was what I had been led to believe was the traditional Missourian (and, therefore, of course, Synodical Conference and, therefore, of course, *Lutheran!*) understanding of worship at 'free conferences', but the fact is that my history was misinformed...yet, my conscience was activated and further study later showed that my conscience was on the side both of Scripture and of history.

In the second to last paragraph of "My Sin in Kansas City," I make reference to the Evangelical

Lutheran Diocese of North America as 1) united in doctrine and practice and 2) a body in which membership would have well served me with regard to what was done in Kansas City (which, indeed, would have been what was *not* done in Kansas City!). I do not regret the decisions that I and the parish I serve made not to go hastily into any fellowship, but I do acknowledge that the slowness (call it patience or timidity, whichever you like; I am sure that it is a mixture of the two) with which we have moved out of ‘pure independence’ has brought challenges of its own...as has our parish’s unique set of circumstances in the leaving of the LCMS (in all likelihood, I would have stayed until the 2007 convention, engaged in a state of confession similar to that of Pr. Michael Henson and Trinity, Herrin, Illinois, but our hand was forced by Central Illinois District officials demanding my ‘reconciliation’ with the false teachers of the local Mid-South District circuit...and since they were neither repenting of their false doctrine nor their gossip-based charges—Matthew 18, Mid-South District President Lampe told our parishioners is “only a guideline” when either parishioners or circuit pastors are dealing with ultra-conservative scum like us—I could not in good conscience acquiesce to their demands...such as their scheduling a meeting without consulting me and then telling me that I was to show up and get reconciled... For a look at what would have been a state of confession letter, but turned out to be my resignation from the LCMS clergy roster letter, please see Holy Trinity’s website at <http://HolyTrinityLC.com>, click on the “History” menu item, and read down until you come to the link).

At any rate, both the creation of the diocese and its progress from its inception have been fascinating to watch. Still a small group of pastors, it is, nonetheless, not afraid to lose any of its members who fall out of agreement in doctrine...but, on the other hand, when they recently had to discipline one of their brethren and, ultimately, find that fellowship no longer existed between them, they were, to a man, devastated. These are not men who are in a rush for purity such that they forget the weakness of men, not those who wish at all to be schismatic or separatistic, but men who readily welcome all...yet, honestly speak to whether or not one’s confession is in agreement with another’s. They are, in short, and in spite of each one’s personal imperfections (since joining the diocese does not impart to one a sinless flesh), precisely what any of us would wish to see in our pastors: men who are concerned with doctrine and practice for two reasons—the honoring of Christ and the blessing of Christ’s people... which is, of course, only one reason, if seen rightly...

The reaction of some people (i.e., Jack Cascione, Gregory Jackson) to what I have written is predictable. They take the diocese (and The Augustana Ministerium, for that matter) as a stopping over place for those who don’t have the courage to go all the way to Rome (like Dan Woodring) or to the East (like John Fenton and Robb Hogg), and I reckon that they’ll accuse me of such a lack of courage for contemplating the ELDoNA. If so, I am thankful that I am too timid to give up a salvation that is by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. I wish others had not been so bold as completely to throw aside the manner and method of church governance that had endured for 1800 years simply because of one questionable bishop, instituting something entirely new, instead of adapting what had always been the case for use in this new, non-land-church environment.

Nonetheless, little, if any, of what is written in the last three paragraphs above was a part of my presentation of “My Sin in Kansas City” or the parts that preceded it; what follows, though, was—a quote from an LCMS centennial publication that both agrees with my second-to-last paragraph and immediately brings to any open-eyed LCMS pastor’s (or layman’s) view just what is wrong with the LCMS today, as well as simply describing the joy and beauty of true Church Fellowship. *Please note*

that the second to last sentence of the second paragraph is very poorly stated—itsself another evidence that Missouri was already in decline by 1947: we do not “band together in congregations,” but God gathers believers around His Gospel and Sacraments. Regardless of ‘how it looks’ or of what ‘mechanics’ need to be carried out for the incorporation and structuring of a local parish, the author’s wording betrays the very sort of anthropocentric view of things that he, no doubt, wished to reject.

