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The Christian Congregation: Its Rights and Duties According to God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions

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is no evidence of the adoration of the host before the twelfth or the thirteenth century, that is, about the time when the doctrine of transubstantiation was fully established in the Church.

As to the *communicants*, or those who were admitted to the Lord's Supper, one strange phenomenon must be noted, namely, the fact that children and even infants should partake of the Eucharist, the argument being that salvation was not possible without the Sacrament. This view was based, for the most part, on a false exposition of John 6, especially of verse 53. Cyprian expressly states that the children received *cibum et poculum Domini*. The *Apostolic Constitutions* and Augustine also refer to the custom, and the Oriental Church has retained the usage till the present time, while the evangelical churches, mindful of 1 Cor. 11:28, 29, have insisted upon greater maturity in the communicants.¹²⁾

P. E. KRETZMANN

The Christian Congregation: Its Rights and Duties According to God's Word and Our Lutheran Confessions

Essay read at the Centennial Convention of the Synod of Missouri, Ohio,
and Other States, St. Louis, Mo., June, 1938

Introduction

In my two brief addresses I shall endeavor to present to you, in their essential features, the paramount Biblical truths which Dr. Walther has propounded in his immortal book *Die rechte Gestalt einer vom Staat unabhaengigen ev.-luth. Ortsgemeinde. Eine Sammlung von Zeugnissen aus den Bekenntnisschriften der evang.-luth. Kirche und aus den Privatschriften rechtglaebiger Lehrer derselben*; which means, in literal translation: *The Correct Form of a Local Ev. Luth. Congregation which Is Independent of the State. A Collection of Testimonies from the Confessions of the Ev. Luth. Church and the Private Writings of Its Orthodox Teachers*. This book was published by Dr. Walther, upon the request of the Pastoral Conference of St. Louis, in 1863, sixteen years after the organization of the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. Originally it was composed as an essay to be read at the convention of the Western District of the Missouri Synod, in session at Crete, Ill., beginning May 15, 1862. Since, however, at this convention the treatise for lack of time could not be given adequate consideration, the author was asked to publish it in book form.

In his Foreword, Dr. Walther first calls attention to a work which he had published eleven years before the *Rechte Gestalt*,

12) Cf. Augusti, 339, 580, 635 ff.; Bingham, V:154 ff., 178.

the very timely and valuable monograph entitled *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt* (Erlangen, 1852); which means: *The Voice of Our Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry* (Erlangen, 1852). This excellent treatise was designed to oppose all Romanizing attempts in the question of church polity and to demonstrate what both Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions teach with respect to the prerogatives and duties of true believers organized into Christian congregations. Walther next points out that his new essay merely applied in a wider scope the principles laid down in his book on the Church and the Ministry, his intention being to prove that the Lutheran doctrine of the Church and the Ministry as stated by him does not lead to "anarchistic, ochlocratic, anabaptistic, and separatistic conditions," on the contrary, that it forms the safest foundation on which a local congregation may be built in its correct Biblical form. Moreover, it shows that the peculiar structure of the Christian congregation as presented by him is in complete agreement with all that our ancient orthodox Lutheran teachers, though themselves living in a State Church and under a consistorial organization, have taught with regard to the Church, the Public Ministry, Church Polity, and the like. And last, though not least, Dr. Walther reminds his readers that the "correct form" which he was now picturing to them was not something novel and untried but a truly dependable form, which had been amply tested by the churches of the Missouri Synod for twenty-four years. Thus Dr. Walther's *Die rechte Gestalt* vindicates the authority and dignity of the Christian congregation over against all Romanizing errors on this point. So much regarding the history and purpose of Dr. Walther's great work *The Correct Form of a Local Ev. Luth. Congregation*.

It is well for us at this time to remind ourselves of the Biblical principles which Dr. Walther seventy-five years ago (1863—1938) impressed upon our Synod with respect to the rights and duties of the Christian congregation according to God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions. Of course, since our presentation of the subject must be so very brief, only a few salient points can be considered. Nevertheless, even this inadequate presentation may serve as a public confession of what we believe, teach, and maintain on the weighty issues of congregational rights and duties. In presenting the subject, I shall follow Dr. Walther's own clear and logical representation. He divides his treatise into three major parts, discussing in these, first, the *rights*, secondly, the *duties*, thirdly, the *exercise of the rights and duties* of Christian congregations organized (according to Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions) independently of the State.

