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Privileges and Obligations

(Paper read at the convention of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States at Fort Wayne, Ind., June, 1941)

I

In the name of the Prince of Peace, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever, we are assembled here for the purpose of considering ways and means to bring the Gospel of peace to a war-torn world and to build, maintain, and extend His Kingdom of Grace and peace in a world enslaved by sin and Satan, harassed by war and rumors of war, by malice and hatred and deadly enmity. Almost one hundred years ago a considerably smaller number of men came together in Fort Wayne, Ind., and in other communities of the Central States of our Union with the very same aim in mind. Their object was to join together as Christian brethren for the conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith, for a united defense against schism and sectarianism, and for the extension of the kingdom of God wherever and whenever opportunities would be offered by the Lord of the Church. From the fall of 1845 to the fall of 1846 these men met a number of times in spite of great inconveniences and huge expense, the trip from St. Louis to Fort Wayne costing no less than \$50 and requiring a four days' none-too-pleasant journey. After prayerful consideration the constitution for the proposed synod, drafted by Dr. Walther and discussed in a number of conferences, was finally approved and signed by sixteen pastors who had met for that purpose in September, 1846, at the parsonage of Pastor Wilhelm Sihler here at Fort Wayne. Synod was organized and met for its first convention in April, 1847, at Chicago, Ill., and one of its first actions was to adopt officially the constitution so painstakingly and conscientiously elaborated by these faithful men

imbued with love of their Savior and their fellow-men and gifted with a keenness and scope of vision such as only heroic faith can create. This constitution has served our Synod for almost a century, and we pray the Lord of the Church that the day may never come that Synod will change the principles laid down in this time-honored document or, while leaving the letter of the constitution unaltered, will ignore its principles and violate its spirit.

While the constitution was being discussed by pastors and congregations, and after the final draft had been published in the *Lutheraner* of September, 1846, there were voiced particularly three misgivings. First, the fear that Synod might interfere with the rights of the congregation. In fact, on the insistence of Trinity Congregation, Dr. Walther's own congregation, Article VII was added, defining the relation of Synod to its members. The second was the apprehension that the governmental policy proposed by the Constitution was altogether too democratic, depriving the clergy of its rights and powers. Some opponents went so far as to charge Walther with having opened the gates to an unbearable *Poebelherrschaft*, mob rule. A third misgiving was voiced by such as did not see the need, and doubted the right, of congregations to unite into such a man-made union as a synod.

In spite of these criticisms and misgivings our Synod has grown and flourished for almost 100 years. The reason is evident: Our Constitution gives to pastors and congregations all the rights and privileges granted to them by the Lord of the Church and expects and urges all its members, both congregations and pastors, to carry out faithfully and to the best of their ability all the obligations incumbent upon them by virtue of these privileges. And as long as neither laity nor clergy abuse the glorious rights procured by the Savior and given by Him to His bride, the Church; as long as neither pastors nor congregations neglect and shirk the obligations and duties so intimately linked up with these privileges and powers, so long will our Synod, by the grace of God, grow and flourish, be blessed by the Lord and be a blessing to untold generations.

Yet we must not close our eyes to the fact that the ancient triumvirate, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, is still as active as ever and still as resourceful as ever and still as antagonistic, as bitterly and unrelentingly opposed, to Christ and His Church as ever. We cannot deny that dangers do threaten the welfare and successful progress of our Synod and may prove detrimental to its very life and existence as a truly Lutheran body. To the superficial observer these dangers may seem to be inherent in, and inseparably connected with, the principles laid down in our Constitution. Yet that is not, and cannot be, the

case, for these principles rest solidly on Scripture. If and when these dangerous symptoms are present, they find their ultimate cause either in the abuse of the privileges and rights which our Constitution on the basis of Scripture grants to the members of Synod or in the neglect of those duties and obligations which our Constitution, again on the basis of Scripture, asks and expects of Synod's pastors and congregations.

In Article III of its Constitution, Synod defines its objects, and professes as one of its purposes "the protection of pastors, teachers, and congregations in the performance of their duties and the maintenance of their rights." (Art. III, 8, p.3.) In order to protect to the full the rights of the congregations affiliated with Synod, Article VII was put into our Constitution, defining the Relation of Synod to Its Members. "In its relation to its members Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government it is but an advisory body. Accordingly, no resolution of Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned." (P. 5.)

Here a question arises: "If Synod is not to exercise legislative or coercive power; if it cannot pass any laws nor force any congregation to obey Synod's rules; and if Synod promises not to interfere with the individual congregation's right of self-government, why does it demand in Article VI as a condition of membership the acceptance of the Scriptures as the Word of God and the Symbolical Books, the renunciation of unionism of every description, the exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymn-books, and catechism in church and school? Do not these conditions interfere with the rights of the congregation and practically nullify its self-government? The answer is, No! No individual Christian and no Christian congregation has the right to choose its own confession or doctrine. The doctrine to be taught by every Christian congregation and by any synod of Christian congregations is definitely and decisively determined by Him who is the one and only Master of the Church, Christ Jesus, and is laid down for all times in His Holy Scripture. No congregation has the right to teach what its Master has forbidden to teach. A Lutheran synod has not the right to permit its congregations to teach what Jesus has forbidden. In insisting that all its congregations must confess the Bible as God's Word and the Lutheran symbols as the true doctrine, Synod is not interfering with the rights of a congregation, it is merely doing what the Lord demands of all who desire to be and remain His disciples indeed. It is merely con-

tinuing in His Word and demanding of its congregations what the Lord demands of them, to continue in His Word.

