

# The Glorious Blessing of Brotherly Fellowship in Faith

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## I.

All Christians are in inner, invisible fellowship with one another, because through the working of the Holy Spirit they altogether believe on Christ as their Savior and through this faith are bound together with Christ as the *only* Head of the church and with one another into *one* spiritual body. Also those Christians who are in heterodox churches are in this fellowship (*unitas ecclesiae interna sive fidei in Christum*, the internal unity of the church or by faith in Christ).

## II.

It is God's will and order that those who believe on Christ in their hearts also enter into *external, visible fellowship* with each other, above all by joining into local congregations in which the gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are administered in keeping with the divine Word, and in addition by recognizing and treating as brothers in the faith Christians who confess the correct faith in other places (*unitas ecclesiae externa sive professionis fidei*, the external unity of the church or by profession of faith). The purpose of this external fellowship is the preaching of the gospel in the world, the extension of the church, and the mutual comforting and strengthening in faith.

## III.

Because many Christians out of weakness of knowledge do not obey Christ's command to hold only to *his* Word, but contrary to Christ's prohibition have fellowship with false teachers, they separate themselves from the God-ordained fellowship with brothers in the faith. This has application only among Christians who cling to the church according to Christ's order, that is, confess the pure doctrine of the divine Word and avoid false teachers.

## IV.

The sadder it is that so many Christians stay in heterodox camps and thus cause and help to maintain division and scandal in the church, all the more diligently and sincerely ought the Christians who are through God's grace in the orthodox camp to practice with each other brotherly fellowship in the faith and carefully avoid any disturbance of it, for the glory of God and for the highest needs of the world and the church.

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## Thesis I.

All Christians are in inner, invisible fellowship with one another, because through the working of the Holy Spirit they altogether believe on Christ as their Savior and through this faith are bound together with Christ as the *only* Head of the church and with one another into *one* spiritual body. Also those Christians who are in heterodox churches are in this fellowship (*unitas ecclesiae interna sive fidei in Christum*, the internal unity of the church or by faith in Christ).

The first thesis points to the *basis* or *necessary presupposition* of the external fellowship of faith. This is the *inner, invisible* fellowship which all Christians share with each other through faith in Christ. Because all of them believe in Christ as their Savior and are children of God and heirs of eternal life and members of the one body of Christ, therefore they can and should practice fellowship in faith with one another here in the world. Of course, at all times there have been people who have participated *externally* in the fellowship of faith without being in the inner, invisible fellowship of the church. But that is then only external pretense, conscious hypocrisy, or self-deception. From that has arisen a repulsive caricature of true fellowship in faith. External fellowship in faith always has an *inner* presupposition, a presupposition in the *heart*: that is faith, faith in Christ,

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<sup>1</sup>From *Verhandlungen der zweiundzwanzigsten Versammlung der Ev.-Luth. Synodalkonferenz von Nordamerika* (1908), pp. 5-38.

fellowship in the gospel. Those whom God has called to the fellowship of his Son can also practice fellowship in faith with each other. Those who want to practice this Christian fellowship in faith properly with each other must be “in Christ.” Otherwise the fellowship in faith becomes hypocrisy and a Judas kind of friendship. The apostle admonishes those who are *one* body and *one* spirit “to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

All Christians are in this inner, invisible fellowship, in spite of their great external differences. As far as their natural life in this world is concerned, there are great differences among Christians. Christians are different in their sex and age, in their earthly property and education. Among them there are male and female, old and young, poor and rich, educated and uneducated. They are different in race: there are white, black, yellow, and copper-colored Christians. They dwell in various places: they live in the wilderness and on the sea, in the forests and on the prairies, in the cities and in the country. They are separated by oceans and high mountains. They live in completely different civic situations: they live in republics and monarchies; they are princes and subjects, employers and employees; they are Democrats and Republicans. But there is a powerful, wondrous unity among them in the midst of all external differences: they have *one* faith.

And what kind of faith is that? It is not the faith according to which one is convinced that there is a god. The heathen also have this faith. It is also not the faith of the old and new rationalists and Unitarians, who certainly still speak of Christ but deny Christ’s deity and vicarious atonement and therefore see the essence of Christianity as morality. It is also not the faith of the Roman Catholics, who confess Christ as God and Man, but want to be saved not only through faith in God’s grace in Christ, but also through the so-called infused grace, that is, through their own works. It is also not the faith of the Arminian sects and of synergistic Lutherans, who certainly confess Christ’s deity, his divine-human work, and partially also faith in Christ as the only means for obtaining salvation, but in addition want to make out of faith itself a partially human work, and make the works of the law, good behavior, and lesser guilt into the basis of salvation. It is also not intellectual faith of those who are externally in the orthodox church and can *speak* correctly about faith, but their heart does not grasp or embrace Christ as the Savior of sinners (*fides acquisita*).

No, the faith which forms the inner, invisible unity of the Christian church is faith *in* Christ worked by the Spirit; it is the faith which has Christ alone in his vicarious atonement as the object for obtaining righteousness and salvation; it is the faith which grasps the Christ outside of us in the promise of the gospel; it is the faith which trusts only on God’s mercy in Christ. In other words, it is faith in the Christian doctrine of justification which the apostle describes with the words, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Ro 3:28). Only this faith, which is produced in hearts by the Holy Spirit without human cooperation, makes a person into a member of the Christian church, as Scripture says, “Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord (πιστεύοντες τῷ κυρίῳ) and were added to their number” (Ac 5:14), namely, to the congregation or church.

This faith is the great *equalizer* in the Christian church. Through this faith all are justified before God, as it is written, “We ... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:15,16). Through this faith all are equally *children of God*: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). Through this faith all have received the *Spirit*: “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?” (Gal 3:2). Through this faith all have *peace* with God and the *hope* of eternal life: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ... and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Ro 5:1,2). *Through this faith all differences of gender, age, position, nationality, and education are abolished before God.*

The Holy Spirit did not become tired, as it were, of enjoining this in Holy Scripture again and again. After the apostle Paul told the Christians “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26), he continued, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (πάντες ὑμεῖς εἰς ἓστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ)” (Gal 3:28). A still fuller enumeration of the members of the church is given by the apostle, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian (βάρβαρος), Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col 3:11). Through faith in the gospel those who are *heathen* according to their descent become “*Abraham’s seed*,” “*children of Abraham*”: “Understand,

then, that those who believe are children of Abraham (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσὶν Ἀβραάμ)” (Gal 3:7) and “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed (εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα ἐστέ)” (Gal 3:29). The prophecies of the Old Testament speak of a great assembly of peoples on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, e.g., Isaiah 2:2f; 60:3f and often. Through faith in the gospel the peoples, *without changing their location*, have come to Mount Zion; the Old Testament prophecies about the assembly of the peoples are made explicit, “You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God” (Heb 12:22). We sing in praise of the Holy Spirit:

Lord, by the brightness of your light  
In holy faith your church unite  
From ev’ry land and ev’ry tongue;  
This to your praise, O Lord our God, be sung (CW 176:1).

and again:

All Christendom on earth  
Has just one mind.

All Christians in the whole world really have *one* mind in spite of their different view-points in earthly things. Insofar as they are Christians, they have exactly the same thoughts about themselves and about God. They regard themselves as damnable sinners before God; they regard God as being gracious to them for Christ’s sake. The heavenly flame of love glows in all their hearts, for faith is active or works through love (Gal 5:6).

Connected with the invisible unity of faith, of thoughts, and of mind is, as Luther expresses it, also the invisible unity of *being*. Through faith they are all *one* body, namely the spiritual body whose head is Christ. The apostle says, “We, who are many, are one body (ἐν σῶμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἔσμεν)” (1 Co 10:17), and “You are the body of Christ (ὑμεῖς...σῶμα Χριστοῦ)” (1 Co 12:27), and “He [Christ] is the head of the body, the church” (Col 1:18). That is the wonderful, inner, invisible fellowship of the Christian church.