Before discussing these weighty subjects, Dr. Walther first offers a precise and thoroughly Scriptural description of a Christian congregation, organized and established according to God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions. Such a Christian congregation is, as he says, "a gathering of Christian believers at a certain place." However, not any accidental gathering of believers at a certain place constitutes a Christian congregation in the Biblical and Lutheran sense in which this term is here used. This convention, for example, although it is large and influential, composed of Christian believers who are assembled for the Lord's service, is not a local Christian congregation. A Christian congregation, according to Dr. Walther's definition, is a gathering of Christians especially established and intended for the proclamation of God's Word in its truth and purity and the administration of the Sacraments according to Christ's institution, as set forth in Scripture. And what makes such a congregation distinctively Lutheran in a confessional sense is its avowed purpose to proclaim God's pure Word and to administer His holy Sacraments in agreement with our Lutheran Confessions. Of course, such a gathering of Christians is not a "communion of saints" in the sense of the invisible Church, in which every member is a true child of God; but local or visible churches include in their external membership also nominal Christians, or hypocrites and, in places where Christian discipline is being neglected, even manifest sinners. Nevertheless hypocrites and nominal Christians are, properly speaking, true members neither of the invisible nor of the visible Church. They are only outward adherents of the Church as, for instance, to use a rather crude but striking illustration often employed by our sturdy fathers, mud attaches itself to the wheels of a wagon on heavy, wet roads.

All these important points are further supplemented, explained, and confirmed by Dr. Walther in six brief paragraphs, in which, on the basis of Scripture, our Lutheran Confessions, and private Lutheran witnesses, he shows: 1. that the distinctive marks of a true Christian congregation are God's pure Word and the unadulterated Sacraments; 2. that a congregation is Lutheran only if it believes and accepts in doctrine and practise the Lutheran Confessions; 3. that it is not necessary for a Christian congregation (to merit this dignity) to have a distinctive organization or constitution or definite ceremonies prescribed by men; 4. that the presence of nominal Christians in local, or visible, churches must be expected; 5. that it is not sufficient to judge a local congregation merely by the name *Lutheran* which it happens to bear; and 6. that a congregation is not an orthodox Lutheran church simply because in it God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions happen to

be present, but that God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions must be actually believed and publicly confessed. All these are vital points, which should claim our attention and study today when syncretism and indifferentism prevail in so many denominations to the lamentable injury of Christ's holy cause and kingdom.

When speaking of the local Christian congregation in his book *Die rechte Gestalt*, Dr. Walther has in mind congregations that are organized *independently of the State*. That is the ideal, indeed, the only Scriptural and Lutheran form of a church organization. Church and State must be separate, as Christ commands in Matt. 22:21 and as our Lutheran Church confesses in the Augsburg Confession (Art. 28): "The spiritual and temporal rules must not be mingled or fused into each other." In the Church even Christian princes and kings are to be considered only *brethren in the faith*, not persons of authority, unless, of course, the Church, *in her own sphere* elects them into offices of authority. The State, moreover, is not within the Church, as though the Church were the larger and the State the smaller realm, but the State is outside the Church, though outwardly, it is true, the Church is *domiciled in the State*. Church-members owe obedience to the State, not as Christian church-members but as citizens and subjects of the State. Dr. Walther thus clearly and correctly distinguishes between Church and State and emphasizes strict separation of the two as a basic principle inculcated both in Scripture and in our Lutheran Confessions.

I. The Rights of a Christian Congregation

After having defined the Christian congregation in the sense of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, Dr. Walther points out its *rights*. These rights are comprehended in the so-called *Office of the Keys*, which Christ, the Head and the Lord of the Church, originally and directly has given to the *entire Church* (Matt. 16:15-19; 18:17-20; John 20:22, 23), and this indeed in such a way that the Office of the Keys, as a peculiar, spiritual church-power, belong to *each local congregation* in precisely the same manner and degree, no matter whether it is small or large, obscure or prominent. In his explanatory paragraphs following this first thesis Dr. Walther, on the basis of Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions, shows in detail: 1. that the Office of the Keys indeed embraces *all* the rights of Christian congregations, since it is the power to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments, especially the power to remit and retain sins; 2. that these rights have been bestowed by Christ upon the entire Church, not *mediately through ordained ministers*, as the Romanists and Romanizing church-bodies assert, but *originally and directly*, so that each believer as a member of the congregation should claim and

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use them (Matt. 18:19, 20; 1 Cor. 3:22); 3. that it is not necessary for any Christian congregation to be joined with others into some larger executive or judiciary church-body in order that it may exercise its divinely bestowed prerogatives, but that it may and should exercise these just because it is a local congregation; 4. that hypocrites, or nominal Christians, that are found in local churches do not possess the rights of the Office of the Keys, since this is given to true believers only (Matt. 16:15-19). Dr. Walther thus, without any qualification whatever, exalts the Christian congregation to the proper sphere and dignity which it possesses by the direct promise and declaration of God's Word.