There is real spiritual strengthening in Christian fellowship. When Paul says he longs to see the Christians in Rome, he gives the reason for such longing: “that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (Rom. 1:11-12). When Paul was led captive to Rome and arrived in the neighborhood of Rome at Puteoli, the brethren from the capital city came to meet him as far as Appii Forum and The Three Taverns. In Acts 28:15 we are told what effect this manifestation of fellowship had upon this great Apostle of Christ: “Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage.” How often have we been refreshed and strengthened in a similar manner in joint worship with fellow believers, in smaller gatherings, at conventions, conferences, and circuit meetings, whenever or wherever we have been privileged to discuss the Lord’s victories and our needs with those who are of the household of faith!

Another purpose of Christian fellowship is the promotion of the unity of faith. There is no more effective way of doing that than having those who confess the same Christ and Lord band together to maintain and preserve this precious unity. That was done in Jerusalem in the days of the Apostles. As a result they were one heart and one mind, and they did continue “steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.” So our people today not only follow God’s command to band together in congregations to promote and foster the unity of faith. They also band together in synods and larger church groups for the same purpose, because the history of the Church has shown the need and advisability of such co-operation.

Separated from each other, fellow confessors can easily drift apart even in their confession. Questionable expressions may be used to confess a certain article of faith. If there are no fellow believers in close fellowship to help correct these expressions, it may happen that those who should have continued in outward fellowship have become completely separated. Walls have gone up between them that might never have been raised had they practiced real fellowship of faith. Error has been permitted to creep in to darken the souls of men where at first there may never have been the least intention to foster error. It is for this reason that our own Synod, organized almost 100 years ago, seeking to foster a closer fellowship of faith, placed this object *first* in its constitution:

1. “The conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3-6; I Cor. 1:10) and a united defense against schism and sectarianism (Rom. 16:17).”

[Arnold H. Grumm, “Church Fellowship,” in *The Abiding Word*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1947, p. 533–534, emphasis mine]

[NOTE: There was a break in my typing that lasted from approximately 3 November 2008 until at least 16 December 2008, so the rest of this ‘transcript’ is not complete. Our first afternoon session considered a number of things and addressed several questions from members of St. Luke. Generally, we considered Walther’s Theses on Communion Fellowship; Prayer fellowship’s evolution into the Unit Concept (see *Marquart, The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, p. 46, n. 10), where we found that WELS’s Unit Concept contradicts a proper understanding of the Church and Her fellowship in precisely the flipside of the modern Missourian way (whether ‘Levels of Fellowship’ or ‘Serial Prayer at Civic Events’), both considering fellowship as a matter of individuals, whereas what needs to be reckoned with is a matter of churches and church bodies); the report of the Overseas Committee: “Prayer is not a mark of the Church, and if it does not give the impression that there is unity where there is not, it may be done,” which lead us to recognize that David Benke manifested false unity, while praying for your hospitalized Baptist neighbor does not; the whole range of Fellowship with the ALC, Yankee Stadium (the problem is not Benke *per se* but that he has officially been considered right by the body), Joint VBS, Open Communion, and, in general, the sorts of things mentioned in the State of Confession of Trinity Lutheran Church of Herrin, Illinois and Pr. Michael Henson, as well as my resignation from the clergy roster of the LCMS. In the fourth session, we moved through the following considerations—“We live in a post-synodical reality, a time wherein we know that none of the American synods are really united in doctrine and practice, but have seen the inroads of institutionalized false teaching in one form or another. What should our reaction be to such a state within a body in which we hold membership? What other options are there for us?”—concluding as follows.]