Luther writes:

Christendom means an assembly of all the people on earth who believe in Christ, as we pray in the Creed, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints.” This community or assembly means all those who live in true faith, hope, and love. Thus the essence, life, and nature of Christendom is not a physical assembly, but an assembly of hearts in one faith, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 4:5, “One baptism, one faith, one Lord.” Accordingly, regardless of whether a thousand miles separates them physically, they are still called one assembly in spirit, as long as each one preaches, believes, hopes, loves, and lives like the other. So we sing about the Holy Spirit, “You have brought many tongues together into the unity of faith.” This is what spiritual unity really means, on the basis of which men are called a “communion of saints.” This unity alone is sufficient to create Christendom, and without it, no unity—be it that of city, time, persons, work, or whatever else it may be—can create Christendom.<sup>2</sup>

There is not more than one Church, or people of God, on earth. This one Church has one faith, one baptism, one confession of God the Father and of Jesus Christ. Its members faithfully hold, and abide by, these common truths. Every one desiring to be saved and to come to God must be incorporated into this Church, outside of which no one will be saved.<sup>3</sup>

The Christians, however, are a people with a special call and are therefore called not just *ecclesia*, “church,” or “people,” but *sancta catholica Christiana*, that is, “a Christian holy people” who believe in Christ. That is why they are called a Christian people and have the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies them daily, not only through the for-give-ness of sin acquired for them by Christ (as the Antinomians foolishly believe), but also through the abolition, the purging, and the mortification of sins, on the basis of which they are called a holy people. Thus the “holy Christian church” is synonymous with a

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<sup>2</sup>LW 39:65.

<sup>3</sup>Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther* (Baker, 2000), 4.2.290.

Christian and holy people or, as one is also wont to express it, with “holy Christendom,” or “whole Christendom.”<sup>4</sup>

In the Large Catechism Luther describes the Christian church in this way:

I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under *one* head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in *one faith, one mind, and understanding*, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms.<sup>5</sup>

Further on in the Large Catechism Luther speaks about all those who do not believe in Christ:

For all outside of Christianity, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites, although they believe in, and worship, only *one* true God, yet know not what his mind towards them is, and cannot expect any love or blessing from him; therefore they abide in eternal wrath and damnation. *For they have not the Lord Christ*, and, besides, are not illumined and favored by any gifts of the Holy Ghost.<sup>6</sup>

On the essence of faith Luther explains that we must grasp (*apprehendere*) and embrace (*amplecti*) passive righteousness. He calls the Christian righteousness passive righteousness because we do not do or produce (*efficere*) it, but receive it. Passive righteousness is Christ or the righteousness offered in the gospel. Passive righteousness is the righteousness of faith, insofar as it is obtained not through works, but through faith.<sup>7</sup>

These two cannot stand *together*, but are directly contradictory: to believe that grace and eternal life are given to us only for Christ’s sake, and yet to seek and pretend that we merit these things.<sup>8</sup>

Melanchthon writes in the Apology:

The adversaries [papists] feign that faith is only a knowledge of the history, and therefore teach that it can coexist with mortal sin. Hence they say nothing concerning faith, by which Paul so frequently says that men are justified, because those who are accounted righteous before God do not live in mortal sin. But that faith which justifies is *not merely* this, that I *know the stories* of Christ’s birth, suffering, etc. (that even the devils know), but it is the certainty or the *certain trust in the heart*, when, with my *whole heart*, I regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without any merit, the forgiveness of sins, grace, and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.<sup>9</sup>

The Apology calls this special faith in contrast to historical faith. The Apology continues:

And that no one may suppose that it is mere knowledge, we will add further: Faith is *that my whole heart takes to itself this treasure*. It is not my doing, not my presenting or giving, not my work or preparation, but that a heart *comforts* itself, and is *perfectly confident* with respect to this, namely, that God makes a present and gift to us, and not we to him, that he sheds upon us every treasure of grace in Christ. (Latin: It is to wish and to receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification.)<sup>10</sup>

Luther wrote:

Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here.... But outside of this Christian Church, where the gospel is not, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness. *Therefore all who seek and wish to merit*

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<sup>4</sup>LW 41:143,144.

<sup>5</sup>LC Creed:51, Trig. p. 691.

<sup>6</sup>LC Creed:66, Trig. p. 697.

<sup>7</sup>LW 26:5f.

<sup>8</sup>St. L. 11:978.

<sup>9</sup>Apol IV:48, Trig. p. 135.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

*holiness, not through the gospel and forgiveness of sin, but by their works, have expelled and severed themselves.*<sup>11</sup>

In the eyes of the world, of course, these ways of life and their positions [father and son, teacher and pupil, master and servant] are unequal; but this outward inequality does not in any way hinder the unity of spirit, in which they all think and believe the same thing about Christ, namely, that through him alone we obtain the forgiveness of sins and righteousness. As for outward behavior and position in the world, one person does not judge another or criticize his works or praise his own, even if they are superior; but with one set of lips and one spirit they confess that they have one and the same Savior, Christ, before whom there is no partiality toward either persons or works.<sup>12</sup>

### **From the Discussions**

In connection with this presentation from the essayist, various speakers expressed the following thoughts:

Brotherly fellowship in faith only takes place through *faith*.—The Holy Spirit certainly also works a knowledge of sin through the law, but no one becomes a member of the church in that way, but is still in death.—

The large amount of unionizing these days comes from the opinion that *inner* fellowship is an impossibility, since each person has his own peculiarities. Thus demanding unity in faith means putting people in a straightjacket.

This despairing of inner fellowship arises because people regard faith as a *human* work. But since faith is *God's* work, why should unity of faith be impossible?

This unionizing leads even to accepting a *dead* faith.—

Although only personal faith in Christ produces fellowship, it would still be wrong to distinguish between faith and theology, between gospel and doctrine, and to declare theology and doctrine unimportant. Therefore “faith in Christ” also includes, e.g., faith in the Trinity; even baptism is not to be excluded.—

It is important to stress here that unity of faith in justification is to be understood not so much of the *doctrine* of justification as rather of *personal* trust in justification; as the Apology says, special faith requires the forgiveness of sins.—

When Luther says that trust in Christ is enough to make *one* church, he is speaking in contrast to the Roman Catholics who regard unity under the pope and other things as also necessary.

### **The Essayist.**

“*Also those Christians who are in heterodox churches are in this fellowship.*” We call heterodox churches those churches in which God’s Word is still present, however not pure and unvarnished, but mixed with errors. Such churches are the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox, the Reformed church and the numerous Reformed sects; also those churches calling themselves Lutheran which in fact do not remain with the pure confession of the church of the Reformation, as at our time the Ohio and Iowa Synods [now ELCA] which deny “only by grace” (*sola gratia*).

The question of how faith in Christ, the Savior of sinners, is possible in heterodox churches is to be answered: *Insofar as they teach errors*, faith in Christ is impossible. Errors cannot produce faith but always only unbelief. The Roman Catholic Church in its official confession, the decrees of the Council of Trent, curses all who want to be saved through faith in Christ without their own works. All the machinery of the papacy is geared toward the doctrine of works. Therefore whoever believes the official doctrine of the papacy does not believe on Christ, the Savior of sinners, but rejects him and is not under grace, but under the curse of the law, as it is written, “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse” (Gal 3:10).—The Reformed sects are

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<sup>11</sup>LC Creed:55,56, Trig. p. 693.

<sup>12</sup>LW 27:61.

partially Calvinistic, that is, they deny the universal grace of God in Christ which extends to all people, and partially Arminian, that is, they ascribe to man power and efficacy for obtaining salvation. Both errors are of the same kind: where they are in effect, they do not let things depend on faith in Christ.—And when the synergistic Lutherans teach that among those who are converted and saved there must be a lesser guilt, a lesser resistance, by which they are distinguished from those who are lost, then faith in Christ is not possible with this doctrine. Faith in Christ cannot arise in a heart dominated by the thought: I am better than many others. Faith in Christ can only arise where one acknowledges himself to be guilty only of damnation.

But alongside of the official false teachings the divine truth, the gospel of Christ the crucified, the Savior of all sinners, is still present in the heterodox churches. Through the working of the Holy Spirit the crushed souls depend on the gospel of Christ and not on the false teachings. Luther reports that in the papacy simple souls participate in the mass, even *call* it a sacrifice, but for themselves do not trust in it, but for themselves depend only on Christ's merit. We have the same experience in conversation with individual Catholics who, for example, are admitted to our hospitals. In conversation they say that the doctrine of works is for other, better people; but they are such sinners who must rely only on God's mercy in Christ. Thus *theoretically* they let the doctrine of works stand—for others; *practically*—for themselves—they take comfort in the grace of God in Christ.

In his writing against Erasmus Luther pointed out that there are teachers who theoretically defend free will, but in practice, when they stand before God, they forget about free will and all their own works and merits.—Among the enthusiasts, who reject the trust in the external Word and the sacraments as merely external Christianity and a residue from the papacy, it constantly happens that crushed souls among them nevertheless depend on the comfort expressed in the external word of the gospel. Since as a result of their enthusiastic false teaching they regard the sacraments as merely external ceremonies, they don't as a rule know how to begin with them. But they depend in faith on the promise of the gospel which they hear in the sermon and read in the Bible. Thus through the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit there are people who believe on Christ in heterodox churches.

