

10-1-1937

## The Pastor and Synod

J. W. Behnken

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Behnken, J. W. (1937) "The Pastor and Synod," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 8 , Article 79.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol8/iss1/79>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

# *Concordia*

## *Theological Monthly*

---

---

Vol. VIII

OCTOBER, 1937

No. 10

---

---

### **The Pastor and Synod**

---

Naturally the pastor's paramount interest centers in his congregation. This is as it should be. It is the congregation which calls him and exacts a pledge from him to serve it unselfishly with the Word of God and the Sacraments. It is the membership of the congregation which forms the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made him overseer to feed the Church of God which He has purchased with His own blood, Acts 20, 28. Again, it is the congregation which has pledged itself to respect him as the pastor and to supply all his temporal needs. Again, according to Scripture the congregation is a divine institution. Christ acknowledged this in Matt. 18, 17. The Apostle St. Paul recognized this in addressing the congregation in Corinth as "the church of God which is at Corinth," 1 Cor. 1, 2. St. John, in Revelation, addressed his letters to separate congregations when he wrote "unto the angel of the church" at Ephesus, Smyrna, etc.

A synod is not a divine institution, but a voluntary organization. Nowhere is there a Scriptural command that congregations must unite. Of course, we have the Scriptural example, Acts 15, of the first convention of delegates from congregations which assembled at Jerusalem. There are features in this sacred account which remind a person of one of our synodical conventions. We notice, for instance, that there were delegates who had been dispatched from the congregation at Antioch for the purpose of consulting with the apostles and elders at Jerusalem about a doctrinal dispute which had arisen in their midst. At this convention there was a great multitude in attendance, which is more than an indication that there were lay delegates present. Attention is called also to the fact that Paul and Barnabas were given an opportunity to report on their missionary activities among the Gentiles. A very important feature—which, by the way, has been one of the chief characteristics of our synodical conventions

and which undoubtedly has preserved unity of doctrine in our midst—is the doctrinal discussion which was held there. After free and frank expressions, which revealed a very pronounced difference of opinion, they reached a God-pleasing conclusion on the basis of the revealed Word of God and thus maintained true unity of the spirit. Yet, despite all these points of similarity we nevertheless must recognize the truth that there is no express command that congregations must unite into an organization such as a synod.

However, under circumstances which prevailed at the time when our Lutheran fathers came to our shores it became very apparent that closer relationship among the various congregations that were established must be maintained. The fathers realized that, even as burning coals must needs be kept together if they are not to be extinguished, so congregations in different parts of our country might not continue in soundness of doctrine, in fervency of spirit, etc., unless they united into a synodical organization. Under prevailing conditions today, where the forces of evil have renewed their efforts and are launching most bitter attacks, whose aim and objective is the destruction of the Christian religion, we could hardly get along without a synod. If we had no synod, we would undoubtedly organize one. As Christians in our various congregations we would feel the urge and the necessity of affiliation with our fellow-Lutherans in other congregations in the various parts of our country and the world. The same reasons that prompted our fathers to organize a synod undoubtedly would move us to take such steps today. We would look to the "example of the Apostolic Church in Acts 15." Again, we would recognize "our Lord's will that the diversities of gifts should be for the common profit," 1 Cor. 12, 4—31. (Synodical Constitution.)

In Eph. 4 the Lord expressly urges His Christians to "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." While this might be accomplished without synodical organization, yet it must be apparent to every one who reflects upon this matter seriously that synodical organization is of inestimable benefit in the accomplishment of that assigned purpose. Let us consider well the tremendous advantages afforded our fathers by the fact that they had others to whom they might turn and with whom they might discuss the weighty problems which confronted them during their doctrinal controversies. Let us not underestimate but evaluate properly the remarkable benefits derived from synodical conventions and conferences, where doctrinal discussions are given such an important place. It can hardly be gainsaid that this has contributed very much toward our synodical unity and, next to God's

grace, has been the outstanding factor in preventing disharmony and disruption. We cannot thank God sufficiently for these blessings which have come to us through our Synod.