Can you really trust the LCMS? Are all rostered pastors of the LCMS appropriate to commune at this parish’s altar? Are all district and synodical publications doctrinally sound *and* advancing the cause of the pure teaching of Scripture to the salvation of souls? If not, you are in a ‘post-synodical’ state, even though you are in a ‘synod’. The question is, “Is being in such a relationship in accord with Holy Scripture?” If not, what should you do?

Some will say, “Really ‘get out the vote’ in the next district or synodical convention!” and that should, indeed, be done for whatever time a parish or pastor is a part of the LCMS, but is that acceptable as a ‘total solution’? What if you ‘lose’ politically? Is that any way to ensure that the pulpit here is served by a faithful pastor when your great-great-grandchildren are in the pews? In the mean time, is it okay that you are in fellowship with Dr. Matthew Becker, formerly of Concordia University Portland, who is a blatant evolutionist? With David Benke? With pastors in your own district that will commune ‘anyone who is Baptized’, regardless of the fact that their church membership confesses a denial of Christ’s bodily presence in the Lord’s Supper?

We turn, again, to Arnold Grumm’s article in *The Abiding Word*:

We cannot solve the situation by saying: Let’s be tolerant and overlook this disloyalty. We cannot tolerate any other teaching, for Christ has said: “If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). For this same reason He has commanded His Church: “Teach them to

observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Luther felt the gravity of a position that forced him to be separated from so many with whom he had once been united in outward fellowship. He knew there were believers in the Roman Church, as he himself repeatedly stated. Yet there was no other choice if God’s Word and will was to be done. He writes:

“To dissent from the agreement of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a grave matter. But divine authority commands all not to be allies and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty.” (Smalcald Articles. Triglot, p. 517.) Luther had in mind, when he spoke these words, the many abuses practiced in the Roman Church with its man-made laws about scapulars and fasts, relics and saints, and with its demand of subjection to the Pope in all things. But the principle he sets forth applies to all doctrines that are the commandments of men. We cannot be allies of such teachings and defenders of them. Whoever defends them separates himself by this act from those who in their confession seek to be loyal to Christ.

Men have sought to confuse the issue. They have blamed the proponents of the truth for the many divisions in Christendom. They have said repeatedly that these are the people that are setting up the walls of separation. Let us keep the issue clear. Christ Himself has asked us to be loyal to Him in all things He has taught. He has asked us to refuse to tolerate error side by side with His Word. He has warned us through His Apostle that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (I Cor. 5:6). He wants us to heed this warning and as good stewards to be faithful to His truth. His is the voice that counts. His sheep are to hear that voice and to follow it.

[Arnold H. Grumm, “Church Fellowship,” in *The Abiding Word*, p. 530]

Yes, you must fight for Missouri as long as you are in Missouri...but *ought* you be in Missouri? I cannot make that decision for you, and I try not to judge anyone who is still in Missouri—*as long as they are still fighting!*—but...but...when is fighting *pointless*? When they won’t even hear your charge of institutional false teaching, what more can you do? That was the conclusion Trinity, Herrin, Illinois had to come to; how is it just ‘a casual intrusion of error’ if it is so much the position of the body that they won’t even listen to you when you challenge them, don’t even care that you find it necessary to teach the exact opposite.

For all in the Missouri Synod, I ask you to return not only to your grandfather’s church, but to the words of your synod’s founder, C.F.W. Walther. “WWWD? What Would Walther Do” if he were confronted by the LCMS you face today? I think he makes this abundantly clear in his “Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Teach Differently.” First, we look at the theses themselves:

THESIS I

The true visible church in an absolute sense, or part of the same, is that church in which the Word of God is preached purely and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution.

THESIS II

A Fellowship in which the Word of God is fundamentally denied, or in which a fundamental denial of the Word of God is tolerated, is not a true orthodox church, but a false heterodox church or sect.

THESIS III

Every man is obligated to recognize the true visible church, and, if he has the opportunity to join it.

THESIS IV

Every man is obligated to avoid heterodox churches, and in the event that he has belonged to a heterodox church, his obligation is to renounce it and separate himself from it.