Through this faith they are connected with Christ and members of his spiritual body. They are in the inner, invisible fellowship which connects all who believe on Christ with one another. We must hold fast to this: Whoever believes in his heart on Christ as his Savior through the working of the Holy Spirit is a member of the Christian church, even if he is externally in a heterodox church. Whoever does not believe in his heart on Christ as his Savior is not a member of the Christian church and is not saved, even if he is according to external fellowship in the orthodox church. There is absolutely no other *entering* into the Christian church and no other *remaining* in the Christian church other than through faith in Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. It is written, "To all who received him (Christ), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God" (Jn 1:12,13). And the apostle warned the Gentiles who had become believers, who wanted to be proud over against the Jews, "But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid!... Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off" (Ro 11:20,22).

The *Book of Concord* says:

As to the condemnations ... [which] had to be ... set forth,... it is in no way our design and purpose to condemn those men *who err from a certain simplicity of mind*, but are not blasphemers against the truth of the heavenly doctrine, much less, indeed, entire churches, which are either under the Roman Empire of the German nation or else-where.... For we have no doubt whatever that even in those churches with have hitherto not agreed with us in all things many *godly and by no means wicked men* are found.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Preface to the Christian Book of Concord, Trig., p. 19.

The Formula of Concord enjoins that according to God's order and will the church ought to be united in all articles and doctrines; nevertheless it also confesses that there are servants of Christ also in heterodox churches.

Luther wrote:

Still we must admit that the enthusiasts have the Scriptures and the Word of God in other doctrines. Whoever hears it from them and believes will be saved, even though they are unholy heretics and blasphemers of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

I contend that in the papacy *there is true Christianity*, even the *right kind* of Christianity (*non solum christiani, sed praestantissimi christiani sub papa reperiuntur*) and many great and devoted saints.... Listen to what St. Paul says to the Thessalonians [2 Th 2:4]: "The Antichrist takes his seat in the temple of God." If now the pope is (and I cannot believe otherwise) the veritable Antichrist, he will not sit or reign in the devil's stall, but in the temple of God. No, he will not sit where there are only devils and unbelievers, or where no Christ or Christendom exist. For he is an Antichrist and must thus be among Christians. And since he is to *sit* and *reign* there it is necessary that there be Christians under him. *God's temple* is not the description for a pile of stones, but for the holy Christendom [1 Co 3:17], in which he is to reign.... We do not rave as do the rebellious spirits, so as to reject everything that is found in the papal church. For then we would cast out even Christendom from the temple of God, and all that it contained of Christ. But when we oppose and reject the pope it is because he does not keep to these treasures of Christendom which he has inherited from the apostles. Instead he makes additions of the devil and does not use these treasures for the improvement of the temple. Rather he works toward its destruction, in setting his commandments and ordinances above the ordinance of Christ. *But Christ preserves his Christendom even in the midst of such destruction.*<sup>15</sup>

Gerhard writes that even under the dominion of a *corrupted* preaching ministry

there nevertheless remain some who retain the *basis* of faith; and even through a corrupted preaching ministry God produces sons and daughters who belong to the invisible, universal (*catholica*) church. Thus we distinguish between the *inner* brightness of the church which consists of faith, hope, love, and the inward gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the *outer* brightness which ... consists of the integrity and purity of the public doctrine and of the uncorrupted preaching ministry.<sup>16</sup>

On the necessity of the sacraments the essayist added that it is incorrect to teach that rebirth is only worked through baptism; it is also worked by the Word of the gospel, as is evident from 1 Peter 1:23. If someone has faith, then he is reborn and a member of the church, even without baptism.—The sacraments belong among the fundamental articles in the sense that God gave us baptism and the Lord's Supper as a *foundation* or *support* of our faith. However, not only the sacraments, but also and chiefly the Word of the gospel. Many in the sectarian churches don't know where to begin with baptism and the Lord's Supper; but since they cling to the Word of the gospel, they are members of the church.—Why, then, are there still baptism and the Lord's Supper besides the gospel? Because God is so exceedingly gracious and offers us the forgiveness of sins in *manifold* ways.<sup>17</sup>

## Thesis II.

It is God's will and order that those who believe on Christ in their hearts also enter into *external, visible fellowship* with each other, above all by joining into local congregations in which the gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are administered in keeping with the divine Word, and in addition by recognizing and treating as brothers in the faith Christians who confess the correct faith in other places (*unitas ecclesiae externa sive professionis fidei*, the external unity of the church or by profession of faith). The purpose of this external fellowship is the preaching of the gospel in the world, the extension of the church, and the mutual comforting and strengthening in faith.

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<sup>14</sup>LW 40:251.

<sup>15</sup>LW 40:232,233.

<sup>16</sup>Gerhard, *Loci*, locus de ecclesia, § 86.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. SA III:IV, Trig., p. 491.

It is reported about a noble heathen who converted to Christianity that he refused external fellowship with Christians. He refused to come to the public assemblies of Christians. When he was reminded that this is a Christian duty, he scoffingly asked if Christianity clung to the church walls. Nevertheless he soon came to a better knowledge.

Christianity certainly doesn't cling to the church walls. It does not *consist* of the external, visible fellowship which Christians cultivate with one another. It consists simply of faith in Christ worked by the Holy Spirit. (cf. the statement of the Apology that the church is not an "outward polity."<sup>18</sup>) But faith in Christ which is in the heart is to express itself by entering into fellowship with those who also confess the Christian faith. That is *God's will and ordinance*, not merely a human resolution. Every Christian should certainly sing and make music to the Lord in his heart for himself (Col 3:16); but Christians ought also to do this in fellowship with one another. Every Christian should certainly read and meditate on God's Word for himself; but Christians ought also to set up the public preaching ministry among themselves and *jointly* hear God's Word in public sermons from the mouth of people who are capable and appointed to teach others. From Holy Scripture we learn: When through the preaching of the apostles a number of people believed in a certain place, they here and there appointed in the congregations (κατ' ἐκκλησίαν) elders, i.e., pastors (Ac 14:23), and the Christians were *to assemble* to listen to the Word preached by the pastors. The apostle Paul wrote to Titus, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town (κατὰ πόλιν), as I directed you" (Tit 1:5).

In short, the gathering together of the Christians of one place into *local congregations* and the setting up of the public preaching ministry is not left to the discretion of Christians, but is *commanded* by God. That local congregations should gather together into still larger ecclesiastical fellowships, e.g., into synods, is not a divine but a human (ecclesiastical) ordinance. That does not *have* to be. But that the Christians of a certain place form a congregation and set up and use the public preaching ministry among themselves *has* to be; that is *God's will and ordinance*. The local Christian congregation is the Christian fellowship established by God in which every Christian of that place must be found. For that reason Scripture contains the admonition, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" (Heb 10:25).

And the local congregations into which the Christians gather must have a definite nature as far as the confession is concerned. They must be orthodox congregations, or as our confession expresses it, congregations "in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered."<sup>19</sup> The Christian church certainly does not have its *own* words to teach and confess. *God's Word*, as it has been entrusted to the church in Holy Scripture, is its teaching and confession, and it dare add nothing nor take away anything from it. Christ says to those who believe on him, "If you hold to *my* teaching, you are really my disciples" (Jn 8:31). On this point preachers and hearers have a *clear command*. The *preachers* among the Christians are only to preach God's Word, "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God" (1 Pe 4:11). And the *hearers* should only cling to those preachers who present God's Word purely. Those who teach differently they are to *screen* and withdraw from them, "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them (ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ' αὐτῶν)" (Ro 16:17). Heterodox congregations, that is, congregations in which human words are mixed with God's Word, are *forbidden by God* and exist only by God's *permission*, not by God's will and ordinance. *Orthodoxy*, that is, remaining in Christ's Word without adding to Christ's Word or taking away from it, is the *external form* willed and ordered by God for the external fellowship of the church. Christ's will and command for all his Christians is for them to be found only in this external fellowship. That Christians also cling to the Roman Catholic church, the Reformed sects, the Ohio and Iowa Synods happens against Christ's will and ordinance—as certain as these groups do not teach God's Word purely and clearly. Christ's will and ordinance

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<sup>18</sup>Ap VII,VIII:13, Trig., p. 231.

<sup>19</sup>AC VII:1, Trig., p. 47.



only corresponds to membership in orthodox local congregations. This membership all Christians should seek and even cling to. That is what it means to practice the external fellowship in faith commanded by God.