The same apostle, however, tells us that God is not a God of confusion but of peace. He commands the Christians, "Let all things be done decently and in order," 1 Cor. 14:33, 40. This word applies to all Christians, to all congregations; it applies to our Synod also. The congregations constituting Synod have been commissioned by the Lord to carry on mission-work. That is a huge task, requiring careful planning, close financing, conscientious selection of men and officials who are entrusted to carry out these plans. That is Synod's business, the business of the whole Church, the business of every individual congregation, the business of every individual Christian. As many as are members of that royal priesthood, that chosen nation, have been called and commanded by the Lord to show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, 1 Pet. 2:9. Yet we cannot possibly call together all the individuals or all the congregations which have combined to do this work. We have adopted the order to plan Synod's work by choosing delegates who, in convention assembled, agree on a well-defined program and on certain ways and means, on a mode of procedure which promises a successful carrying out of the program. Naturally, these delegates cannot meet every week, every month, or every quarter year. Our delegates meet only every third year. The amount of business to be transacted at such a meeting is an enormous one, as even a brief glance at the *Book of Reports and Memorials* will prove. To accomplish anything, there must be certain rules and regulations, there must be order. If every one having a suggestion to make or some plan to propose would have the liberty to speak as long as he pleased on the floor of the convention, there would not be the remotest possibility to finish the huge amount of business before the convention. God does not want His work to remain undone, to be delayed. He wants it to be accomplished, completed, brought to the finish. And He wants it to be done in an orderly way and not in confusion, because He Himself is not a God of confusion but of peace.

God might have laid down certain rules and regulations to be strictly observed within His Christian congregation, as He did in the Old Testament for His chosen people. God, however, deals with His New Testament Christians not as with minors who, while they possess all the rich blessings of God, yet are under tutors and governors, appointed by the Lord Himself, from whom they must take their orders just like the servants in the home. God rather deals with us as being of age, as with free men, and trusts us to find proper ways and means to carry on His work

in the most efficient manner possible. What a marvelous trust does our heavenly Father place in His children on earth!

In keeping with the will and trust of God, Synod has chosen the order of transacting the business coming up at the triennial convention by assigning the various items to be proposed to Synod to larger or smaller committees for careful consideration and specific recommendations to the convention. The delegates then are in a position to vote intelligently, to weigh the arguments pro and con, to accept or reject the propositions of the committees as the majority sees fit.

Synod meets in convention ten days every third year. Synod's business goes on during the remaining 1,085 days of the triennium. Again we have adopted the plan of transacting this business by committees, by boards, by our officials, etc., who are to carry out the resolutions of Synod. I firmly believe that this plan, if not the only way, is at least the best way in which Synod's business, our Church's business, can be carried on successfully, and we shall have to retain this way until a better one has been found. God demands that we be orderly in conducting the Church's business, and He certainly wants us to make use of the best possible ways and means. So we are safe in stating that God is well satisfied and pleased with the manner we have adopted in conducting our affairs and that He will bless our work carried out in an orderly manner in keeping with His will.

On the other hand, we must not overlook the fact that because of our sinfulness there is a danger lurking in every man-made plan and device. And as I see it, there is a twofold danger threatening. The one, that the delegates, the pastors and the laymen sent here to conduct Synod's business, do not take the proper interest in Synod's affairs. Only too frequently we meet with people who make it their motto, "Let George do it." "Why did we choose a committee? The men on the committee are good men, able and conscientious. They have studied the matter thoroughly and in the fear of God. Their recommendations surely may be and ought to be accepted." Such an attitude is the first step toward that very danger against which Article VII of our Constitution lifts up a warning finger. The delegates are not sent here merely to be yes-men, merely to rush the matter through as rapidly as possible, merely to adjourn at the earliest opportunity. The delegates are supposed to come here well prepared. Old Trinity Congregation at St. Louis met no fewer than nine times between May 20 and June 18, 1846, to study and consider the new constitution. When it had been approved by the sixteen pastors at Fort Wayne, Trinity again carefully studied the whole question. No one objecting, Trinity finally resolved

to join Synod, provided that Article VII be added, safeguarding the rights of the congregation.

Let every member of Synod take like interest in the affairs of his Church. Before the convention the Book of Memorials was sent to every pastor of Synod and another copy to every lay delegate. This book is to be carefully studied by the pastors, the delegates, and their congregation. If they have any suggestions to make, any criticisms to offer, any changes to suggest, let their chosen delegates attend the meetings of the committee to which this particular problem has been assigned, or let them submit their recommendations in writing. And when finally the committee reports and recommends a certain action, then let us not simply vote for it because we feel that the committee ought to know best. Let us carefully weigh the arguments advanced, and if necessary, and if the matter is of sufficient importance, let us once more on the floor of convention voice our own opinion and then vote intelligently, conscientiously, in the fear of God, and with the knowledge that we are responsible to the Church and to our God for our vote.

Let us thank God that He has given to His Christian congregations the right of self-government and that our Constitution guarantees this liberty to all its congregations. And let us make use of these rights and not shun the obligations connected with these privileges. There is no quicker way to lose these rights than carelessness and negligence in their use. Only unthankful persons will refuse to make the proper use of God-given blessings, and ingratitude calls down upon itself the punishment of God, the curtailment, perhaps the complete loss, of our precious liberty of Christian self-government.

There is another danger to be guarded against, that of losing our rights and privileges by permitting any individual or any group to usurp the authorities granted to all Christians, to set up any form of autocratic government.