That the Christian congregation truly possesses the Office of the Keys, and together with this the entire spiritual power and authority to ordain and execute all things required for the management and government of its affairs, Dr. Walther, in a further thesis, proves from the fact that Scripture denominates all true church-members *priests and kings* before God, in particular, "a chosen generation," a "royal priesthood," a "holy nation," a "peculiar people," a "spiritual house," a "holy priesthood," to show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light and to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Moreover, the prerogatives of the Office of the Keys are guaranteed to each believing church-member as such by the following terms of dignity and honor conferred upon them by Christ: the Lord's anointed (1 John 2:20, 27); Christ's chaste bride and virgin (2 Cor. 11:2); Christ's body and temple, in which God dwells (1 Cor. 12:27; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20); brethren, equal among themselves, but all alike subject to Christ (Matt. 23:8-11); possessors of all spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 3:21-23), even of the supreme judgment (Matt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 6:2-4). If the true members of Christian congregations are so highly exalted in rank and dignity by God, then their rights as Christian church-members must not be curtailed or even removed by tyrannical church lords or overbearing church councils. Thus again Dr. Walther upholds the Scriptural and Lutheran principle of true church democracy.

II. The Duties of a Christian Congregation

But since the Christian congregation possesses rights, it also has *duties*; and of these Dr. Walther speaks in the second part of his great treatise. Of the duties of a Christian congregation the first and foremost is that of *preaching God's Word* (Col. 3:16), and this in such a manner that Christ's Word indeed dwells richly in its midst and is disseminated abroad as the divine seed begetting spiritual and eternal life (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; 1 Pet. 1:23). The obligation of preaching the Word embraces also that of *administering the Sacraments* according to Christ's institution

(Matt. 28:10, 20; 1 Cor. 11:24 ff.). Moreover, it is the duty of the Christian congregation to provide for purity of doctrine and of life in its midst; it must therefore in the fear of God and in accordance with His Word practise church discipline (Matt. 18:15-18; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 6:1-8; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14, 15; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10, 11, etc.). Nor must the Christian laity surrender their right of judging the doctrine of the clergy; for it is theirs by special divine will and grant (John 6:45; Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17). Furthermore, since all believers are *brethren in the faith* and infinitely precious in God's sight, the Christian congregation must liberally provide for the poor and needy in its midst (Gal. 6:10; Rom. 12:13; Gal. 2:9, 10; Jas. 1:27; 1 Thess. 4:11, 12; Deut. 15:4, etc.). Again, since the Christian congregation represents Christ and His true religion in this world, it must see to it that all the things it does are done decently and in order lest offense be given within and without its pale (1 Cor. 14:33, 40; 2 Cor. 8:20, 21; Col. 2:5). Moreover, because God is a God of peace, the Christian congregation must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in order that true unity in doctrine and practise may be attained and preserved among the churches professing the same sound Christian faith (Eph. 4:3; 1 Thess. 4:9, 10). It is presupposed, of course, that in case of temporal need and suffering one church should lovingly and liberally provide for the other (Rom. 15:26, 27; 2 Cor. 8:19). In the same manner it is also the duty of the Christian congregation to build up in ever-increasing measure the *Christian Church as a whole*, and to this end it must be diligent in missionary work both in its own community and beyond this in more distant and even far-away foreign fields (Acts 11:21-23; 15:1 ff.). All these duties are of eminent importance and dare not be neglected. Briefly expressed, the Christian congregation must glorify God by keeping and preaching His Word and exercising Christian love both temporally and spiritually, so that, as far as it is concerned, all men may be abundantly blessed by God through the means of grace with all spiritual and heavenly benedictions. Also here Christian love, exercised both toward God and the neighbor, in true faith and in the fear of God, is "the fulfilling of the Law" (Rom. 13:10). May God grant us grace and strength at all times fully to appreciate our glorious prerogatives and obligations as Christian church-members to the everlasting praise of the name of our divine Redeemer!

III. The Exercise of Its Prerogatives and Obligations by the Christian Congregation

A. The Holding of Voters' Meetings. — In order that the Christian congregation may competently and fully exercise its divinely imposed rights and duties, it must, in the first place, maintain proper

public church assemblies in which it considers and determines all things that are necessary for its special church management. Such public executive church assemblies Christ presupposes when in Matt. 18:17, 18 He issues the command: "Tell it unto the church. . . . Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Such executive church assemblies were therefore generally maintained in the first Christian congregations, as the Book of Acts informs us. In Acts 1:15, 23-26, for example, we are told how such an executive church assembly elected Matthias in place of Judas Iscariot, who had hanged himself after betraying the Lord; in Acts 15:5, 23, how such a church assembly decided whether the Gentile Christians should be burdened with circumcision or not; in Acts 6:2, how such a church assembly chose members of the congregation to serve at the tables in place of the apostles; in Acts 15:30, how such a church assembly determined what rules of conduct the Gentile churches were to observe, etc. In 1 Tim. 5:20 St. Paul demands such executive church assemblies everywhere when he says: "Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear."