But Christians have responsibilities in regard to the practice of the fellowship of faith *which go beyond the local congregation*. As already mentioned, it is not a divine ordinance that local congregations bind themselves together with other local congregations into a larger eccle-siastical body, like our synods. These connections are a matter of Christian freedom. The local congregation is the *only* union established by *God* in the Christian church. All other unions and con-nections are only a human ordinance. We cannot have the synodical connection made into a divine ordinance. But there is still *one* divine ordinance which goes beyond the connection in the local congregation, namely, that we acknowledge and *treat* as brothers in the faith the Christians who confess the correct faith in other places. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, *or ashamed of me his prisoner*” (2 Ti 1:8). Accordingly Timothy is to acknowledge and treat as a brother in the faith Paul who was locally separated from him and imprisoned in Rome, because Paul was a true preacher of the gospel. Here on earth Christ is confessed and denied in the confessors of his Word. If someone had said to Timothy, “You are certainly to preach the gospel of Christ, but you are not to have anything to do with Paul; him you are not to acknowledge as a brother in the faith; him you must renounce”—if someone had spoken those or similar words to Timothy, and if Timothy would have followed those words, then Timothy would in Paul have denied Christ.

Confer what Luther had to say about confessing to *his* (Luther’s) name:

I see that an admonition is necessary for those whom Satan is beginning to tempt to think that they can escape danger when they are attacked by saying: “I don’t hold with Luther or with anyone, but [only] with the holy gospel and with the holy church,” so they are left in peace and yet they maintain in their hearts that my doctrine is evangelical and they remain with it. In truth such a confession doesn’t help them, and is the same as denying *Christ*. Therefore I ask them to be cautious.—It is true that for the sake of your body and soul you ought not say: I am Lutheran or papistic, for neither has died for you or is your master, but only Christ; you ought to confess yourself a Christian. But if you regard *Luther’s doctrine to be evangelical* and the pope’s doctrine to be unevangelical, then you must *not throw away Luther*; otherwise you throw away with him his *doctrine*, which you recognize to be Christ’s doctrine. Rather, you must say: It matters not to me whether Luther is a rogue or a saint, for his doctrine is not his but Christ’s.

Now also we within the Synodical Conference ought diligently to acknowledge one another as brothers in the faith. Therefore when, for example, an orthodox synod is attacked, another orthodox synod must perceive that as an attack on itself and speak and act accordingly.

The Augsburg Confession states: “Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue for-ever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered.”<sup>20</sup> To this Carpzov correctly remarks that here the church is defined as in reality and in its natural condition it *must* be.<sup>21</sup> It is *unnatural* for Christians to follow false teachers instead of Christ alone. Not only the *inner nature* of Christians, because they are reborn, but also *Christ’s command* urge them to *pure* doctrine without the admixture of error.

Luther wrote:

The church of God on earth, when its *external fellowship* is spoken of, is an assembly of those *who hear, believe, and confess the true doctrine of the gospel of Christ*, and have the Holy Spirit who sanctifies them and works in them through Word and sacrament, notwithstanding that among them are some false Christians and hypocrites who never-theless unanimously hold to this doctrine and have fellowship in the sacraments and the other external ministries of the church.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>AC VII:1, Trig., p. 47.

<sup>21</sup>Carpzov, *Isag.*, p. 306: *Definitur hoc in loco ecclesia, non prout saipe esse solet, sed prout in re et naturali suo statu esse debet, quando sc. non premitur a persecutoribus nec turbatur ab haereticis.*

<sup>22</sup>Erlangen 14:211.

The Formula of Concord states:

*Such ceremonies* should not be reckoned among the genuine free adiaphora, or matters of *indifference*, as make a show or *feign the appearance*, as though our religion and that of the papists were not far apart, thus to avoid persecution, or as though the latter were not at least highly offensive to us; or when such ceremonies are *designed* for the purpose, and *required* and *received* in this sense, *as though by and through them both contrary religions were reconciled and became one body*; or when a reentering into the papacy and a departure from the pure doctrine of the gospel and true religion should occur or *gradually follow therefrom*. For in this case what Paul writes (2 Co 6:14) shall and must obtain: Be ye not unequally yoked together.<sup>23</sup>

Thus even the *appearance* of ecclesiastical fellowship with the heterodox is to be avoided. Luther wrote: The first article, in which peace and freedom from all danger is promised to those who subscribed the confession delivered at Augsburg and its apology, if only they henceforth begin nothing new and *don't receive and protect* those who, enlightened by divine grace, want to accept the true doctrine of the gospel, is in no way to be approved. For it has to do with faith and confession. And if anyone would object that the emperor is now dealing with the elector of Saxony and his clergy, but not with those in the future, and the elector of Saxony does not need to be concerned about others, and he or his clergy do not need to speak up for the subjects of other governments but only for their own.... When it is written, "all who follow this rule" (Gal 6:16), no one is excluded. Accordingly all who believe and live according to the doctrine of our confession and its apology are our brothers in faith and doctrine, and their danger concerns us as much as our own. As members of the true church we cannot abandon them; they may submit to us if they wish; they may do that quietly or publicly; they may live among us or *abroad*. That we say and confess. Third, if Christ prayed for all who would believe the teaching of the apostles (Jn 17:20), why should we abandon and ignore those for whom Christ prayed? Fourth, since the Lord says that the gates of hell will not overcome the church (Mt 16:18), and yet those gates do not stand still, it necessarily follows that this doctrine is not bound to any specific time, place, or person, but always continues and will remain for all those who either already believe or will believe in the future.<sup>24</sup>

### From the Discussions

The inner unity of the church is an article of *faith*. The church is invisible, since each individual merely knows of himself that he is connected with God through faith, and only God knows all of his. The external unity, on the other hand, is based on the confession.

Although faith in Christ the Savior is enough for the inner unity of the church, the mere confession to Christ does not suffice for the external connection, because Scripture demands that we hold to *all* of Jesus' teaching (Jn 8:31) and proclaim the *whole* will of God (Ac 20:27). When someone out of weakness does not confess everything, we do not for that reason deny his faith; but this weakness dare not be made into a rule, just as a crippled man is still a man even though crippledness cannot be listed as a feature of the correct definition of a man. It is a question of not adding to God's Word, but also of not taking away from it. No doctrine is, so to speak, to be outlawed.

There is something tempting what it is said: Among the various talents of people, every church body has a special call in its characteristic doctrinal position. But no one has the right to decide about the doctrinal position of the church except God in his Word. But God *has* decided that his church should teach and confess *only his Word*. Therefore only those church bodies which preach God's Word purely have a right to exist as a church body. But heterodox churches are bound to the goal of promoting their false doctrine; therefore, *as heterodox churches*, they are forbidden by God. When Jesus did not restrain the man who drove out demons in

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<sup>23</sup>FC SD X:5,6, Trig., p. 1053f.

<sup>24</sup>St. L. 16:1537-1539.

his name without following the other disciples (Lk 9:49), that does not confirm any recognition of heterodox churches. For this man acted *in the name of Jesus*.—

If definite external distinctions in position, talent, education, etc., call forth a definite aversion toward an external connection with such people, we are helped to get rid of that by the consciousness of the glorious blessing of the inner fellowship, that even the man most disagreeable to me, insofar as he is a Christian, is nevertheless a member in the body of Christ.—

Confessing unity with those who confess the true doctrine is not a demand that goes beyond the gospel, but is in the nature of things, it is a fruit of the gospel. Through the gospel God works new *life*, a life which expresses itself in that we speak and confess, namely speak what God according to his Word wants spoken by us. Two different statements cannot both be correct. Thus to cling to those who speak differently, or to withdraw from those who speak the same, means to deny the truth. It is simply impossible to hush up about faith shared by another.

### **The Essayist.**

*The purpose of the external fellowship ordained by God.*—What should those who in their hearts have come to faith in Christ do? Shall each one keep the secret of faith to himself and wander alone in the world until God takes him from this world into heaven? Christ instructs, “What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs” (Mt 10:27). Christians are to *confess* their faith. So that this is not done in a disorderly way, Christ ordained the manner and way: The Christians of a place are to form a local congregation and to assemble around the preaching ministry ordained by Christ. Why? The prophet Isaiah addresses the church of the New Testament in these words, “You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’” (Isa 40:9). Here the church is described according to its external fellowship, according to its appearance in the world. In its external appearance the church is above all to enter the world in order to proclaim the gospel of Christ. In fact, this is fellowship when the gospel is expressed with united powers and with great courage, through climbing up on the high mountain and lifting up the voice powerfully. Every Christian is to proclaim the gospel in his circle and in his neighborhood. But from the beginning on we find that the preaching of the gospel in the world is a matter of the fellowship or of the congregation. Thus the *congregation* at Antioch received the command from the Holy Spirit to send Barnabas and Saul out as missionaries. The church of Christ is spread into the world through the preaching of the gospel, and thus the church on earth becomes the mother of individual Christians, as it is said of her, “The Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother” (Gal 4:26).