Christ tells His Christians: "Be not ye called Rabbi [master]; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren, Matt. 23:8. In the Church of Christ there is but one Master, one Ruler, Christ. His Word and will must rule supreme and absolutely. There is to be no higher and lower clergy in Christ's Church. In the kingdom of Christ there are not to be rulers and subjects, dictators and vassals, despots and slaves. No individual and no body of men has the right to usurp authority over any child of God or any group of Christians. That would not only be doing violence to his equals, his fellow-kings and fellow-priests, that would be a flagrant violation of the decree of the only Lord and Ruler of the Church: "Be not ye called Master; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren."

In conducting the work of the convention there is to be no endeavor to create a synodical machine, no back-stairs plotting and counter-plotting, no electioneering, no lobbying for private interests and pet schemes of an individual, no church politics, no intrigues, no parliamentary trickery, no railroading of any resolution, no steam-rollering the convention; Synod is assembled as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. We meet here as brothers, as equals, every one a priest by divine appointment, every one a king by God's ordinance. The humblest Christian and the highest official, the smallest congregation in the backwoods and the largest, richest church in the metropolis, all have been endowed by the Lord with equal rights. Let each one be granted the right to voice his opinion in an orderly manner, and let every one submit to the rules and regulations adopted by the convention. Let no one insist on special privileges which cannot be granted to all without interfering with, and delaying, other matters of importance. Let all questions under consideration be discussed openly and frankly, in committee or on floor of the convention, as the case may require. Let the whole problem be put fairly and squarely before the assembly, without minimizing or exaggerating either the difficulties or the benefits and blessings. Let the matter be presented objectively, without prejudice, truthfully, so that every member present may understand the situation and vote intelligently.

As it would be sinful for any one to usurp authority within the Christian Church, it is equally sinful for any Christian congregation or individual to relinquish those rights which the Son of God has so graciously granted to the congregation as well as the individual. I say, no individual and no congregation and no synod has the right to sign away, or turn over to any other individual or body, the right of self-government, the liberty from bondage to any man-made yoke. The price paid for these rights by Him who procured them and presented them to His Church as a precious bridal gift, that price is too great to allow the Church to cast this gift aside as of little or no value. The Son of God has laid down His life in order to gain liberty for His Church, and He expects His Church to esteem this liberty, watch jealously over it, and cling to it with all her strength.

Particularly in times of storm and stress, of general unrest and uncertainty, the only feasible way to conduct Synod's business may seem to be to turn it over entirely to a committee or board to act according to their own discretion. And the very volume of business to be transacted may seem to make it imperative to entrust it in ever-increasing measure to boards and commissions, to individual groups working under a more or less cen-

tralized seat of power. But on that very account we must exercise particular and prayerful care in the selection of those men to whom we entrust the guidance and direction of our Synod and its work. How are these men to be chosen? By election or by appointment? If by election, ought the election be by ballot or by acclamation, by synod-wide vote or by the vote of the delegates? If they are to be appointed, should that be done by an individual or by a committee? If by an individual, who shall he be? If by a committee, how shall this committee be constituted and how chosen? Some more questions. How shall the candidates be proposed? By nomination from the floor of Synod or by a committee? If from the floor of the convention, shall the right of nomination be confined to the voting delegates, or shall it be extended to the advisory delegates or to all congregations? Shall the nominations made by a committee be final or subject to ratification? I sincerely believe that this matter ought to be given careful consideration, so as to avoid, on the one hand, disorderliness, a cluttering up, and disorganization, which would seriously hamper or make impossible the successful execution of Synod's business, and to avoid, on the other hand, an overcentralization of power with all the dangers that may involve.

A question of even greater importance is to obtain the proper men, the best qualified for the position, such men as meet the requirements laid down in Holy Scripture, men of honest report, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, men who have the gift of government, of initiative, of true progressiveness, and who are at the same time unflinchingly loyal to the eternal principles laid down in God's Word; men who have the welfare of the Church at heart, men who, forgetting selfish interests and local advantages, will work with self-sacrificing zeal for our beloved Synod. Have we such men? Why, the Lord Jesus Himself, whose promises in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, 2 Cor. 1:20, has promised such men as His gift to the Church He loves. We read: "When He [Christ] ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. . . . And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," Eph. 4:8, 11, 12. The men we need are already in our midst, presented to our Church as a gift by the heavenly Bridegroom. Let us look for them; let us choose these men whom the Lord wants to serve us; and when these men are chosen, let them serve. Let neither false modesty nor the preference for a life of quiet and peaceful service keep them from heeding the call extended to them by the Lord Jesus through His Church.

As long as Synod in the fear of God continues to seek to choose in an orderly manner from the laity and from the clergy as their leaders such men as put the will and Word of their Lord and the welfare of their Church above all other considerations, and as long as these men work faithfully according to their abilities in the work assigned to them, and are supported by the prayers and the sincere and whole-hearted cooperation of all members of Synod, there will be no danger of losing our precious rights and privileges as a royal priesthood nor abusing them to the detriment of Christ's holy Church. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Gratitude for the privileges granted us, a vivid realization of the duties incumbent upon us by virtue of these rights, a ready willingness to carry out our Christian obligations, will by the grace of God insure to us the continued blessing of our heavenly Father.