These executive church assemblies we commonly call *voters' meetings*; for we admit to them, as authorized to vote, only the adult male members of the church, excluding both women and children, the former because of God's special injunction in 1 Cor. 14:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:10-15, and the other because they are not yet able to judge matters adequately and, besides, are commanded to be subject to the elders (1 Cor. 10:15; 1 Pet. 5:5). It is understood, of course, that also in these two cases true Christian love and wisdom should be observed, so that for the work of the church the fine talents and gifts both of the women and the young people of the congregation may be secured. It is understood, moreover, that with regard to all spiritual blessings there is complete equality between men, women, and children (Gal. 3:28). This, however, does not invalidate or abrogate any social distinction which God in His infinite wisdom has seen fit to institute for the welfare of His Church.

The executive church assemblies *are to be conducted* according to God's Word and the principle of brotherly love under the leadership of those whom the congregation has chosen for this purpose; and here indeed God needs and employs many and various talents, such as apostles and elders (Acts 15:6); elders, especially those who labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17); exhorters and rulers (Rom. 12:8); prophets, teachers, miracle-workers, healers, helpers, managers, etc. (1 Cor. 12:28). Let the modern Church, however, remember that many of the spiritual gifts in use in the early Christian Church have now disappeared

and that the pastoral ministry, the ministry of the Word, is the chief ministry and in itself comprises all others. All who assist in church management, or government, assist only the ministry of the Word; for their specific work should only expedite and facilitate the blessed Gospel ministry.

Subjects, or topics, for discussion and adjudication in voters' meetings are among others: 1. matters of doctrine and life (Acts 15:1 ff.); 2. The establishment and administration of all offices in the church (Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-6; 2 Cor. 8:19); 3. questions of church polity and church discipline (Matt. 18:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 5:20); 4. the removal of offenses (within the congregation) (Acts 21:20-22); 5. the adjustment of quarrels and disputes (1 Cor. 6:1-8); 6. vital matters pertaining to good order and Christian service, such as church propriety, missionary work, congregational and synodical finance problems, youth problems, etc. (1 Cor. 14:26-40; 16:1, 2). In other words, the voting members should in their meetings discuss and manage all things that pertain to the weal and woe of the congregation, since they are the supreme executives of the church.

As said before, all matters pertaining to Christian doctrine and conscience must be adjudicated unanimously, according to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions (Is. 8:20), while matters pertaining to adiaphora, that is to say, to things neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, are to be adjudged according to the principles of love and equity, after thorough deliberation in Christian order, by a majority vote (1 Cor. 16:14; 14:40; Col. 2:5). If by any chance the congregation should decide or decree anything contrary to God's Word, such an enactment would *per se* be null and void and must, upon being recognized as unscriptural, be so declared by a vote of disavowal on the part of the congregation. That a congregation has no authority to determine and enforce anything not established in God's Word, Dr. Walther proves: 1. from what Scripture says of *Christian liberty*, which must not be violated (Acts 15:10; 1 Cor. 7:25; Gal. 5:1; Col. 2:16, 20); 2. from Christ's injunction forbidding the Church to teach anything that He Himself has not inculcated in His Word (Matt. 28:20; Is. 29:13; Matt. 15:8, 9); 3. from the example of the apostles, who never permitted human laws in the Church to tyrannize the conscience (1 Cor. 7:35; 2 Cor. 1:24); 4. from the fact that God alone is Lawgiver in His Church (Is. 33:22; Jas. 4:12). For these reasons all adiaphora are not to be enforced by way of command or conscience, but they are to be inaugurated by free and willing submission because and inasmuch as they serve the cause of Christian order and propriety.

In order that all things may be done decently and in order and that Christian love may not be violated, every voters' meeting

must be duly announced in advance, so that, if possible, all members may know time and place of the meeting. If in spite of this, members fail to attend, they waive their privilege of voting and may not oppose the approved measure by subsequent demurrer. However, for the sake of Christian love and peace it is advisable that important resolutions, which may be postponed, should be ratified in the ensuing voters' meeting, before they are accepted as the final decision of the congregation, since this respite will give dissatisfied members opportunity to voice their objection. In all such cases, however, no objection should proceed from personal stubbornness or any selfish motive.