With reference to the "diversities of gifts to be used for the common profit" we surely must admit that this has been a very prominent factor in our synodical life. Even prior to the organization of our Synod it was very apparent that God used the diversity of talents so evident in Walther, Wyneken, Sihler, Craemer, and others. Our century of activity has added many illustrious names to that list of men whom God endowed with particular talents that in all humility they might place these at the foot of Christ's cross and into the service of His kingdom.

Again, the needs and requirements in that enormous task which the Church has been commissioned to perform call for a diligent use of these different talents. In order to accomplish this properly, it is so essential that there be united effort. No individual Christian, and for that matter no individual congregation, could assume full responsibility for the performance of those duties which Christ assigned to His Church when He requested her to preach the Gospel to every creature and to go into all the world in order to accomplish this. This necessitates, as experience has demonstrated it, the establishment of schools where the future pastors, teachers, and missionaries of the Church might receive their training for the work of the Christian ministry. Again, it necessitates the sending of laborers that have been thus trained into the fields "white already to harvest." Of course, only God can send them, but He does this through His Church. Surely, when we contemplate the immensity of such a program, we shall recognize some compelling reasons for the organization of our Synod.

Let us add to the aforesaid the thought that Bibles, books to be used in church and school, and all manner of Christian literature must be published and disseminated. We could hardly visualize an effective performance of our great mission to the world today without such literature.

Since the Church is viewed by the world, and judged largely also by her practise and customs, "the largest possible uniformity in church-practise, church-custom, and in general, in congregational affairs" (Syn. Const.) is greatly desirable. While no perfection has been achieved, yet much has been accomplished, and this could hardly have been achieved without synodical organization.

Again, "the supervision of the ministers and teachers of the Synod with regard to the performance of their official duties, as well as the protection of pastors, teachers, and congregations in

the performance of their duties and the maintenance of their rights" (Syn. Const.) is certainly necessary if the Church is to continue in purity of doctrine and uniformity of practise. However, also this can best be accomplished through the organization of a synod. We may even say that our congregations can hardly dispense with the remarkable service rendered by Synod. Where is the congregation which could educate and train faithful pastors to serve it and also men whom she might dispatch to mission-fields at home and abroad? Let us not underestimate the training of soundly orthodox pastors and teachers, which God has wrought at our synodical institutions. What a blessing to have such an organization as a synod to which congregations may turn during vacancies to suggest to them faithful and conscientious pastors and teachers whose orthodoxy is proved and established. Surely we should feel constrained to organize a synod if we did not have one.

Our fathers were extremely careful in organizing our Synod. They safeguarded the sovereignty of the congregation. They considered not merely that Synod is a voluntary organization, but also that it could function only in an advisory capacity. They effected an organization which was truly democratic. Our Synod cannot legislate, can levy no taxes, can exercise no compulsion by which congregations may be forced to join, can assign no pastors to congregations, cannot expel pastors from office, can pass and enforce no laws in adiaphora, can exercise no control over the property of congregations, cannot dictate congregational policies, cannot interfere in the government of the congregation, but must ever respect the sovereignty of the congregation itself. Only the Word of God can legislate for the congregation. When this whole matter is viewed in the light of Scripture, it becomes apparent that God endowed our fathers with genuine wisdom when they adopted the Constitution and By-laws, in which the principles and policies of the proper relationship between Synod and congregations, hence also between Synod and the pastors of the congregations, was established.

The truly democratic character of our synodical organization makes it all the more urgent that our pastors understand not merely their own and their congregations' privileges, but also their duties and responsibilities over against Synod.

With regard to the democratic government in our country some have expressed misgivings. We hear much complaint from the lips of some fellow-citizens against certain practises which prevail, and usually such people add: "Our Government should do something about that." Apart from such complaints, however, they themselves are altogether indifferent about the affairs of

government. Such indifference is decidedly dangerous. It may undermine the very foundations upon which our Government rests. In fact, on account of this some claim that no democracy can continue, but must ultimately collapse. Undoubtedly many of our statesmen, political economists, editors of newspapers and magazines, and others realize the insidious danger which lurks in such indifference. It is pathetic that even during a national campaign, with all its efforts to arouse people to action, hardly seven out of ten of our citizens who enjoy the privilege of the ballot will take the trouble to go to the polls. Other selections reveal much greater apathy. Such indifference is dreadfully dangerous.