But the external fellowship of Christians also has the goal of the *mutual comforting and strengthening in faith*. When the members of a family or of a whole relationship come together, when fellow countrymen or compatriots meet each other in a strange land, they greet each other, they have much to tell each other, they have common interests to discuss; their conversation is a source of pleasure and comfort. Christians are connected with each other still more inwardly than compatriots and physical relatives. Here on earth they are in a strange land. God has called them out of the world and brought them into the kingdom of his dear Son. In their hearts dwells the *one* Holy Spirit, indeed the entire Holy Trinity. They have *one* Lord and Savior, *one* faith, *one* hope; they have the same work, the same interests and goals: they want to spread the gospel in the world and to keep themselves from being polluted by the world, since they together travel the narrow way to heaven. Thus they greet one another as children of God when they see or hear of each other. The apostle Paul sent a brotherly greeting “to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, *together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Co 1:2). Many have regarded the greeting sections in Holy Scripture to be superfluous and for that reason, e.g., in the worship service skip the great part of Romans 16 because it contains only greetings. But also the parts of Holy Scripture which contain greetings are edifying and of great importance. They teach us the duties of the Christian fellowship and share with us the blessings of Christian fellowship.—The Christian congregation in Rome did not originate from the service of the apostle Paul. Rome had not been his personal area of work. But the congregation was just as

much on his heart as the Gentile congregations he had founded. He writes, “I long to see you” (Ro 1:11). At the end of the letter he fills half a chapter with greetings (Ro 16:3-16). With those verses the same foolish thought comes to the young exe-gete as with the genealogies—superfluous! But it is a glorious example by which fellowship in faith is demonstrated before our eyes as something desired by God and as a glorious blessing.—We live in the time of unions and reunions. Almost all who are of the same trade and business have regular meetings, whose goal is discussing common interests and also pleasure. But how much Christians always have to discuss with each other! Man is a ζῶον πολιτικόν. When the children of this world come together, they speak of what fills their hearts. So also Christians. Christians always have much to say to each other. Much is always occurring in the church which interests them. First, the church always experiences victories. It continually gains souls and new area. That is an interesting topic of conversation for Christians. That a Christian congregation had arisen in Rome was the object of conversation in the whole civilized world (Ro 1:8). The church also has continuing need. It is continuously attacked outwardly and inwardly. When Christians come together, the matter of their support does not fail.—And what a source of spiri-tual pleasure and spiritual strengthening flows in the mutual discussions of Christians! When on their journey to Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas reported in the Christian congregations about the conversion of the heathen, “this news made all the brothers very glad” (Ac 15:3). The apostle Paul teaches by word and example how Christian fellowship *strengthens* in faith. When he was led captive to Rome and came into the vicinity of Rome, the Christians of this metropolis set out to meet the apostle at “the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns,” two suburbs south of Rome. What impression did that make on the apostle? “At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and *was encouraged*” (ἐλαβε θάρσος = boldness, Ac 28:15). That is reported to us *about* the apostle Paul. He himself explicitly writes, “*I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith*” (Ro 1:11,12).—God grant that Christians zealously practice brotherly fellowship in faith and harvest its blessing! This point needs ongoing instruction and exhortation.

Luther states that Christ desires the believers to come together externally and confess the faith and teach:

When Christ adds words about *baptism* to the phrase, “Whoever *believes*,” that applies to the command about the external ministry in Christendom, as he combines both parts, “Teach all nations, baptizing them” (Mt 28:19). Thus Christ first shows that faith, of which the gospel preaches, must not remain secret and hidden, as if it were enough for each one, when he heard the gospel, to go away and *believe for himself alone*, and ought not confess his faith before others, but that it would become *manifest* not only where the gospel is preached but also received and believed, that is, where the church and Christ’s kingdom are in the world he wants to *bring us together and sustain* us through this divine sign of baptism. For if that were lacking and we were dispersed without *external assembly* and signs, then Christianity couldn’t be spread or maintained until the end. But now through this divine assembly he wants to tie us together so that the gospel goes further and further and through our confession others are brought to it...

And Christ has very elegantly ordered that his kingdom should go into all the world and among all creatures not in *many and various* ways, as previously among the Jews and as there must be so many variations of country and people, nations and languages, but *without* any ceremonies and external ordinances he added the simplest and most com-mon sign which is everywhere one and the same [namely, baptism]; just as the preaching is the same here and in every place throughout the world, large and small.<sup>25</sup>

On the words, “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:21), Luther writes:

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<sup>25</sup>St. L. 11:982,983.

The fruit that is to follow through and from this unity is *that Christ's Word is spread further* and received in the world as God's Word in which there is an omnipotent, divine, invincible power and salvation.

### **From the Discussions.**

In the discussions it was emphasized that the organization within the Christian congregation covers everything. When the congregations are told, they are willing to give everything the Lord needs.

It was further pointed out that the goal of external fellowship is also the glory of God, just as that is the final goal of all the divine arrangements. As the Savior personally only had in mind the glory of God, so he also wants God praised in and through the congregation. The proclamation of the gospel is the proclamation of the glory of God.

### **Thesis III.**

Because many Christians out of weakness of knowledge do not obey Christ's command to hold only to *his Word*, but contrary to Christ's prohibition have fellowship with false teachers, they separate themselves from the God-ordained fellowship with brothers in the faith. This has application only among Christians who cling to the church according to Christ's order, that is, confess the pure doctrine of the divine Word and avoid false teachers.

Whoever in the church teaches differently than the church is charged to teach, than is the divine ordinance and divine right in the church, he cuts up the bond of brotherly, ecclesiastical fellowship; and whoever holds to someone teaching differently separates himself from the brotherly fellowship in faith ordained by God. Even Christians take part in this sin out of the weakness of their knowledge. It is reported that Absalom undertook a very evil thing against his father David. Under the pretext of a worship service at Hebron, he set out from Jerusalem for Hebron in order there to set up a counter-government. What Absalom undertook and set in motion was revolution, an obviously godless act. And yet what do we read? "Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite *innocently, knowing nothing about the matter*" (2 Sa 15:11). They knew nothing about the sinfulness of Absalom's act. They participated in revolution without recognizing the godlessness of their act.

This also happens in the Christian church. There arise people who undertake evil things against Christ and his church. They teach differently than Christ has commanded be taught. Instead of Christ's Word they teach their own word. That means causing a revolution in the Christian church. Christ only wants *his Word* preached in the church. Therefore he rules his church and remains the only Lord in his church. Whoever in the church teaches his own word wants to knock Christ down from his throne. Now one would think that all Christians would turn away from those who introduce their own teaching alongside Christ's Word. All of Holy Scripture is already a warning against false teaching; and the Holy Spirit does not become tired of setting it down as something atrocious, as an abnormality, to urge human words alongside of God's Word. There are also the admonitions of Christ and his apostles. Christ himself admonishes, "Watch out for false prophets" (Mt 7:15), and, "False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles.... See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it" (Mt 24:24-26). And how often and how clearly do the apostles of Christ admonish and warn! Paul said to the elders of Ephesus, "From your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Ac 20:30). In his letter to the Romans the same apostle admonishes all Christians to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in their way that are contrary to the teaching they have learned, and tells them to *keep away* from those who teach differently.

The Lord says, "What has straw to do with grain?" (Jer 23:28)—that is, human words and God's Word. Thus a hodge-podge of straw and grain is not to be proclaimed in the church of God. Therefore God threatens the *prophets* who mix their own word into God's Word, "I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, 'The Lord declares'" (Jer 23:31). And he not only calls to his *people*, "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds" (Jer

23:16), but he also commands his people to punish with death unsparingly those prophets who teach something different than God's Word and are thus alienated from God's Word (Dt 13:1-5).—In the New Testament God does not deal with physical punishments. But also in the New Testament teachers who teach something different from God's Word in the church are *forbidden existence*; Christians are to have nothing to do with them but are to avoid them like the plague. The apostle Paul opposed false teachers wherever they were active. Obviously there were some teachers in Ephesus whom the apostle did not really trust with reference to the purity of doctrine. Therefore he wrote to Timothy to command some “not to teach false doctrines” (μη̄ ε̄περοδιδασκαλειν, 1 Ti 1:3). At the beginning of his letter to the Galatians he even twice spoke a curse on those teachers who taught a different gospel (Gal 1:6-10).—As all of Scripture is a revelation of the doctrine of Christ, so all of Scripture is at the same time *a polemic against false teachers*, that is, against those who teach something different than God's Word. Many, especially in our indifferentistic time, regard teaching something different than God's Word in the church to be something minor, even something natural. But according to Holy Scripture that is an abnormality, an atrocity. The Holy Spirit does not become tired, so to speak, of labeling it an abnormality and an atrocity.

