

Synod and Congregation

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What is the relation between Synod and Congregation? To be specific: What has the Word of God to say about them? Is the one, as is sometimes maintained, a divine institution, while the other is a mere human arrangement? Does the one exist by divine command, while the other was developed by men in their Christian liberty? Does the one act with divine authority, which must be obeyed at the peril of one's salvation, while the other has nothing but human agreement to back up its decisions—decisions which may therefore be ignored at will, if they seem to you to be unsuitable or inconvenient?

Both are organizations through which the Church of Christ on earth operates—so much is clear and admitted by all—but what is their *raison d'être*? Specifically: What is their mutual relation?

I.

Both terms, congregation and synod, are collective nouns, each denoting a group of people; the same persons at the same time being members of some congregation and of a synod, membership in a synod, for all practical purposes, being restricted to the members of certain congregations.—Now, when dealing with organizations a question of vital importance arises: What are the *qualifications for membership*?

As to synods and congregations, both are organizations of Christians. Only professed Christians may hold membership in either. A professed non-Christian is by that very fact excluded from either and from both.

Christ in Matthew 16 spoke about building His Church. There He also gave us a picture of the material that He will gather and use in erecting His building, His Church. He asked some questions of His disciples. The first one is very significant. He asks: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (vs. 13). And then pointedly He inquires about the opinion of His disciples concerning Himself. He asks: "But whom say ye that I am?" (vs. 15).

The material that He will use in building His Church are persons who take and hold a certain attitude over against Him. Their attitude over against Him is the deciding factor. Nothing else is required. Their attitude must be of a very specific conviction. They must have a clear conception concerning Him, the Son of Man, concerning His person and concerning His work. Only people who hold the correct attitude toward Him can qualify for membership in His Church. People who do not stand on that conviction are unfit.—What is the attitude which Christ demands?

The previous verses (of the chapter referred to) speak of persons who rejected Him as a deceiver and blasphemer, if He would not provide credentials such as they demanded: "a sign from heaven" (vs. 1). He refused to comply: "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah" (vs. 4). They had witnessed His miracles, sufficient in quality and sufficient in number to establish Him as what He claimed to be, their promised Messiah. Since they refused to accept these signs at full value,

their refusal plainly demonstrated their deliberate unbelief. They stood self-condemned.—Their demand of a special sign from heaven was unwarranted. “And he left them and departed” (vs. 4).—They were not material of a type which He could use in building His Church.

There were other people who did not reject Jesus out right. They rather highly respected Him and in their own estimation gave Him all due honor. The disciples, in answer to Jesus’ first question reported: “Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias or one of the prophets” (vs. 14). That sounds very complimentary. But not only were their opinions divided, no, in every case they fell short of the mark. Jesus could not consider them as suitable material for building His Church.

When Simon Peter answered in the name of the Twelve: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (vs. 16), then Jesus announced that out of people holding that faith He would build His Church, which would be able to with stand the fiercest onslaughts of hell. “Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (vs. 18).

Summary of Peter’s confession: Jesus is not a deceiver. He really is what He claims to be. He is more than any human representative of God, no matter how high a rank he may hold. Jesus is the very Son of God, come into the world to fulfill the promise of God given in the Old Testament regarding His Messiah, whom He would send to undo the damage which Satan had done to the human race when he seduced Adam to sin. He is the Messiah of God, come to destroy the works of the devil and to restore the blessing which we had lost through our fall into sin.

This is the attitude of faith, a faith which commits us fully into the hands of Jesus as the promised Savior. This faith qualifies people for membership in the Church. As believers they can be used by Jesus in building His Church; in fact, this faith not only fits them for membership, it actually makes them members of His Church.

Here the question is often raised as to whom Jesus may have had in mind when He said, “Upon this rock I will build my Church.” Who or what is “this rock”? There are many people, not only Roman Catholics, who refer this term to Peter. But could Jesus really mean to say that Peter is the rock on which, or on whom, He will build His Church? This is not very likely, no matter how much you may tone down the thought that in that case Jesus would in some way and to some extent have built His Church on a man, a mere human. But what did He mean with “this rock”? Jesus used two words for rock. To His disciple Simon He gave the name Peter (*petros*, masc. a rock), but in the phrase “this rock” He used the form *petra* (fem. a ledge). This in itself would seem to indicate that He had two different objects in mind, distinguishing “this rock” from the person of Peter. Against this, however, the objection is raised that Jesus spoke Aramaic to His disciples. In Aramaic the word is Cephias, which does not indicate any distinction in gender. Yet, however that may be, the fact remains that Matthew in recording Jesus’ words, or rather the Holy Ghost through Matthew, used the two forms of the Greek word. It is clear that Matthew understood Jesus to make a distinction; and the Holy Ghost by inspiration had him record the event in that sense.