Even so some have declared that our Synod cannot continue because of its democratic character. From its very beginning there were those who predicted confusion and collapse not merely because of its unwavering adherence to God's Word in matters of doctrine, but also because of the organizational structure. To say the very least, it is most remarkable that under such emphatic insistence upon congregational sovereignty our Synod has not merely continued, but enjoyed a marvelous growth. We know of course that all credit and glory belongs to God, whose powerful Word has been the magnetic force to keep the congregations of our Synod intact in such remarkable soundness of doctrine. Let us not forget, however, that God used human instruments to accomplish this. Next to the grace of God we need to recognize the faithful and conscientious loyalty, the unswerving orthodoxy, of that host of consecrated pastors and teachers as the outstanding contributing factor toward the preservation and expansion of our Synod. They, in turn, indoctrinated the laity and exhorted them to be truly loyal, and enthusiastically so. When Dr. Walther exclaimed, "Gott erhalte uns ein frommes Ministerium," he paid the ministry of Synod a high compliment. He understood what an important and responsible position our ministers had occupied and how faithfully and conscientiously they had performed their tasks. At the same time he voiced the truth that also in the future the welfare of Synod would depend, next to the grace of God, upon pious and faithful servants of the Word.

This emphasizes the great importance of the pastor's loyalty to his Synod. Unless he is loyal to it,—and it deserves his loyalty,—how can he expect his members to manifest loyalty? Our generation of pastors, which has entered into the heritage of the fathers without any special effort or any inward struggle, is inclined to take very much for granted. We shall do well to subject ourselves to an honest examination, to make a fearless audit, and thus to come to a keener realization and a deeper appreciation of the blessings which God has showered upon us

through our Synod. We shall then arrive at this conclusion: Next to God and my Christian parents, who gave me my early Christian training, I am indebted to my beloved Synod. It furnished the Christian teacher who taught me in the parochial school, the pastor who instructed and confirmed me, the professors at whose feet I was permitted to sit at college and at the seminary. It furnished the catechism, the Bible history, the hymnal, and many other books which I needed for my elementary, higher, and theological education. It carried on the mission-work which led to my call, my ordination, and the wonderful privilege of being an ambassador of Christ. Consequently I dare not be indifferent about its welfare or even assume the attitude "My Synod owes me," but rather, "I am indebted to my Synod. I owe it support, loyalty, service."

Having voluntarily become a member of Synod, a pastor should be thoroughly informed about the organization which he joined. Above all should he be thoroughly acquainted with, and whole-heartedly subscribe to, the doctrines of his Synod, and this should be based upon the firm conviction that these fully agree with the Word of God. He should possess more than a passing knowledge of the doctrinal controversies through which his Synod was compelled to pass and gratefully rejoice that God graciously kept it with the truths of the Bible. He must know something of the history of his Synod, its beginnings, its struggles, its growth. He should be well acquainted with its Constitution and By-laws, its form of government, its customs and practises. He should give serious and constructive thought to the problems and difficulties confronting it. He should be vitally interested in its activities and undertakings, its program of elementary and higher education, its missions at home and in foreign fields, the support it is giving to the Veterans of the Cross, etc.

Next must follow unstinted and unflinching support. Sometimes a pastor will hear harsh criticism uttered against his Synod. Even as with citizens who criticize our Government, so also criticism voiced against Synod usually comes from such members as otherwise manifest no active interest in it. They criticize very sharply and destructively, but neither offer nor do anything of a constructive nature. A faithful pastor will then come to the defense of his Synod. It may require courage, but he loves it so intensely that he cannot bear to have any one malign or harm it. After all, if he does not defend it and speak well of it, who shall do it?

The faithful pastor must work for the welfare of Synod in his congregation. Of necessity Synod looks to him to do this. Again we ask, If the pastor does not arouse interest for Synod in his congregation, who shall do it? This is becoming increasingly

difficult in our day, especially in larger congregations. So many of our members are not in church when the pastor imparts information; so few of our people read our church periodicals; so many have practically no conception of what their Synod is, of its activities, its needs, and consequently they take no interest in the work of the Church at large. However, though it is difficult, the faithful pastor will find ways and means, will perhaps enlist the cooperation of willing workers in the congregation, to reach, to impart information to, and to make enthusiastic, each member of his congregation for the work his Synod is doing.