Accordingly one would think that no Christian would cling to false teachers, but would be careful to avoid them. But what happens? As those two hundred men from Jerusalem went with Absalom to Hebron and participated in revolution in their simplicity, not knowing about the evil matter, so also Christians out of weakness in knowledge go into the revolutionary camp, since they *follow* false teachers instead of *fleeing* from them. How does the devil manage that? In various ways. He slanders pure doctrine and decorates the false doctrine with God's Word. Through lies and calumny he seeks to awaken a prejudice against the orthodox church. So, for example, the Roman Catholics slander the orthodox church that through our doctrine of justification, that God justifies without the works of the law only through faith, we promote *servicing sin*. The Calvinists slander that our doctrine of *universal grace* makes God into a powerless idol, because in fact not all people are saved. The synergists (Iowa and Ohio Synods) slander that according to our doctrine of conversion only by God's gracious working God does not want all people to be converted and saved, etc. Thus the false teachers arouse *prejudice* against the orthodox church. In many cases Christians are even detained in the camp of the false teachers because people appeal to “love.” It is to be loveless to condemn all deviant doctrines, and love is to be the highest of all commands. Thus what Scripture says happens, “By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people” (Ro 16:18). They slander the correct doctrine and seek to give false doctrine the appearance of Scripturalness. To do that they conceal [the truth] through human explanations, they cite Scripture passages which do not deal with the matter at hand, and the like.

What attitude should we take toward those who are in the heterodox camp and to whom we do not presume to deny Christianity? We have to testify to them that *they* have separated themselves from the brotherly fellowship in faith. To proclaim and cling to false doctrine is to make divisions in the church. And whoever holds to false teachers takes part in the division and separates himself from the brotherly fellowship in faith ordained by God. It is of course very common to blame the orthodox for causing division in the church, because they will not practice fellowship with heterodox churches. But those who dissolve ecclesiastical fellowship are the ones who teach differently than God's Word and who cling to those who teach differently. Thus the fact that dear children of God are found in heterodox fellowships ought *not* change our verdict and conduct toward heterodox congregations. We ought not approach them, but they ought to approach us. That is God's will and ordinance. We encourage Christians to know God's will and ordinance and act accordingly with our testimony against all false doctrine and those who cause divisions. In no case may we change over to heterodox fellowships, not even under the pretence that we only want to be connected with the children of God in the false camp. If we were to fall to them, we would by that act acknowledge the heterodox fellowship as having equal rights with the orthodox.

At our time especially people want to introduce “equality” into the Christian church, that is, orthodoxy is not to be the *only legitimate* position; rather it is to be *established* in the Christian church that the confessors and the deniers of scriptural doctrine recognize each other as having equal rights in the Christian church. Over in Germany unions have been formed whose express goal is to assure the representatives of the so-called liberal

theology equal rights in the state churches. The false teachers already *de facto* have almost equal rights; but they also want to have equal rights *de jure*. And so-called positive theologians, who still want to hold onto the basic truths of Christianity, have already declared their agreement with this. (So recently Seeberg in Berlin.) That is an unscriptural and impossible position. The idol Dagon cannot stand next to the ark of God, but must fall before it (1 Sa 5). Christianity in its essence is very *inclusive*: Christ is the Savior of *all* people, he purchased *all* with his blood; but just for that reason Christianity is also rigorously *exclusive*. Christ allows no savior alongside of himself, but says, “If you do not believe that *I* am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins” (Jn 8:24). Thus Christ recognizes no human words as equally justified with his Word in the Christian church, but says, “If you hold to *my* teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31,32). He gave his church the command, “Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20). Christ does not recognize the concept of equality. Whoever grants equality to false belief cannot himself earnestly believe Christ’s Word.

The Smalcald Articles state:

This being the case, all Christians ought to beware of becoming partakers of the godless doctrine, blasphemies, and unjust cruelty of the pope. On this account they ought to desert and execrate the pope with his adherents as the kingdom of Antichrist; just as Christ has commanded, Matthew 7:15: Beware of false prophets. And Paul commands that godless teachers should be avoided and execrated as cursed, Galatians 1:8; Titus 3:10. And 2 Corinthians 6:14 he says: Be ye not unequally yoke together with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with darkness? To dissent from the agreement of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a grave matter. *But divine authority commands all not to be allies and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty.*<sup>26</sup>

Thus according to our confession brotherly fellowship in faith is limited to those who confess the pure doctrine of the divine Word and avoid false teachers. The Apology states:

The entire Eighth Article has been approved, in which we confess that hypocrites and wicked persons have been mingled with the Church, and that the Sacraments are efficacious even though dispensed by wicked ministers, because the ministers act in the place of Christ, and do not represent their own persons, according to Luke 10:16: He that heareth you heareth me. *Impious teachers are not to be received or heard*, because these do not act any longer in the place of Christ, but are antichrists. And Christ says Matthew 7:15: Beware of false prophets. And Paul, Galatians 1:9: If any man preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed.<sup>27</sup>

The sacramentarians, among others, reproached Luther for being “all too obstinate and stubborn” and for “dissolving all love and unity in the Christian church,” because he would yield nothing in the article of the holy Lord’s Supper.

For (God knows), how we were obliged to hear that we possessed no Christian love, that we despised the ministers of Christ, grieved and confused the church, etc. There were no sinners on earth except us alone, and there were no saints in heaven except the fanatics alone. Among them there was nothing but the fire of love, among us nothing but the ice of mercilessness.<sup>28</sup>

He answered with the forceful words: “*A curse upon any love and harmony whose preservation would make it necessary to jeopardize the Word of God!*”<sup>29</sup> (*Maledicta sit caritas et concordia, propter quam conservandam periclitatur verbum Dei.*)

### From the Discussions.

In the discussions it was brought up that in our time among the fellowships which Christians must avoid are also to be listed the lodges.—

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<sup>26</sup>Tr 41,42, Trig., p. 517.

<sup>27</sup>Ap VII,VIII:47,48, Trig., p. 243,245.

<sup>28</sup>LW 38:293,295.

<sup>29</sup>LW 26:424,425.

In polemics we ought to consider that we also still have an old Adam in us; therefore we ought not fall upon our opponent in a haughty way, but rather meet him earnestly and decidedly but also in a humble and friendly way with a heartfelt prayer to God for him. We ought not seek to overcome our opponent with mere disputing, but above all with a clear testimony of the truth. We ought to strive to gain his confidence when we point to what is still true in him in order to lead him further and to bring him to conviction.

Teaching human doctrine alongside the Word of God is *abnormal*; it is against the nature of the gospel. The gospel is the happy news in which the merciful God shows the way of life to the sinner condemned to eternal damnation. It is in the nature of things that the one conscious of being beyond hope does not begin to meditate about whether or not the way shown in the gospel is the correct way, but *he simply lays hold of it without any brooding*. (A drowning person grasps also for a single straw.)—

Today we have special reasons to be vigilant about purity of doctrine. History shows, as Luther stressed, that the preaching of the gospel seldom has remained pure in one place longer than one person's memory. We have now had pure preaching for sixty years.—There are three things which especially lead to false doctrine: self-righteousness, human cleverness, and laying emphasis on church government. It is the last from which danger especially threatens us. Therefore we ought all to be properly concerned about *doctrine* so that we are properly *grounded* in doctrine. Then we can also watch over the purity of doctrine.

### The Essayist.

Various objections are raised against this thesis, e.g.: “One can hold to false teaching *externally* without approving of false teaching *in his heart*. One only takes from the sermons of false teachers what they still teach correctly.” Many in our time speak this way and act accordingly. When there is no orthodox congregation in a place, they join a heterodox congregation. To this it is to be said: Granted that this would be possible—although it is not possible—nevertheless Christians have the express command to keep away from all who bring a different doctrine than the apostolic doctrine. “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. *Keep away* from them!” (Ro 16:17). Here two things are said: (1) those who present a different doctrine than the apostolic doctrine cause divisions and scandals within the Christian church (they are the ones διχοστασίαισ καὶ σκάνδαλα ποιούντες). (2) How Christians are to act toward the people who do this: they are to *keep away* from them, not to hold to them but to separate *from* them (ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ’ αὐτῶν). God's command to Christians means not merely that they are not to agree with the false teachers in their hearts, but very explicitly just that they are to keep away from them *externally*. Specifically external church fellowship with false teachers is forbidden to Christians.

A further objection is this: “Many are false teachers only because of the weakness of their knowledge, and we ought to receive those who are weak in knowledge, not separate from them.” We receive those who are weak in faith, who don't claim to be *teachers*, and seek to cure their weakness through instruction. But we do not receive those who only present false doctrine because of the weakness of their knowledge as our *teachers*. God's ordinance in the church is that only those administer the teaching office who proclaim God's Word without any admixture of human doctrine. Whoever errs out of weakness does not belong in the pulpit, but under the pulpit.