THESIS V

True Christians are also found in heterodox fellowships as a result of their lack of knowledge.

THESIS VI

Those who are aware of the partial apostasy of the church fellowship to which they belong and yet continue to remain within that fellowship are not to be considered among the weak but are either the lukewarm whom the Lord will spit out of his mouth or Epicurean religious sceptics who within their hearts would ask with Pilate, "What is truth?"

THESIS VII

The main purpose of the Holy Sacrament is to be a tool and a means through which the promises of grace are offered, communicated, and appropriated, as with a seal, guarantee, and pledge through which these promises are confirmed. However, within this major purpose, as a secondary goal, the Sacrament is to be a distinguishing sign of confession and a bond of fellowship in worship. Therefore Communion fellowship is Church fellowship.

THESIS VIII

Holy Communion was not instituted to make people Christians. It was instituted to strengthen the faith of those who already are true Christians. Therefore Communion should be administered to no one who has been revealed as a false Christian.

THESIS IX

In Holy Communion the Body and Blood of Christ is actually present, distributed and received by every communicant. Therefore Communion can not be administered to anyone who does not confess a belief in this mystery without grievous sin.

THESIS X

Holy Communion is a mark of confession of Faith and Doctrine among those who celebrate together. Therefore the admission of members of heterodox fellowships to the celebration of communion within the Lutheran Church is in conflict with:

1. Christ's institution;
2. The commanded unity of the church in faith and accordingly in confession;
3. Our love for those to whom the Sacrament is administered;
4. Our love for our own fellow believers, especially the weak who by this action would be given serious offense.
5. The command not to become participants in the sin and error of others.

THESIS XI

We do not place members of heterodox fellowships under excommunication or declare them to be heretics or damned by our refusal to allow them to participate in the celebration of communion within the fellowship of the Lutheran Church. Instead, they are merely suspended until such time as by their separation from the false fellowship they are reconciled with the orthodox church.

Walther goes on to discuss true and false churches under his Second Thesis (p.12):

Thus Jesus also in these words clearly indicates the marks of the true and the false church Those who hold to the words of Christ are the true church in which God himself makes his dwelling. They are the house of God and the true temple. The Lord of heaven and earth lives among them not only as he does everywhere according to his essence, but also according to his gracious presence. These are the marks of the true church. One can therefore recognize a false church in this, that it does not fundamentally hold to the Word of God but denies it. Therefore God cannot dwell in it. It is a sect—with which we will have no fellowship. I admit that within the evangelical Lutheran Church it sometimes happens that one will deviate in this or that from the Word of God. But *because this happens out of weakness or in ignorance, our church still does not through it become a sect. But whoever fundamentally and persistently falls away from the Word of God belongs to the false church.*

However, the point made in this thesis is also very important; *a church in which a fundamental denial of the Word of God is tolerated is also a false church.* This is the case, for example, in the Union. *We do not deny that there may still be some within the Union who in general teach the Word of God purely.* But this circumstance makes the union church neither pure nor a true visible church of God. Much more we must testify to them that they are worse off than any other protestant sect. For with the other protestant sects there exists true Christians in their midst who in their ignorance believe, and are convinced in their hearts, that their error is the truth. One can openly and honestly struggle with them, as we Lutherans also have done with honest Reformed on the doctrines of communion, baptism, the person of Christ, etc. But in the union church one can falsify the Word of God with impunity. Here the lie is reckoned to be as good as the truth and error is wicked tolerated. Pure doctrine is generally interpreted to be an in different thing, while a life which evidences good works is of major importance. Truly this miserable principle of unionism would have been condemned by the heathen Cicero himself. In a speech which he made on the various teachings of individual philosophers Cicero once added: "I do not know which of these beliefs is correct. But this I do know, that only one of them can be correct." The fearful

judgment of Christ upon the bishop of Laodicea also applies to the Union, “Revelation 3:15, 16: I would that you were either hot or cold. But because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold I will spit you out of my mouth.”