II

The Lutheran Church is called the Church of the open Bible. Is our Church deserving of this name? Christ, the Lord of the Church, has given to the Christians a marvelous bridal gift, His holy Word, the Scriptures. There the Church hears the voice of her heavenly Bridegroom and rejoices greatly. Christ has instituted the holy ministry, the office of His Word. He has promised to His Church preachers and pastors to feed His flock on the green pastures and to lead it beside the still waters of His precious Gospel. Are we as grateful for these gifts as Christ has a right to expect us to be? Do the members of our Church, do the pastors, do the teachers, do the laymen, of our Church, know the Bible as well as they ought to know it? The Lord of the Church tells us: "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. If we continue in His Word. Beyond His Word there is no spiritual freedom, because beyond His Word there is no saving truth. God's truth and Christ's freedom are to be found only in Christ's Word. And to continue in this Word is possible only if we know the Word, the Word of Christ as it is recorded in Holy Scripture. Therefore Christ earnestly urges us: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me," John 5:39. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life," John 6:63, and Christ speaks to us in Scripture. The Christians at Berea are called noble men because they received the apostolic message with all readiness, not as the word of men but, as it is in truth, the Word of God, and they searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so. Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 2:13. Are the lay members of our Synod

as eager to study the Word of God? Are they truly noble men like the Bereans of old?

Our pastors, who are, like all Christians, to continue in the Word of Christ, who are to preach this Word, the whole counsel of God as revealed in His Book, our pastors have need of daily thorough study of God's Word. No matter how urgent their other duties may be, no matter how much time must be devoted to reading other books, a pastor cannot afford to become negligent in Bible-study. Timothy, the able assistant of Paul, knew the Holy Scriptures from a child; yet he is not told that he no longer needed the Bible after he had come of age and had been pastor for some time. Paul tells this pastor that Scripture is able to make him wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. And the reason? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," 2 Tim. 3:16. And already in his first letter Paul had written his beloved Timothy: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. . . . Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine, continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee," 1 Tim. 4:13-16.

If we pastors want to save ourselves and them that hear us, here is the way, the only way,—diligent, prayerful, continued study of our Bible. And if our Synod is to flourish, if it is to be the blessing that God wants it to be, if we are to be a shining light in the midst of a crooked and perverse world, here is the way, the only way,—that pastors and laymen study the Word, search the Scriptures, for that and that alone is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

Next in importance to faithful devotion to every word of Scripture is the proper esteem for the office of the holy ministry, which Christ has established for the preaching of His Word. Our Church cannot flourish unless both congregations and pastors realize the sacred character of the office of the ministry. Both the clergy and the laity must remain fully conscious of the fact that Christ is the Lord of His Church, of the pastors and the people, and that Christ retains for Himself the right to choose the sphere of activities for His messengers. It is not for the pastor to choose his own field of labor, nor is it for the congregation to prescribe to the Lord just which preacher it wants. The pastors must keep in mind at all times that they are servants, bond-servants, slaves of the Lord, and that the Lord decides where His servants shall work in His vineyard. When Christ calls, when it becomes evident that Christ wants a pastor to serve in a par-

ticular field, then let him respond at once, "Here am I; send me"; let the pastor be grateful that the Lord honors him by permitting him to feed the lambs and the sheep bought by the Savior's blood. It would be ungrateful, sinful, a shameful presumption, if a pastor by letter or postal or telegram or personal appeal or through friends or relatives cried out, "Here I am; call me, call me." As bondservants of the Lord we have no will, no choice, of our own. As faithful ambassadors we work where the Lord has placed us.

On the other hand, the congregations must at all times remember that, though they are priests and kings, though all things are theirs, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come, though all are theirs, yet they are Christ's, subject to Him, to His Word and will, to His rule and order.

We are fully aware that not every pastor fits every congregation. The needs and requirements of a congregation may not be supplied by every pastor, and the gifts of a pastor may not be required in every congregation. We do know, however, that the Lord of the Church has a pastor ready for every congregation. He who knows the needs of every individual congregation, He who is anxiously concerned for the temporal and eternal spiritual welfare of every individual congregation, He has a man in mind and in readiness for every congregation. How will the congregation find its man? By taking heed to this matter also according to the Word of Christ. Christ has given very clear and definite instructions to His Church, which a congregation will gladly follow in calling a pastor. It will not be out of place to take a brief glance at these rules.

Writing to the congregation at Corinth, Paul very distinctly states that Christian pastors are the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God and that the essential requirement in every steward is faithfulness, loyalty, unflinching loyalty, to his Master. And this Master demands loyalty in life and in doctrine. A pastor must be an example to his parishioners in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity, 1 Tim. 4:12. And in his second letter Paul solemnly charges Timothy before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do

the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry," 2 Tim. 4: 1-5.

Such are the men whom Christ wants to serve in His Church and whom He wants His congregations to call. Christian congregations will heed these instructions of their heavenly Bridegroom. They will remember that Christ does not promise to send perfect pastors, that He uses human beings, sinful men, to be His ambassadors to sinful men. Even if Christ would send perfect, sinless men, they could not possibly please all men and at the same time be loyal to their Lord. Paul certainly was as ideal and faithful a servant of the Lord as any, and still there were men in the congregation at Corinth who were dissatisfied with him and openly voiced their grievances. His bodily presence was weak and his speech not as rhetorical as these fastidious critics demanded. And while Paul was a sinful, imperfect man, there was a man, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, Jesus, the God-man, and He failed to please all His hearers. In the synagog at Nazareth all that heard Him began to wonder at the gracious words which came out of His mouth, until He touched a sore spot, until He threatened them with rejection if they refused to believe. Then all they in the synagog, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath and rose up and thrust Him out of the city and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong, Luke 4: 28, 29. A Christian congregation will not expect a perfect pastor but will be satisfied with the men with whom Christ is satisfied and, like their Bridegroom, learn to overlook the failings and short-comings of their pastor so long as he is a faithful steward of his and their Lord.