It goes without saying that all essential transactions should be carefully preserved in the minutes of the congregation, which for the sake of supplementation or emendation ought to be read either at the close of the same meeting or at the beginning of the next (Acts 15:23-31). Each meeting, of course, should begin with a suitable prayer by the pastor or, in his absence, by any person designated for this purpose (Matt. 18:19; Acts 6:4). A more extended devotion is even preferable to a brief prayer, and, if possible, there ought to be some doctrinal discussion at every voters' meeting, since God's Word is the basis, source, and norm of our whole Church's faith and life.

B. Inculcation of God's Word. — In order that God's Word may abundantly dwell and have free course among men, Christian congregations must establish and maintain the paramount office of the public, or pastoral, ministry (Titus 1:5; Eph. 4:11, 14). That it is not optional with Christian congregations to establish the pastoral ministry or not is emphatically affirmed, on the basis of Scripture, by our Confessions. (Cf. Apology, Art. 13: "The Church has God's command that it should ordain ministers and deacons.") Also Luther writes: "God has *commanded* the Church to appoint persons for the pastoral office and the ministry of the Sacraments." (*Wittenberg Reformation Articles*, 1545; *Rechte Gestalt*, p. 68.) The appointment of the Christian ministry implies the due election and calling of pastors, and this must be done according to God's Word and with due deliberation and ardent common prayer, also with due consultation of experienced pastors in our Church, especially in conference with the Visitor or the District President, who may also be present at the voters' meeting in which the pastor is called (Titus 1:5; Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-6; 14:23). Every voting member has the privilege to suggest a suitable candidate (Acts 1:23). The fitness of each candidate should then be thoroughly discussed in accordance with 1 Tim. 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 2:15, 24-26, and other passages, and the candidate chosen by the assembled voters or at least by the majority should be regarded as the choice of the

congregation (provided, however, that no member seriously objects to him for valid reasons). The call should at least normally be extended to the chosen candidate by means of a formal *instrument of vocation* (1 Cor. 16:3), in which the called minister is obligated to fulfil his ministry according to God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions (Col. 4:17; Acts 15:23; 2 Tim. 1:13, 14; 1 Pet. 5:1-4, etc.) and in which the congregation on its part solemnly promises to regard and treat him as its properly called pastor and shepherd, to listen to his instruction and admonition, and to support him according to the best of their ability (Luke 10:16; 1 Thess. 5:12; 2:13; Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:13; 1 Tim. 5:17; Luke 10:7; 1 Cor. 9:13, 14; Gal. 6:6). After the candidate has accepted the call, he, before serving the church as pastor, should be solemnly ordained and installed, so that he may be properly inducted into his sacred office (Acts 6:6; 1 Tim. 3:10; 1 Tim. 4:14; Acts 13:2, 3). It is self-evident that Christian congregations may call only candidates whose orthodoxy and ability to minister are beyond question; that is to say, who have received their diploma from seminaries which are recognized by our Church as truly Lutheran and as providing adequate instruction, or who have passed a duly instituted *colloquium*. In the matter of calling Christian pastors more care ought to be exercised by our congregations in the future than has been done in recent years in order that the kingdom of Christ may not suffer injury but be duly built up and extended in the world.

In order that the Word of God may dwell richly in a congregation, it must see to it that all Sundays and holy days are rightly observed for divine worship and that all members diligently attend the divine services (Luke 11:28; Acts 2:46; Heb. 10:24, 25). Moreover, it is the duty of the congregation to insist upon the proper Christian education of the young by means of home instruction, church-schools, Sunday-schools, catechumen instruction, and the like, in order that souls may not be lost through the fault of those who are responsible to God for them. Infants should be brought to Holy Baptism as soon as possible in order that not by any culpable delay they may be deprived of salvation (1 Cor. 4:1; Mark 10:13 ff.). While confirmation is not a Sacrament but merely a church rite, it should not be contemned, but devoutly maintained, especially because of the *instruction* and the *confession* which it involves (Matt. 21:14, 15), and especially, that our members may well understand the great blessings of *Absolution* and the *Holy Supper*, which should be received devoutly and frequently, oftener than this has been the case in many of our churches (John 20:23; 2 Cor. 2:10; 1 Cor. 11:20, 26). Before attending the Holy Supper, the members should announce their in-

tention of so doing to the pastor in order that they may receive from him due instruction, admonition, warning, and comfort, as the case may require (Heb. 13:17; 1 Cor. 4:1; Matt. 7:6). Our excellent confessional services, held in connection with Holy Communion, should be continued and not dropped, as has been done in some places. Furthermore, in order that the Christian home influence may be preserved intact, *Christian marriage* is to be kept by our congregations on the high level of honor and dignity on which God's Word has placed it, and all Scriptural commands relative to betrothment and the conduct of marriage by Christians should be diligently inculcated and heeded (1 Cor. 7:39; 1 Tim. 4:3-5). In all cases of sickness, death, and similar afflictions church-members should seek Christian instruction and consolation, learning to submit themselves piously and joyously to God's good and gracious will (Jas. 5:14, 15). Finally, when God removes their loved ones from this vale of tears, they should accord them the respect and honor of a Christian burial (Acts 8:2), which, however, should not be misused to serve those that have denied the faith.