### Thesis IV.

The sadder it is that so many Christians stay in heterodox camps and thus cause and help to maintain division and scandal in the church, all the more diligently and sincerely ought the Christians who are through God's grace in the orthodox camp to practice with each other brotherly fellowship in the faith and carefully avoid any disturbance of it, for the glory of God and for the highest needs of the world and the church.

The fact that many Christians stay in heterodox camps and thus separate from us externally is a *sad* fact. Why? We have already demonstrated that Christians do not belong in that camp, that they are in a fellowship which is not proper for Christians. According to God's will and ordinance Christians ought to stay where the gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are administered in keeping with the divine Word. Further, a heterodox fellowship is not proper for those Christians because, *insofar as they are Christians*, they are united



with us in faith and mind. In their hearts they believe in justification by grace for Christ's sake; and they are so minded that they would belong to the orthodox church if they were correctly instructed.

In view of these facts, our *public polemics* (e.g., in our ecclesiastical periodicals) ought always to be directed toward leading the children of God out of heterodox camps. They should be *clearly instructing, resolute, and spiritual*. Also our *private conversations* with the heterodox ought to be suitable for leading the heterodox into the fellowship of the orthodox church. Not only pastors but all orthodox Christians should be able to speak the truth not only to unbelievers but also to the heterodox. The apostolic admonition, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pe 3:15) applies not merely to pastors but to all congregational members. In this matter there is much neglect among the Christians who through God's grace are in the orthodox camp. When they should give an answer about the truth faith it is much too easy for them to say, "I'm no scholar; go to our pastor."

Great learning is not necessary for confessing and defending Christian doctrine. All of Christian doctrine, together with its proof from God's Word, is in Luther's *Small Catechism*. In all struggle and controversy about Christian doctrine, one only needs to remain with Christ's words, as they read. Christ's words are *clear*. Our Savior has not posed a *riddle* to us. But we must guard ourselves lest a *human interpretation* is put in the place of God's Word. For papists, Reformed, and all heterodox constantly put explanations (glosses) in place of the Word of God. What ill treatment has, e.g., the very clear word of God, "This is my body," to suffer from the Reformed in order to set aside and do away with the clear meaning of the words! (In his "Brief Confession concerning the Holy Sacrament," Luther enumerated the explanations of seven "holy spirits," to which he added the subterfuge of an eighth "young holy spirit."<sup>30</sup>) Thus the objection that the matter between us and those who teach differently has to do not with remaining in God's Word, but about various views and interpretations of the Word has no justification. We simply put ourselves *under* God's Word; those who do away with God's Word through their inter-pretation put themselves *over* God's Word. To be sure, in order to be able to remain in God's Word our Christians must diligently learn God's Word and diligently be occupied with God's Word, diligently promote the Catechism in their families, read appropriate books and periodicals, etc.

But the papacy and all kinds of other sects will, as Scripture foretells, *remain* in the church until Judgment Day. So also the sad fact will remain that *Christians* are held captive in heterodox fellowships and *we* remain *deprived* of their brotherly fellowship in faith. Christians who are in the orthodox church ought all the more diligently practice brotherly fellowship in faith with each other, both within their congregation and beyond their individual congregation.

Within the congregation the brotherly fellowship in faith is to be practiced above all in the *regular, public worship service*. Attendance at the public worship service is God's will and ordinance, as we have seen. Deficient attendance at the public worship service is the most dangerous and most harmful neglect of the brotherly fellowship in faith. Things are bad in a congregation where what people have coarsely called "church carelessness" is dominant. A so-called society life, no matter how active, cannot replace the divine ordinance of the public worship service. Also the *voters' assemblies* in which the local congregations carry out the business assigned them are God's ordinance and belong to the practice of brotherly fellowship in faith. The Christians of a place ought also diligently and gladly *to visit in a Christian way with each other*. Christians can have civic visits with worldlings. That is not sin. But Christians find comfort in visiting with brothers in the faith. They visit with worldlings about their concern for honest, secular business, etc. But they visit in a different way with brothers in the faith. Their brothers in the faith are the people with which they walk hand in hand on the narrow way through this evil world into eternal life. The poorest brother in the faith is closer to them than the richest and most distinguished worldling.

However, as we have seen, the brotherly fellowship in faith extends beyond the congregation. Conditions would be exceedingly despicable in *that* congregation which had no ecclesiastical interests beyond its own walls. Every local congregation ought to have a lively interest in the weal and woe of its sister

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<sup>30</sup>LW 38:296-298.

congregations. It is a divine precept that those who confess the same faith also heartily and sincerely recognize each other as brothers in the faith, pray for each other, heartily rejoice in the successes and welfare of sister congregations and sister fellowships, bear suffering in common, regard attacks on one part of the orthodox church as directed against the whole orthodox church and repulse them, etc.

Such fellowship is something *exceedingly glorious*. What joy when we find the same doctrine and the same faith among Germans, English, Negroes, Indians, Jews, etc.! What joy we have inwardly when we may acknowledge each other! And how we grieve the Holy Spirit in our hearts when we deny and abandon each other! It is hideous when someone denies his personal friend; but it is the pinnacle of an unworthy mindset when someone denies a brother in the faith.

That brings us to the *disturbances* of the brotherly fellowship in faith in our own midst. The devil incessantly seeks to disturb the brotherly fellowship of faith both in the congregation and beyond the congregations, between sister congregations, sister synods, etc. This disturbance occurs in various ways, but always for fleshly reasons. The *Holy Spirit* does not disturb the fellowship he has created. That the devil does when he lets the flesh do his dirty work; the flesh—which in Christians is in chains but not yet dead—is his ally. One way this disturbance occurs is that someone stands aloof from the public worship services or from the voters' assemblies, or separates himself completely from the congregation, because he has something against the pastor of the congregation or against part of the congregation or even against the whole congregation; thus he does this because of personal animosity. People even express this publicly, and instead of deciding the matter according to God's Word, they separate themselves. *In many cases, however, the devil begins the matter more subtly and dangerously*. Although the root of the problem is fleshly reasons, wounded pride, and personal bitterness, they don't want to admit that reason to themselves and others, but seek a reason in doctrine. Because it sounds better and more respectable, they accuse their congregation or their synod of false doctrine, and in order to obtain a material antithesis they set up a false doctrine and seek to gain followers. That is the way most of the divisions in the church have arisen from the time of the apostles down to our own days. The devil not only causes discord in the Christian church, but also seeks to give the appearance that he has done this out of a great conscientiousness, out of concern for the church and for the purity of doctrine; this can easily be demonstrated in the Novatians, the Arians, the Nestorians, the papists, the Reformed (Zwingli couldn't be recognized as equal to Luther), the Ohioans, the Iowans.

*There is no good reason for division and for staying separate from the orthodox church*. Every reason is in the area of the flesh. The best reason Scripture mentions is ignorance. The apostle Paul says of himself, "I acted in ignorance and unbelief" (ἀγνοῶν ἐποίησεν ἐν ἀπιστίᾳ, 1 Ti 1:13). This reason for staying separate from the orthodox church and for contending against the orthodox church has a place among many who have grown up in heterodox fellowships and have, so to speak, imbibed false explanations of certain Scripture passages with their mother's milk. But whoever has once known the true doctrine will find on more carefully investigating things that he has gotten into false doctrine from obviously fleshly reasons and has caused division in the Christian church. Especially in our time people think that even with an honestly Christian mindset and through earnest searching in Scripture, various doctrinal tendencies can thrive in the Christian church. But that is an error which has its basis in this that people do not regard Scripture to be the clear Word of God. As certainly as Scripture is clear, so certainly a person remains with the correct doctrine when he reads Scripture with an honestly Christian mindset and subjects himself to the Word of Scripture in simple faith.

Let us look at what *Scripture* says about the motives of those who teach differently than God's Word and thus cause division in the church. St. Paul writes of those who cause division and obstacles contrary to the doctrine of the apostles, "Such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people" (Ro 16:18).—Let us also here what Luther says on this point with reference to Ephesians 4:1-6:

For to cause discord and division in doctrine is the worst and most harmful scandal in the church; this the devil works at most intensely. And this commonly comes from some arrogant, obstinate, and ambitious heads who want to be something special, in order to contend for their own honor and praise; they cannot be regarded as equal to anyone; they think they would be disgraced if they were not

praised for having a more learned and greater spirit (which they certainly don't have) than others; they begrudge anyone honor, even when they see that he has greater gifts; out of envy, anger, hatred, or vengefulness against others they seek to rabble-rouse and get people dependent on them.<sup>31</sup>

If we want to be preserved from the dreadful sin of disturbing the brotherly fellowship in faith, then we must keep watch over our own fleshly, vengeful, proud, obstinate hearts. Here no one is *secure*. Whoever says: That can't happen with me, doesn't yet know his evil heart correctly. Experience teaches that people who not hypocritically but honestly confess pure doctrine and contend against false doctrine can become personally embittered. They give up that state of mind and soon become defenders of false doctrine and attack pure doctrine.