On another occasion Paul reprimands the congregation at Corinth for a fault found very frequently in our congregations, the overestimation of certain externals, certain qualities, which, while desirable, still are not at all essential characteristics of a faithful pastor. The Corinthians made unwarranted distinctions between the different apostles and preachers serving the Christian Church. There was an overstressing of the personality of the preacher, of his individual characteristics, his talents, his temperament. They forgot that, after all, it was not the personal gifts of the pastor that was of prime importance, but his message and his faithfulness in putting whatever gifts God had given him into the service of the Lord and His Church. Seeking to correct this fault, Paul administers quite a sharp rebuke to the Corinthians. We read in his first letter, 1 Cor. 3: 4-7: "While one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who, then, is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos

watered, but God gave the increase. So, then, neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." And when, instead of complying with Paul's exhortation, they continued in their foolish overestimation of unessential matters, he felt compelled to reprimand them still more severely. "For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. For ye suffer if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face," 2 Cor. 11:19, 20. "But I fear lest by any means, as the Serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh, preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him," 2 Cor. 11:3, 4.

There is an important lesson for all congregations in these words of apostolic reproof. A congregation despising its faithful pastor, continually finding fault with his actions, be they ever so correct and manifesting ever so clearly his loyalty to his Lord; a congregation unwilling to put up with minor shortcomings; a congregation unceasingly criticising, backbiting, gossiping, such a congregation serves not its Lord, who has said: "Touch not Mine anointed and do My prophets no harm," Ps. 105: 15. Such a congregation does not serve the welfare of its pastor, its God-appointed steward. The constant opposition, open or secret, will gradually make it impossible for the pastor to do his work with joy. The ministry will become to him an unbearable burden, until finally he resigns, a man broken in spirit and frequently a physical and mental wreck. Nor will such congregations serve their own interest. They actually uproot what has been carefully sown and planted; they tear down what has been painstakingly built up; they destroy what by the pastor's faithful work has been accomplished; they hinder their own growth both numerically and spiritually. Rather ought all congregations that have a faithful pastor to thank God for His gracious gift. Their pastor may not be a silver-tongued orator; he may not be as polished in his manners, not as brilliantly gifted, not as learned, not as young, not as good-looking, as others: as long as Christ has given them a faithful shepherd, who conscientiously does his duty, they ought to thank God and esteem their pastor very highly and be at peace with him and love him as an ambassador of Christ, sent to them by Him who has told His messengers: "He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me."

Many a pastor who possesses only average gifts, who is not at

all what we usually call an outstanding man, who does not excel his fellow-pastors in any particular, has, by the grace of God, become a very successful pastor, largely because he had the full cooperation of his vestry, of his members, men and women, young and old; because his congregation did not expect him to pull the cart alone, while they applied the brakes and took an uncanny delight in putting obstacles in his way. And when finally, exhausted by his efforts, he collapsed, they were only too glad to get rid of him; they asked him to get out of the harness, or they simply unharnessed him and told him to look for another job. If, on the other hand, the congregation members recognize in their pastor a gift of God, the man their Lord and Savior has sought out for them, they will be grateful and will love their pastor for his work's sake. They will work together with him, and he will grow in experience and in knowledge and in wisdom and in spirit and in love to his people. Shepherd and flock are content and happy, peace and harmony rules. The congregation flourishes, is richly blessed, and becomes a blessing unto many.

Permit me, finally, to call your attention to the order which the congregations of our Synod have adopted to safeguard the sacred character and the divinity of the call and to protect the rights of congregations and pastors in this respect also. In the By-Laws of Synod's Constitution the "Rights and Duties of the District Presidents" are defined, and one of the duties prescribed to these officials by the congregations is that they "advise the congregations of their District as to the calling of pastors and teachers." By-Laws, p. 28, D, 1. And on page 48, 2b we read: "Since the calling of servants of the Word is a most important matter, for which the advice of experienced men, who are also well acquainted with synodical conditions, is needed, and since the duty of the Presidents of the various Districts is to advise congregations upon their request, congregations, pastors, teachers, and students must not unofficially interfere in the matter of calls and elections. (4. S. Hdbk., [1899], pp. 10, 11, 147.)"

According to these stipulations the congregations of Synod have made it the duty of the President of their District to advise them in the calling of pastors and teachers. Thereby they have agreed to consult with the President of their District and ask his advice whenever they call a pastor or teacher. That is a very wise and useful order. Our officials are men who have at heart the welfare of Synod at large and of their District and of every congregation within their District. They are men who know the needs of the congregation and the qualifications of the pastors within their District better than most other pastors. The District Presidents can most readily obtain information from other District

Presidents as to suitable candidates for a congregation. We have chosen them for their responsible position because we have the confidence in them that they are men particularly qualified to perform the duties that we require of our Presidents. We have agreed to consult them in calling a pastor. Do we do that? Do pastors and congregations ask their District President to advise them in this important matter? And do we ask them not only as a matter of form but with the intention of carefully considering their advice and prayerfully weighing their reasons why they recommend their candidates? Or do we ask them only for the purpose and with the intention not to call the candidates they suggest? Brethren, we have agreed to request and to seriously consider the advice of our officials. If we do not regard them as capable of giving good advice, we should not have chosen them, or we should vote them out as quickly as possible. If they are worthy of our trust,—and I know of not a single one who is not trustworthy,—if they are worthy of our confidence, let us heed their advice. Many a congregation would have been much better served had they listened to the advice of their officials rather than followed the suggestion of a meddling, interfering busybody, whose chief interest was not the welfare of that congregation but his own personal advantage or the boosting of a friend or relative.