Thus the entire life of Christian church-members should be sanctified and blessed by the Word of God and prayer. To this end also the Christian congregation must amply provide for proper Christian education and instruction in order that its youth may be reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Matt. 18:10; Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:6, 7; 2 Tim. 3:15; Rom. 2:20). The Christian congregation should also contribute its share towards training able Christian pastors and teachers in order that its Christian youth may be properly cared for. Christian teachers should not merely be appointed or engaged but duly called and properly supported, since their teaching ministry is a part of the public ministry which God has enjoined upon His Church (Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28). It is needless to say that the Christian congregation should not permit separatistic conventicles, that is, private or even secret religious meetings, under the spiritual care of any other than the duly appointed pastor (1 Cor. 11:18; Jas. 3:1; 1 Cor. 12:29; Rom. 10:15).

C. Maintaining Purity in Doctrine and Life.—All members of Christian congregations should seek to grow in the blessed knowledge of God's Word (2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Cor. 1:5), so that they may be able rightly to judge the doctrine which is being proclaimed or submitted to them (Acts 17:11; Matt. 7:15, 16; 1 John 4:1; 1 Cor. 10:15), and stand firm and immovable against all manner of error (Eph. 4:14; Heb. 5:12). Unless our members do this diligently and cheerfully, it will be extremely hard to maintain that purity of doctrine and life which God so graciously has entrusted to us. Moreover, the Christian congregation should also elect elders to aid the pastor in the maintenance of Christian order and

discipline (1 Tim. 5:17; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28). Elders must have all the qualifications which are prescribed in Holy Scripture, be themselves well instructed in God's Word, be honorable men, and enjoy a good reputation within and without the church (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:8-12). Again, the congregation must see to it that only such books are used in its midst (that is, in church, in school, and in the homes) as do not contain anything contrary to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions (1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Tim. 1:13; Gal. 2:4, 5). In particular, it should be deeply concerned about what its young people read and earnestly warn them against all that is injurious to their spiritual welfare.

Only such persons are to be received as communicant members as may be regarded as true Christians. That is to say: 1. They must be baptized (Eph. 5:35, 36; 1 Cor. 12:13); 2. they must publicly confess the Christian faith as it is set forth in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions (Gal. 2:4; 2 Cor. 6:14, 15, 17; 2 John 10, 11; Eph. 4:3-6); 3. they must lead a Christian life and be without offense to those within and without the Church (1 Cor. 5:9-13; 10:21; Matt. 7:6). Church-members who refuse obedience to God's Word either in profession or life should be properly dealt with and disciplined according to God's Word, to the end that they may see the error of their way and repent (Matt. 18:15, 16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 2:6; 2 Thess. 3:14, 15; 1 Tim. 5:20; Gal. 2:14). In case they refuse to heed God's Word, they must be excommunicated after due fraternal admonition and warning, as clearly outlined in Scripture (Matt. 18:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:13; Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10, 11). Since by their perversity excommunicated persons have destroyed the bond of spiritual fellowship, they should no longer be regarded and treated as Christian brethren, though excommunication does not exclude them from all necessary social or commercial association (1 Cor. 5:9-11). Such members as maliciously refuse to support or uphold the Christian excommunication of manifest sinners in the church must themselves be disciplined (1 Cor. 5:1, 2), though, of course, excommunication must not be executed until the whole case is clear beyond all doubt. (Cf. Paul's detailed instruction on the matter in 1 Cor. 5:1-13.) Penitent persons should readily and publicly be absolved and received back into the Church (2 Cor. 2:6-11). Also on this point the spirit of Christian love should guide the congregation in directing all things according to God's Word, and the true aim and object must be the glory of God and the good of all concerned in the matter.

Christian pastors and teachers may not be arbitrarily dismissed from their office, for they have been called to serve the congregation until God Himself severs the divinely established relation between them and their parish by calling them to other

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fields, or until they have become incompetent to administer their sacred office either through illness, old age, or other similiar causes. However, if ministers lapse into error or wicked life and thus give offense to church-members and those without, they are to be disciplined according to God's Word, and in case they refuse to repent, they are to be deprived of their office and excommunicated from the church. (1 Tim. 5:19; Matt. 7:15; 1 Tim. 3:7; Matt. 18:15-18.)