But why not listen to Peter’s own version, and learn from him how he understood the words of Jesus? He speaks about the matter in his First Epistle, in chapter 2. For “rock” he uses another word, *lithos*, which means a building block. He says: “To whom (namely, the Lord) coming, as unto a living stone (*lithos*),...ye also, as lively stones (*lithoi*) are built up a spiritual house” (vss. 4-5). By using the modifier “living” (“lively”) he indicates that he does not want the word “stone” to be understood literally of an actual ordinary stone; but that he is speaking figuratively. He clearly identifies Jesus as the foundation stone, and the believers as the building

material. That is the way in which Peter himself understood the words of Jesus, and that is the way in which the Holy Spirit had Peter record this in his letter.

The basic factor, then, in determining the proper qualification for membership in the Church is the attitude of faith in Christ Jesus as the divine Savior of the world. No other qualification is required. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). And Paul could write to the Corinthians: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2).

The importance of Jesus Christ in connection with the Church, the being and the well-being of the Church, and the importance of the proper attitude of the members toward Him, is forcefully set forth by Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians. The small congregation in Colossae was troubled by some serious errors. They are not mentioned by name in the letter; but from some directions which Paul gave the Colossians, from some of his instructions and warnings, we can recognize the nature of the error. It must have been a mixture of certain Judaizing ideas with incipient Gnosticism.

We might expect that Paul would do his work of trying to help the Colossians, of trying to rescue them from the impending danger, of trying to restore and strengthen their faith, by attacking and denouncing the error of the Gnostic Judaizers, pointing out the dangerous implications of their system. He does not do so. Rather, he begins by making Christ big before the eyes of his readers and by leading them to see Christ in all His glory as their Savior.

We take a brief look at chapter 1:12-23. Paul begins by saying that in Jesus Christ we have redemption through His blood, namely the forgiveness of our sins. He calls Jesus Christ the *eikon*, i.e. an exact copy, a duplicate of God; he calls Him the Firstborn before all creation. He emphasizes that all things were created by Him, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, even the highest thrones and principalities. He calls Him the Head of the Church, being the firstborn from the dead. In Him dwells all fullness, and thus by His sacrificial blood which He shed on the cross He reconciled all things, He restored them to their original, but lost, relation to Himself, a relation of serene peace and fellowship. His work includes and benefits everybody, be they the inhabitants of earth or of heaven. Then addressing himself to his readers directly he reminds them that, although they formerly were aliens and enemies by their wicked works and by their evil mind, yet by His death Christ restored them, having re-established peace, and presenting them holy and unblamable and unreprouchable in His sight.

If the Colossians recognize that Christ means this to them, then they will be practically immune to the lures of Judaizing Gnosticism; and if they have actually been infected by the error, they will be able to shed it again.

Thus Paul applied to the Colossians the question which Jesus addressed to His disciples: Whom do you say that I am? And he led them to answer in the spirit of Peter: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

But how do people acquire this proper attitude of faith toward Christ?

Jesus reminded Peter: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Peter's own flesh and blood was Jewish flesh and blood; and Jewish flesh and blood was looking for a Messiah entirely different from what Jesus was, about the direct opposite. They were looking for a political champion who would restore political independence to their nation, and would win for them temporal blessings, and would elevate them to a position of respect and honor among the nations of the world. When Jesus called them to repentance and humility, they rejected Him. Were they not God's chosen people, whose piety merited His

recognition and reward? That was the specific form of Jewish flesh and blood. It blinded them and thoroughly prevented them from recognizing their long-expected Messiah when He arrived. But their utter inability to recognize the Savior applies to human flesh and blood in general. Without the revelation from God Himself no man can take the proper attitude of faith toward Christ, and thus become a member of His Church. Just as no one who is speaking by the Holy Ghost can call Jesus accursed, so no one can call Him his Lord but by the Holy Ghost (I Cor. 12:3). "Faith cometh by hearing." Jesus told Peter that he owed his faith in Him as his Savior to the revelation from "His Father which is in heaven."

This faith in Jesus brings a new life principle into the heart. The truth of Christ the Savior cannot be filed away in the mind cold as just a bit of new information. If the truth that Jesus is the Christ is treated as being merely an historical fact among many others, it is far from being the required qualification for Church membership. As a living germ it will permeate the whole spiritual part of man, his thinking, striving, feeling. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creature. He has undergone a second birth. This will show itself in his whole speech and conduct. He will lead a new life, not because he is afraid of some punishment if he fails to do so, nor because he expects some remuneration for behaving well; no, he does so because he is not under the Law, but under grace. He has been reborn by the Spirit, and grace has made a new man out of him. The Law has now been written in his heart. The Ten Commandments are no longer a grievous burden laid on him, he cherishes them as a welcome guide for his behavior.