The congregations have very advisedly restricted the right to offer advice in the calling of a pastor or a teacher to the District President and to the pastor taking care of that congregation during the vacancy. While this regulation in no wise interferes with the right of the congregation to ask other men also for advice in so important a matter, it does intend to prevent, at least to curb, the inordinate, disorderly desire of pastors and laymen to obtrude their often ill-considered advice on the congregation or its members. Let us not forget that Christ still rules His Church and that Christ has told us: "Let all things be done decently and in order." If Christ wants me to advise a congregation, He will find ways and means that the congregation, mind you, the congregation, not only one or two members, but the congregation, through its officers, or the synodical officials ask me for advice. I have no right to appoint myself as an adviser to any congregation. Let all pastors and laymen guard against unofficially meddling with matters which do not concern them, and particularly against the shameful custom of wire-pulling, of unduly influencing the congregation to call one's favorite candidate. That is interfering with the rights and privileges of the Christian congregation; that is meddling with matters which Christ has in His hands. After all, it is Christ and His Holy Spirit that have the right to place their servants into the congregations. Who are

we in ill-advised and disorderly manner to interfere with the sovereign authority of our Lord?

Brethren, as members of the Lutheran Church we are proud to call ourselves the Church of the open Bible. Let us prove worthy of that name. Let not the Bible remain to us a book sealed with seven seals; the best seller, the book found in every home, yet a book unknown to us. Let us permit the Bible to become an open book to us by reading it, by studying it, by meditating upon it, by becoming ever better acquainted with it as the years go by, until it becomes to us a dear friend, a tried and trusty companion, whom we know well, whom we dearly love, whose words of advice and of warning and of admonition and of consolation we readily recall even when he does not happen to be at our side. And as we learn to love the Bible, let us by the grace of God learn to love and honor and esteem those men whom God has given to us that they should speak unto us the Word of God as they that must give account.

May God preserve to Synod a pious ministry and a pious membership, both laity and clergy loving and cherishing and highly esteeming the sacred Word and the sacred ministry of the Word.

III

Every Christian congregation is a sovereign body. Here is a community of saints, all cleansed, all justified, all sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God. Here is an assembly in which all are brethren and sisters, all in equal measure children of God, all, without distinction, kings and priests before God. No pastor, no ecclesiastical official, no synod, nor any other body has the right to dictate the policies of the Christian congregation. Every Christian congregation is sovereign.

The Christian congregation, however, is not autocratic. An autocrat is a sovereign ruler whose power is unrestricted and who is responsible to no one. "Ye are all brethren," says Christ to His congregation, but only after having told them, "One is your Master." Christ ever is and always remains the Master, the King, the Lord Supreme. A congregation has no more right than Christ has given to it. A Christian congregation at all times is responsible to its King and owes absolute obedience to Him and His Word.

While Christ has assigned certain duties and obligations to His Church and has laid down a number of rules and regulations governing the administration of His Church on earth, He has entrusted the regulation and control of many matters of vital importance to the liberty, the wisdom, and the intelligence of His Christians. In the management of the business of the church, in the arrangement of their services, they may exercise to the

full their glorious rights and privileges which their royal priesthood has bestowed upon them. Yet even these matters Christ did not give out of His hands entirely. He Himself is a God not of confusion but of peace and harmony, 1 Cor. 14:33, and He demands that, even when He has turned the management of certain business over to His Christians, all things should be done decently and in order, 1 Cor. 14:40. The individual Christians have not the right to insist on their own opinion, to do as they please, and to refuse to cooperate with their brethren in any plan not to their liking. The individual Christian has not the right to refuse to go to church unless it begins at 9:30 o'clock, or to insist that he as a king and priest before God has the right to sleep till ten and not to come to church unless the service begins at eleven. That would not only be foolish, childish; that would be sinful. God is a God of order, and He has told His apostle to write it down as a divine command for all times to come that in the Christian congregation, in its worship and in the conduct of its business, all things are to be done decently and in order. Decently, that is to say in a manner that is generally regarded as proper, correct, becoming, fitting the high dignity of the Church; and in order, that is according to a methodical and harmonious arrangement arrived at by careful planning and carried out smoothly, without confusion and disturbance.

The apostle himself applied this divinely established principle in regulating the congregational affairs in the early churches. He tells the Christians at Corinth: "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two or, at the most, by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God." 1 Cor. 14:27, 28. The congregation member did not have the right to speak publicly, even though he had the gift of speaking with tongues. Why not? "It does not edify," says the apostle, for no one could understand him. And it would not be "decent," proper. "If, therefore, the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?" 1 Cor. 14:23. A stranger coming into such an assembly babbling in various unknown tongues, would feel that he had accidentally run into a madhouse.—Again, when one began to prophesy in the public worship, he was not permitted to speak as long as he pleased. He had to yield the floor to the next one moved by the Spirit to prophesy. And the Christian had no right to complain, "That interferes with the free use of my gift granted to me by the Holy Spirit." What if it does, answers the apostle. God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. "But where

did God command that I must yield the floor while the Spirit still moves me?" God has said: "Let all things be done decently and in order. And since it is neither proper, seemly, nor orderly to have two men prophesying at the same time, we Christians have made this rule. That is the order established by us; and God wants all things to be done in order; God wants no confusion in the churches; you have no right to cause confusion, disorder. You have the right and duty to submit to the order established.