When is there a disturbance or even a dissolution of the brotherly fellowship in faith between sister congregations and sister synods? There is a very coarse disturbance of the brotherly fellowship of faith when a congregation *admits someone legitimately excommunicated* by another congregation. Likewise it is a coarse disturbance of the brotherly fellowship in faith when a congregation *refuses to review the process of church discipline* on another congregation or on individual Christians who have doubts about the excommunication pronounced. Likewise it is a coarse disturbance of the brotherly fellowship in faith when a congregation *pronounces a false excommunication*, and even *wants to maintain* it.—It might here be objected that this disturbance of the brotherly fellowship in faith can scarcely be avoided, since even Christians can only with difficulty agree on an excommunication. To this it is to be said that Christians who judge according to God's Word can in every case agree on whether or not a person should be excommunicated. The Lord does not indicate doubt but expresses certainty for the Christians judging and acting when he says, "Treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (Mt 18:17). But are there not many cases when even Christians judging calmly remain doubtful whether someone sins out of weakness or out of malice? Certainly. Such situations are not rare. But Christians are also united with reference to such doubtful cases, namely that an excommunication is never to be pronounced in doubtful cases. At the root of disagreement in judgment—under the assumption that people on both sides know the Christian doctrine of excommunication and church discipline—is fleshly loyalty [patriotism] to the congregation or synod. God's Word ought not be blamed, as if it were not a lamp for our feet and a clear light for our way also for practice in the church.—It is a gross disturbance when a congregation *seeks to take members away* from another congregation, or a synod *seeks to take members away* from another synod. They ought not appeal to the fact that each congregation and synod has special interests. The answer to that is that in the Christian church there are no special interests. All Christians and all Christian congregations form *one* spiritual body, and the weal and woe of one member concerns the whole body. All members of the spiritual body have only *one* interest, namely that the body of Christ be built up. Every special interest which is not subordinated to this universal interest is fleshly loyalty to congregation and synod. The apostle Paul teaches us in great detail about the common interest of all members in the body of Christ (1 Co 12:12-27).—The Synodical Conference has taken this position in the stipulations which are to govern the relationship of the synods to each other.<sup>32</sup>—Likewise it is self-evident that there is a disturbance of the brotherly fellowship in faith when a congregation or synod *receives as a brother someone* applying to it when the person *has broken off his brotherly relationship to a sister congregation or a sister synod and has not yet reestablished it*.—Finally, when someone *publicly attacks individual congregation members*, his whole *congregation*, or his whole *synod*, he has thus denounced the brotherhood of faith with them.

With reference to John 17:11,21, Luther writes about the *glorious blessing* of Christian fellowship and about the grave sin of disturbing that fellowship:

So now a Christian is defiant because he knows that when the devil attacks *him*, he is not attacking a finger but the *whole body*, that is, all the Christians in the world, and God and Christ in addition. Just as in the body, when your little toe is stepped on, your whole body wakes up, your eyes look cross,

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<sup>31</sup>Erlangen 9:290f.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. *Synodalhandbuch*, p. 165.

your nose is turned up, your hands are grasping, and every member wonders what's going on. For that is part of this unity, that there is no part *which lives and feels for itself alone* and doesn't live and have feelings for all the others, that is, for the whole body. Now if the least member of Christianity suffers, the whole body soon feels it and is in motion, so that they come together, bewail, and cry out; then our head, Christ, also hears and feels it. And even though he pauses a little, yet when he begins to look cross and to turn up his nose, he will not joke about it. For he says through the prophet Zechariah, "For whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye" (Zec 2:8)... We have a fine example of this in the history of St. Paul. When he persecuted the Christians and had helped to do away with Stephen, he thought he had torn out a little toe. But what did Christ in heaven say about that? He did not say, "Why do you pinch my little *toe*, or persecute my poor group?" but he said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Ac 26:14), just as if he had attacked Christ's person. Why? Because you cannot attack a member of the body without the head feeling it, and feeling it first. For all power for the body to feel and perceive comes from the head. This, I say, is the highest comfort in all the sufferings of Christians, whether they are assailed by the devil or attacked by the world, that they do not suffer alone but all of Christianity on earth, even all angels in heaven and Christ and the Father himself receive their suffering and share it; one cannot experience anything without all of them experiencing it. Whoever knows and believes this can bear and overcome all misfortune; and again nothing makes suffering or attacks so difficult and unbearable than when the heart feels that it suffers all alone, and sees no example or companions in the same suffering, as if it were peeled and left alone; all suffering of Christians appears that way to our flesh. Therefore faith must cling to this Word against its own feeling and the cries of the world; when the world attacks a Christian, it thinks it has him subdued, so that no one can help or rescue him; in the same way they bragged and triumphed over Christ when he hung on the cross. Look, that is the unity of Christians, which Christ has stated with these words. But no one can come to that point in any other way than that God upholds us (as he has said) in his name, that is, when we remain in the Word which we have received from Christ. *For the Word supports us so that we all remain under one Head* and cling to him alone, seeking no other holiness or anything of value before God than in him. In summary, through the *Word* we are incorporated into Christ so that everything he has is ours, and we can receive his as our own body, and on the other hand he must receive as his own everything we experience, so that neither world, nor devil, nor any misfortune can harm or vanquish us. For there is no power on earth strong enough to do anything against *this* unity. But the devil is busy with destroying this bond and through his guile and tricks *tearing us from the Word*. When that happens he has already won. For *apart from the Word there is no longer any unity, but only dissension, innumerable sects and hordes*, which he throws among them with his nets and cords, that is, human teachings, so that each one seeks holiness in his own works, etc.... What more blessed thing could anyone wish than to come *into this fellowship or brotherhood* and become a member of this *body*, which is called Christendom? This is a body to which God has given himself with all his blessings as its own. In summary, it is a powerful lady and empress in heaven and on earth; if she but speaks a word, devil and world, death and hell must fall at her feet. For who wants to pull down or harm a man who is so defiant? He knows that if he has the least suffering, then heaven and earth, all angels and saints must cry out. If a sin attacks him, which wants to frighten his conscience, bite, afflict, and threaten him with devil, death, and hell, then God says to the whole pile of them: Dear sin, leave him unbitten, death unchoked, hell undevoured. But that requires faith, for it appears completely different to the eyes and reason of the world, in fact just the opposite.<sup>33</sup>

We now carefully avoid any disturbance of the brotherly fellowship in faith, and rather practice it as best we can "*for the glory of God and for the highest needs of the world and the church.*" In many passages

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<sup>33</sup>St. L. VIII:806f,831.

Scripture speaks about the glorious goal of the brotherly fellowship in faith of Christians and of the harmfulness of disturbing it. In his highpriestly prayer Christ implores for his church “they all of them may be one ... in us” (in the Father and in the Son) “*so that the world may believe that you have sent me*” (Jn 17:21). And in the same prayer, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let *the world know that you sent me* and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:22,23). It makes a powerful impression on the world when Christians unanimously testify in word and deed about salvation in Christ. The Acts of the Apostles reports, “All the believers were *one* in heart and mind.... With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all” (Ac 4:32,33). “And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number” (Ac 5:12-14).

If, on the other hand, the world sees discord among the Christians, they are scandalized and strengthened in their unbelief. The same is to be said about the *heterodox*. If they see unity and heartfelt brotherhood in the orthodox church, then that can become the means which leads them to heed the testimony of the truth and to come over into the camp of the orthodox church. If, on the other hand, they see those who boast of their orthodoxy biting and devouring one another, that can cause them to revile God’s glory and God’s Word and to stay separated from the orthodox church. If anyone needs convincing about the scandal caused by the disturbance of the brotherly fellowship in faith, let him only heed the rejoicing of the Roman Catholics about the discord among the Protestants; Luther’s lament about the defection of the sacramentarians; the gloating [Schadenfreude] of the established church about the discord among the independent churches; the rejoicing of those in the General Synod, the Iowa Synod, and the Ohio Synod when they think they are seeing dissension within the Synodical Conference.

And what harm would be done by the disturbance of the brotherly fellowship in faith in our own midst! “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Gal 5:15).

That which is necessary to maintain unity is this: “*Clothe yourselves with humility*” (1 Pe 5:5).

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It was resolved to leave the discussion of the fourth thesis out of the record. The essay was received and the essayist was voted the heartfelt thanks of the Synodical Conference.