Finally, the congregation should exercise all possible care that neither the entire church nor individual members maintain spiritual fellowship with heterodox or unbelieving persons or groups, thus becoming guilty of syncretism or religious unionism (2 Cor. 6:14-18; 2 John 10:11; Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10; etc.). Christian loyalty and confessionalism demand that the congregation attest the truth in opposition to all error in doctrine and life by both word and deed; and hence true Christians dare not render themselves guilty of syncretism. This embraces also the question of membership in the unchristian lodges, which certainly is not compatible with church-membership.

D. The Care of the Needy. — It goes without saying that Christian congregations are in duty bound liberally to supply their pastors and teachers with a livelihood adequate to their needs and in accord with the high dignity of their sacred office (Matt. 10:9, 10; 1 Cor. 9:14; 2 Tim. 2:3, 4). Deliberate refusal to obey God's Word in this respect will not only impair the efficiency of the ministers but also call down upon the miserly church-members God's righteous wrath and punishment (Gal. 6:6, 7). However, the Christian congregation must also provide for the needy in its midst, such as widows, orphans, the sick, and the infirm, in short, for those who are unable to support themselves and cannot be cared for properly by their own relatives or friends (1 Tim. 5:16; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Cor. 12:26; 1 Thess. 4:11, 12; 2 Cor. 8:13, 14; Matt. 25:35-45; etc.). In case of special chastisements inflicted by God upon entire congregations or synodical Districts, such as pestilence, drought, floods, devastation by war, etc., the afflicted churches should liberally be provided for by believers and not be permitted to suffer want (2 Cor. 9:1 ff.). In general, the Christian congregation should not permit any brother or sister to go begging of the world or join unchristian secret societies for the sake of the support which these promise, but they should regard it as their privilege to help those in need who are of the household of faith. This, of course, does not exclude all legitimate means of help accessible to those who are in need (proper support by the Government and the like). Holy Scripture is especially emphatic in inculcating the assistance of Christians in times of sickness and death, so that no one Christian brother may be deprived of proper medical help or a Christian

burial simply because he is utterly without temporal means (Matt. 25:36; 1 Tim. 5:10; Matt. 14:12; Acts 8:2).

E. Proper Management of All Church Matters.—In order that all affairs of the congregation may be managed decently and in order, the pastor should keep a careful record of all the members of his church, together with all the ministerial acts and the services, so that there will be an authentic account of all matters pertaining to the congregation and its progress and work. The secretary of the church should conscientiously write all minutes, and the treasurer and the finance committees in general should be exceedingly conscientious in dealing with the moneys contributed by the members for home and foreign purposes (2 Cor. 8:20, 21), accounting for them from time to time in clear and simple terms, intelligible to all members. For the proper care of the poor and needy special almoners or administrators should be chosen, who at all times should be ready to give account of their work and the disbursements made (Rom. 12:8; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). It is needless to say that Christian congregations should also provide all the necessary buildings, such as churches, schools, parish-houses, parsonages, etc., and keep them in good repair, under the supervision of the trustees or whoever may be appointed for this duty. For divine worship the congregation should supply all books and other things needed, such as the Bible, an agenda, Communion sets, a baptismal font, and the like, and have the janitor keep them in proper condition. Pews should not be rented in Lutheran churches, but the entire church should be open to all alike, rich and poor.

In all meetings, no matter of what nature they may be, all transactions should be governed by God's Word, adiaphora being decided by the majority, though at times the majority may be bound by Christian love to yield to the wish of the minority (1 Cor. 11:14; 2 Cor. 10:8). While meetings are in progress, the chairman should see to it that all who desire to speak do so in due order and that peace and good will among the members be preserved (1 Cor. 14:30; 11:16). The elections should be so conducted that all members know who the candidates are and be free to vote for whomever they will. In case members should be cited to appear at the meeting, they should be notified in such a way that any possible mistake or misunderstanding may be avoided, preferably in writing and through a responsible person. All persons whom the congregation chooses or appoints for regular ministries in the church should be properly instructed as to their duties in order that they may fully understand what is required of them (1 Pet. 4:10, 11). Each congregation, too, should have an approved constitution in which all rules and regulations are laid down in clear and unmistakable language. Approved constitutions may now be

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had at our Concordia Publishing House. While all members, even the relatively poor, should learn to contribute regularly and liberally for home and outside purposes, no one is to be coerced in the matter of giving; all gifts are to be secured through proper application of God's Word, love being the true motive of Christian giving (Matt. 10:10; 1 Cor. 9:14; 2 Cor. 8:12; 9:7).