In the same way when a person who is eager for a refreshing drink of water instead receives lukewarm water in his mouth, he is so disgusted that he immediately spits it out. So also the holy God is disgusted with those who consider his revealed Word to be an indifferent thing, and equate error with the truth. He is so disgusted that he will cast them out of his sight. The theory invented and maintained by the followers of the Union and unionistic, false, Lutherans which states that different directions may lead to the same goal is absurd. Just as little as it is possible for a multitude of travelers to reach the same city when they follow roads that lead in different directions; just as little in the spiritual area can one and the same goal be reached by following different directions. Where different directions are followed different goals are always attained. The orthodox Lutheran Church knows full well that it bears in its midst those who are erring out of weakness in order that through admonition and reproof from the Word of God they might be moved to repentance. However, when these efforts fail an one is revealed as a stubborn errorist our church will then no longer recognize him as a brother but will separate itself from him. The orthodox church can never tolerate or authorize false doctrine. It can never make a union with the lie. If, for example, a pastor were to propose false doctrine and his hearer were to allow this without protest or struggle, or did not withdraw from him, so must we consider them also to be erring and, under the circumstances, even heretical. *One may with justification judge a member of the congregation by his pastor, just as one may judge a church by its confession.* We also freely admit, for example, that there are many just souls in the Reformed Church, which with more precise knowledge we would have to consider as dear Christians and brothers. But our churches could never unite. The union church, on the other hand, is that in which false doctrines and also teachers are tolerated and considered as brothers....Luther:

For the holy church sins and stumbles and can even err as the Lord’s Prayer teaches. However, it does not defend or excuse itself, but humbly asks for forgiveness and improves itself where it is able. Thus it is forgiven so that its sin is no longer reckoned as sin. Now if I do not know or distinguish the true church from the false one on the basis of obedience and obdurate disobedience, then I am unable to speak of a church any longer. Then one might accordingly also with due deference call all heretics, all factions and sects, that are wantonly disobedient to Christ, the holy church; for they are in no way worse than the pope’s church, if indeed wanton disobedience against God does no harm. On the other hand, the papal church is not better because it is stubbornly disobedient to God and wickedly perverts his word, and besides, it is more insistent on being right than any other faction and heretic. [A Letter From Dr. Martin Luther Concerning His Book on the Private Mass. *AE* 38:229.]

[Walther, C.F.W., “Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Teach Differently,” p. 12, emphasis mine.]

[As pointed out in the course of the reading of the above,] I think that my position on fellowship with the LCMS of the 21st century is exactly that of her first president: there are many in Missouri who still

teach the truth (though they are a minority); but there is this toleration of false teachers and teachings, both official and unofficial, that shows Missouri to be a “false church.” As Walther writes: “*a church in which a fundamental denial of the Word of God is tolerated is also a false church.*” What is there, for example, in David Benke’s unionism/syncretism but a fundamental denial of the Word of God? What is there in his public praying for the salvation of the dead? What is it when Romans 10 is turned on its head so that the churches are preached to by those whom God has not sent, those who are not recognized by the Church as servants of the Word, but only ‘licensed’ by districts and given temporary contracts?

Yes, you must fight for Missouri as long as you are in Missouri...but *ought* you be in Missouri? I cannot make that decision for you, so I simply implore you to continue to fight, but to ask yourselves as you do: is it faithful to be in fellowship with these errorists that we are fighting, errorists who don’t even care that we teach the opposite doctrine from what they teach? I believe that Walther’s words agree with those of St. Paul: (Romans 16:17) mark and avoid those in error, even while you are in the same body fighting to bring them to repentance...and if that body refuses to mark and avoid such, but instead you see that “false doctrines and also teachers are tolerated and considered as brothers,” then I remind you of the harsh judgment that Walther speaks in his Sixth Thesis and bid you to remember his Fourth:

Every man is obligated to avoid heterodox churches, and in the event that he has belonged to a heterodox church, his obligation is to renounce it and separate himself from it.