Paul knew that not all Corinthians would be satisfied with his presentation. He knew that many would be inclined to charge him with depriving them of their God-given rights, with dictatorship, with arbitrarily and autocratically prescribing rules to priests and kings who have no superiors. He very effectively silences all opposition. "What?" he exclaims. "Came the Word of God out from *you*? All the privileges you enjoy as Christians, all the spiritual gifts you possess, are not man-made, are not the result of your own wisdom and power. On the contrary, God's Word came to *you*. It is God who through His Gospel made you what you are and gave you what gifts and privileges you possess. It is God who has the right to tell you how and when to use these rights and gifts. And this God tells you: "Let all things be done decently and in order." God's priests and kings have not the right to be unruly and disorderly. God wants them to submit to those rules which they themselves have established for the preservation of decency and order in their midst.

Such proper, orderly conduct is God's will not only with respect to congregational, local customs and affairs. This rule applies also to the relation of congregations to their sister congregations. Paul very distinctly and definitely brings home this truth to the Corinthians and to all congregations. His second question is: "Or came it, the Word of God, unto you only?" You are, he means to say, under obligations not only to God, you owe consideration also to your sister congregations.

The whole Christian Church constitutes the body of Christ, the individual Christians and congregations being members of this body. To each Christian and to every congregation God has given certain gifts, and these gifts are to be used not only for the welfare and edification of the individual member or congregation. As in the human body all the members put their own peculiar gifts into the service of the whole body, so every Christian and every congregation must, according to the will of God, cooperate with all those of like faith in the great work of bringing the Gospel in its truth and purity to all mankind. In this business, commanded to the Church by its Lord Supreme, all congregations are to unite and work together in harmony and peace. That is a matter not

of their own choice; that is their God-appointed obligation. And in order that such peace and harmony in carrying on the work of the Lord be possible, the Ruler of His Church, who is a God of peace and not the author of confusion, has established the rule, which every Christian congregation must adopt: "Let all things be done decently and in order."

When some members at Corinth questioned the necessity of women's covering their heads while praying or prophesying, as the apostle had directed, Paul did not say that this was a divine mandate. There was no such command of God. Yet the apostle does not permit every individual Christian or congregation to do as they please. He reminds them of their obligations to consider other Christian congregations. He carefully explains the reasons why this custom was generally observed in the Christian congregations and why the Corinthians ought to observe this custom also. Paul knows that some will object, that since there is no divine command, the whole matter can be decided by the individual congregations. He does not deny the absence of a divine law and the liberty of the Christian congregations to adjust such matters. But he does deny the right of a Christian individual or congregation to be contentious, lovers of strife, fond of disputations, and he does deny the right of a Christian congregation to leave out of consideration its relation to its sister congregations and to the customs generally adopted and observed throughout the Church. He praises those who are willing to keep the ordinances as he has delivered them to the Corinthians, whether of divine institution or congregational customs; 1 Cor. 11:2. And he tells those who would change these customs for no other reason than that they had the liberty to do so: "If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." Neither the apostles nor the churches are lovers of strife, just as God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. From this viewpoint we will readily see that the founders of our Synod were following Scriptural example when they named in Article III of the Constitution as the fifth object of Synod the endeavor to bring about the largest possible uniformity in church practice, church customs, and, in general, in congregational affairs. That is in full keeping with the will of the Lord of the Church, "Let all things be done decently and in order." While Synod has not the right to command such uniformity, the congregations of Synod have the right and the duty to endeavor to establish uniform practices in their midst in order that in this respect also things may be done decently and in order.

When Paul and Barnabas had agreed with the apostles that henceforth they were to preach chiefly in the Gentile world, they

had also promised to remember their poor brethren in the Jewish-Christian congregations. Paul did this faithfully by impressing upon the converted Gentiles their duty to do good to all men, particularly to them that were of the household of faith, to support them financially in time of need. This work apparently assumed greater proportions as the enmity of the Jews toward the Christians in Palestine grew and poverty among the Jewish Christian congregations increased. In order to systematize this work, Paul proposed a plan to all the congregations which promised success without unduly burdening the Gentile Christians, most of whom could not boast of great wealth. Whether Paul himself or some one else had conceived this plan, we cannot tell, but we know that it was generally adopted by the congregations established by Paul. The plan, as outlined in 1 Cor. 16 and 2 Cor. 8:9, was to lay aside upon the first day of the week, Sunday, a certain sum, as the Lord had prospered every one. This collection was to be brought to Jerusalem by a delegation, the members of which were chosen by the congregations and properly accredited by letter, 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:19, "avoiding this," says the apostle, "that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us; providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men," 2 Cor. 8:20, 21. Again we see the underlying principle, namely, that all things be done decently and in order. For that very reason Paul is so careful to avoid every semblance of undue authority, of dictatorship. Although the congregations had adopted the plan, yet Paul very clearly states: "I speak not by commandment." "Herein I give my advice," 2 Cor. 8:8, 10. It was a humanly devised plan, a man-made system; prayerfully conceived, well considered, enthusiastically adopted, promising success exceeding all expectations, 2 Cor. 8:1-5. Yet, after all, it was not a plan prescribed or commanded by God, and Paul would have been the last to claim divine authority for a human system.