F. The Duty of the Christian Congregation toward Its Sister Churches.—The Christian congregation should not merely seek its own interests but should keep in mind also its sister churches, joined to it by the unity of faith. This implies: 1. that Christian congregations pray for one another and for the Church of Christ as a whole (Eph. 6:18); 2. that they strive to establish and retain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, always seeking church union on the basis of God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions and avoiding factions and schisms (1 Cor. 1:10); 3. that neighboring congregations arrive at a clear understanding with regard to members and other matters, so that disputes may not arise and injure the spread of the kingdom of God (Titus 1:5; Gal. 2:9; 1 Pet. 4:15; 5:2; Heb. 10:25); 4. that members seeking release are given transfers and that without such transfers no persons be received as members by sister churches (Acts 18:27; 3 John 8-10); 5. that no Christian congregation receive into membership such as have been rightfully excommunicated by a sister church (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 4:14, 15); 6. that all brethren appealing to it, such as those persecuted on account of their faith or unduly excommunicated by tyrannical churches, whose action cannot be accepted as in accord with God's Word, or visitors from sister congregations be received and treated as fellow-believers (1 Pet. 4:9; Rom. 16:1, 2; 1 Cor. 16:10, 11; John 16:2; Matt. 25:35); 7. that a congregation when calling the pastor of a sister congregation or considering the call extended to its own pastor by a sister congregation receive and satisfy every demand of Christian love and fellowship (Matt. 7:12; 1 Cor. 16:14); 8. that Christian congregations assist one another with mutual advice, assistance, and financial and moral support, as the case may require (Acts 15:1 ff.; 1 Cor. 16:1, 2; 2 Cor. 8:1-14; 9:1-15); 9. that larger Christian congregations permit their pastor to serve those smaller churches or parishes which as yet are unable to call their own minister (affiliate churches), in all these things observing God's important counsel given in 1 Pet. 4:10, 11.

G. The Duty of the Christian Congregation toward the Church as a Whole.—In order that the Christian Church may be established throughout the entire world, it is the privilege and the duty of individual Christian congregations to work conjointly with others towards executing all measures by which Christ's kingdom may be brought to men. In particular, it is the duty of the Christian

congregation: 1. to provide for the education of Christian young men for the service in Christ's vineyard as pastors, teachers, and missionaries (1 Cor. 12:7); 2. to have the Word of God preached to those in the diaspora, to such as are inadequately or not at all provided with the Bread of Life (Acts 11:21, 22); 3. to disseminate the Word of God also in writing, in particular, through the spread of the Bible, prayer-books, postils, and the like (1 Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:8); 4. to carry on mission-work, not only at home but also abroad, among those who have not yet heard the name of their divine Redeemer (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Pet. 2:9). It should also be willing to join with other orthodox churches in establishing a large church-body by which the work of the Lord may be accomplished all the more effectively (Eph. 4:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:7). May God grant us His Holy Spirit that we may serve Him in true unity of faith and with all possible zeal in order that His name may be hallowed, His kingdom come, and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven! Amen.

J. THEODORE MUELLER

Die Pastorkonferenz zu Milet

Apost. 20, 17-38

In den Schriften des Neuen Testaments bekommen wir einen Einblick in das apostolische Gemeindeleben. Wir lernen aus der Apostelgeschichte, wie die Gemeinde zu Jerusalem gegründet und wie sie geleitet wurde und welche Schwierigkeiten sie hatte. Auch werden wir bekannt gemacht mit den Verhältnissen in den Gemeinden zu Korinth und in Galatien und mit dem, was Paulus tat, um die Schäden zu heilen. Alles dieses ist in der Bibel unter anderm auch zu dem Zweck aufgezeichnet, damit die Pastoren dadurch unterrichtet werden, wie sie ihre Gemeinden regieren und in dieser und jener Lage sich verhalten sollen.

Doch wir werden nicht nur in das apostolische Gemeindeleben eingeführt, sondern in der Apostelgeschichte wird uns auch eine Synode und eine Pastorkonferenz beschrieben. Die Synode Apost. 15. Wenn man den Bericht dieser ersten Kirchenversammlung liest, dann erkennt man alsbald, daß unsere Synodalversammlungen danach eingerichtet sind. Es wurde in Jerusalem über die Lehre verhandelt, und brennende Tagesfragen wurden besprochen. Das Resultat wurde den Gemeinden mitgeteilt. Auch zankte man sich, wie das auf unsern Synoden auch hier und da geschehen ist.

Die Pastorkonferenz wird Apost. 20 beschrieben. Seit dem Bestehen unserer Synode sind in unserer Mitte unzählige Pastorkonferenzen abgehalten worden. Die Synode macht es in ihrer Kon-