In this connection a word may be in place about efforts put forth jointly with other congregations. Synod passes a resolution which urges every congregation to cooperate in some special endeavor. Some congregations then desire to insist upon their sovereign rights and declare: "We shall not take part in this. Synod must not dictate to us." Let us consider well that congregations and their pastors joined Synod voluntarily. Thereby they not merely signed the Constitution and thus subscribed to the principles and policies expressed therein, but also assumed certain obligations. Cooperation and support are such obligations. Of course, special circumstances may prevent the execution of the plan at a certain time or in a certain manner; but wherever possible, pastors should strive for such cooperation. Besides, such plans and programs are sufficiently flexible to adapt them to the particular conditions which may exist here or there.

Of course, congregations should cooperate in the work of the Church at large by their financial contributions. While a person often hears the remark "Let Synod do it," and while this attitude is apparent also in some of the rousing resolutions passed at District or synodical conventions which involve the expenditure of sums of money, yet every one who considers such matters seriously must know that Synod can do only as much as congregations permit it to do, and that permission is expressed very definitely in terms of their contributions. Our pastors are Synod's contact men. Synod must of necessity depend upon them to present the needs of the Church at large to the people. This does not mean that the pastor must serve as collector for Synod (though the writer remembers well how years ago many pastors willingly assumed that obligation and made the rounds in the congregation for an old-fashioned *Hauskollekte*). However, the pastor as leader of the congregation must impart the information and then apply the Word of God, especially the precious Gospel of our crucified Redeemer, which is the urgent, compelling motive to render hearts and hands willing to give liberally. It will not do merely to state, "We shall have a collection for Synod's budget."



That is so mechanical, so cold, and to many of our people so meaningless. That will not enkindle their hearts and open their purses. Pastors must lead their people to see the "facts behind the figures" and then urge and encourage and convince them with the Gospel of Christ. Again, though this is difficult, pastors should make arrangements that every member will be reached in a systematic way and given an opportunity to enjoy the privilege of placing also a proper portion of their temporal possessions into the service of Christ's kingdom.

This is certainly a most propitious time to restudy the proper relationship of the pastor and his congregation to Synod. We are approaching the centennial of the landing of the founders of our beloved Synod. Within a few years, God willing, we shall celebrate the centennial of the organization of Synod. We are entering upon a second century of soundly Lutheran church activity in America. What accomplishments this second century will record will depend, next to God and His gracious blessings, upon the genuine orthodoxy, the unflinching loyalty, the consecrated service, the aggressive activity, and the whole-hearted support of Synod's pastors. "May God preserve unto us a pious ministry!"

Oak Park, Ill.

J. W. BEHNKEN

### Schrift, Bekenntnis, Theologie, Pfarramt und verwandte Gegenstände

Es liegt uns eine Anzahl theologischer Hefte zur Besprechung vor, die wir nicht gerne mit der allgemeinen Bemerkung abfertigen möchten: „Hier wird uns manches Treffliche dargeboten.“ Davon hat der Leser nicht viel geistigen Gewinn. Die genannten Gegenstände sind ja so wichtig, daß das, was angesehenen Theologen der Gegenwart darüber zu sagen haben, etwas eingehender besprochen werden dürfte, als das im Rahmen einer gewöhnlichen Rezension geschehen könnte. Wenn wir sehen, daß auch in andern Kreisen auf Dinge, die bei uns unbekannt sind, Nachdruck gelegt wird, so hat das seinen Nutzen. Und wenn uns verkehrte Urteile und Grundsätze entgegentreten, so mahnt uns das, um so fester an der aus der Schrift erkannten, an der Schrift geprüften Wahrheit festzuhalten. Die Schriften, die wir jetzt in der Form eines Artikels — der naturgemäß kein formgerechter theologischer Aufsatz sein kann — besprechen wollen, sind die folgenden:

**Theologia Militans.** A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig. 1936. 1937.

8. Heft. O. Prosch. „Das Bekenntnis im Alten Testament.“ 28 Seiten. M. 75.