And still Paul looked for full cooperation in this plan on the part of the congregation. They had made this plan their own by willingly adopting it and were no longer free to do as they pleased. Paul had used this willing adoption of the plan by the Corinthian congregations as an incentive to other congregations. He writes, "For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many," 2 Cor. 9:2. And when the congregation at Corinth failed to keep its promise, Paul did not let the matter drop. In his first letter he reminds them of the collection they promised to gather and urges them to begin at

once, in order "that there be no gatherings when I come," 1 Cor. 15:2. He tells them frankly that he would not accompany the delegation to Jerusalem unless it was really worth while. When this brief reminder did not rouse the Corinthians, he devotes two chapters of his second letter to this matter. He does not mince words. While he knows and concedes that he has no right to command, he at once adds that he speaks because others were so willing and in order to prove the sincerity of their love and promise. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich," 2 Cor. 8:9. — Though he must say that he can only advise, yet he adds: "For this is expedient for you, who have begun before not only to do but also to be forward a year ago. Now, therefore perform the doing of it, that, as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have," 2 Cor. 8:10,11. And he wrote not only the two letters; he sent Titus and another brother to admonish them personally. "Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf, that, as I said, ye may be ready, lest haply, if they of Macedonia come with me and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren that they would go before unto you and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty and not as of covetousness," 2 Cor. 9:3-5. That is doing church-work decently and in order, according to a carefully devised plan and using every proper means to carry this plan to success. Paul did not infringe upon the sovereignty of the congregation. No. In the first place, the support of the poor was a duty commanded by the Lord, one which they could not shirk. In the second place, that same Lord had commanded that in the business of caring for the poor as in all business of the congregation all things be done decently and in order. And, in the third place, the systematic manner in which this work was to be carried out had been agreed on and adopted by the vote of the congregations; they had pledged their support; they had obligated themselves, and God expected them to carry out this work in the order agreed on. They were not driven like slaves. They were not suffering an unbearable dictatorship. They were not dominated by an autocratic hierarchy. No; as highly privileged priests and kings before God, they were gratefully carrying out the marvelous work the Lord had assigned to them. They were publishing by word and deed the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness to His

marvelous light and were doing this decently and in order, in keeping with His will.

Let us apply this to ourselves. Synod, I repeat it, has not the right to dictate to its congregations or to insist on the observance of any rule or resolution not laid down in the Word of God. Let us fight to the last any attempt to deprive our congregations of the liberty which Christ has procured for them, of the sovereignty which our Savior has given as a precious gift to His chosen bride, the Church. On the other hand, no congregation has the right to set aside the clear and unequivocal will of God "Let all things be done decently and in order." A synod constituted like ours is, thank God, not a body exercising arbitrary or autocratic powers. It is an assembly of congregations represented by their delegates, who meet to carry out the work which has been committed to them by their great God and Savior Christ Jesus; a body which meets to devise, and agree on, ways and means to carry on this work in the most practical and effective manner possible under existing circumstances. While our congregations are not bound absolutely to adopt the order proposed, yet they have of their own free will chosen the human device of synodical conventions to conduct their divinely commanded business in that orderly manner in which God wants all things to be done in the Church. And before arbitrarily refusing to lend Synod its full and complete and willing cooperation, let a congregation give careful thought to two considerations. The first, whether the refusal to cooperate with its sister congregations in the plan proposed by Synod is not in reality due to an unwillingness to do the Lord's work; in other words, whether they are not refusing Synod's plea and plan because they are actually refusing obedience to the command of Christ "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me unto the uttermost part of the earth." Perhaps their flesh is not willing to sacrifice, not willing to go to a little inconvenience for the sake of Christ's kingdom, and as an excuse they plead their liberty, the sovereignty of the congregation over against all human rules and man-made plans. Perhaps they forget that the work of missions is not a human device nor a man-made obligation but the will of Christ, a divinely imposed duty. The selfsame apostle who tells his Christians that they are a royal priesthood tells them in the same breath that they were made priests and kings for the purpose, "that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

In the second place, let every congregation consider well whether such a refusal on their part is due to good and valid reasons, or whether, in denying their cooperation, they are not arbitrarily setting aside the will of God that in the Church all

things should be done decently and in order; whether the real reason of their refusal is not that contentiousness of which the apostle declares in no uncertain terms that it is not a custom in the churches of God. And it would be contentious if we should insist on our right to do as we please, on our privilege to be different, rather than to be willing to do all in our power to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Sitting in his prison at Rome, yet constantly concerned about the churches he and his assistants had established, Paul, in writing to the congregation at Colossae, voices his joy on hearing of the steadfastness of their faith in Christ. But even before he speaks of their faith, he makes mention of his joy in beholding their *order*, their harmony, their willing cooperation. Col. 2:5. A far greater one than Paul is watching His congregations, our ascended Lord, sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Oh, that the sight that He beholds may fill His heart also with joy and rejoicing! May He behold our Synod and all its congregations standing steadfast in the faith of Christ, all the congregations keenly aware of, and unfeignedly thankful for, their glorious privileges and ready to defend them to the utmost; all equally aware of their solemn obligations and eagerly willing to fulfil them to the last letter; individuals all, and proud of it; each one having a special gift, special aptitudes, and every one determined to retain his individuality. Yet not one looking down disdainfully on any other, not one seeking to dominate, but all united in faith, in love, in hope; all—every congregation, every layman, every pastor—willing to put themselves and all their gifts into the service of the Lord and His Church; all presenting a united front, forming a body well organized, purposeful, determined to do the work of the Lord and do it well; each one having a task assigned him according to a carefully considered plan; each one working in harmony with all his colaborers; each one putting his shoulder to the wheel, shirking no effort; each one knowing that he may rely on all his brethren throughout the length and breadth of our Church to do their full share, so that no one will be left alone to finish what the Lord expects all to do.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord," 1 Cor. 15:58. "Let all things be done decently and in order," 1 Cor. 14:40. And "unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father: to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen," Rev. 1:5b, 6.

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