Such are the people who constitute the membership of Christ's Church.

But the above is only a part of the picture.

As long as the members of Christ's Church are living here on earth, although they have the right attitude toward Christ, believing in Him as their Savior, they still have also the former sinful disposition in their heart, inherited by birth from their parents. It is called the flesh, and is known also as the old man or the old Adam. Jesus speaks about it when He argued that the things which we eat do not defile us. They do not go farther than into our physical part, into our digestive organs; they do not touch the soul. The seat of trouble and defilement is our heart: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). These are things which actually defile a man. And these things are still in the heart, although a man be born again into actual faith in his Savior. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:1). A Christian must constantly battle against the wicked thoughts that continue to spring up in his own heart to plague him. St. Paul says that every member of Christ's Church must ever struggle to "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22). In the Colossians passage cited above he even uses the expression that we must "mortify," i.e. put to death our "members which are upon the earth" (vs. 5). To indicate that this is not so simple a thing, but a very painful process, he uses the term "crucify." "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would...They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:17,24).

Paul paints a vivid picture of the agony we endure in the attempt to subdue our flesh, when in Romans 7 he grants us a look into his own heart and tells us about the constant fierce struggle going on there against the old Adam. He calls the old Adam the "law of sin." He complains: "That which I do I allow not; but what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (vs. 15). He repeats this thought: "For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I

would not, that I do” (vs. 19). This bitter struggle drives him to sigh: “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (vs. 24).

This is the other side of the picture. All members of Christ’s Church believe in Him as their Savior and strive to lead a life pleasing to Him, but at the same time there is present in their hearts this old sinful depravity, fiercely trying to spoil their attitude towards Christ, their faith in Him. This struggle never ceases as long as we are living on this earth. Five years after St. Paul had written to the Romans about his internal troubles, five years, the greater part of which he spent behind prison walls, he wrote a letter to the Philippians, in which he complained: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (chap. 3:12).

The picture becomes still gloomier. There is not only this bitter struggle internally plaguing the Christians; they are at the same time exposed to forces attacking them from without. We are still living in the world. The world, as St. John says, is dominated by the “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (I John 2:16). These things exert their lure also on the Christians, and they find it difficult to resist. But because the Christian tries to fight down those lusts, he loses standing with the world. The world refuses to recognize him, it hates him. St. Peter says: “They think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you” (I Pet. 4:4).

Thus the world, both with its lure and with its enmity, presents a constant threat to the Christian’s faith.

Another trait must be added, to complete the picture. It is a very serious thing, but we need not devote many words to it. We quote I Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

Such are the members of the Church: people exposed to dangers from without and within, yet clinging in faith to Christ as their Savior, and doing this with triumphant joy, as Paul encourages us: “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. 4:4). Paul himself concludes his complaint about the—often losing—struggle he wages against his flesh with the words: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25).

II.

The picture of the members of Christ’s Church on earth which we briefly sketched in the foregoing gave us a pretty clear indication already of *their needs*. What do Christians require because of their double nature? We shall now take a little closer look.

In Romans 6 St. Paul reminds his readers that in their Baptism they were brought into very close and most intimate connection with the death of Christ. Christ died in their stead. His death was actually their death, because He had substituted for them and taken their place. Now in their Baptism, and by means of this sacrament, that substitution of Christ was sealed to them personally. Paul writes: “Know ye not that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (vs. 3). Of this fact he then makes the application: “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together (the word which Paul here uses means literally, we have become grown together—Stoeckhardt: *verwachsen*, we have become joined to Him, have become one nature) in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (vss. 4-5).

In the letter to the Colossians he says the same thing about the meaning of our Baptism. He tells his readers that they were “buried with Christ in baptism, wherein ye are also risen with him through the faith of the operation of God who raised him from the dead” (chap. 2:12). Then in a twofold application he shows the Colossians what need is indicated by the twofold meaning of their Baptism. In verse 20 he says: “Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances...after the commandments and doctrines of men?” The idea that we in some way or measure have to earn our own salvation is detrimental to our faith, which rejoices that Christ’s death is our death and has completely rid us of our guilt, yes, has made us the free children of God.

Then in chapter 4: 1, he enlarges on the second application: “If ye then were risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” And he adds in verse 4: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

This, then, is what the members of Christ’s Church on earth need: their hearts, their thoughts, their desires, their cares, their deeds must become more and more detached from the things on earth; and their eyes must become more firmly fixed on things in heaven in a living hope and confidence.

What this means in a practical way, how their needs can be taken care of, Paul discusses in Colossians 3. After having pointed out the need he continues: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (vs. 16). Everything the members of the Church may need for further development is richly supplied in the word of Christ. The word of Christ will strengthen their faith, drawing them away from the entanglement in things of this earth, and fixing ever more firmly their sole attention on the things above where Christ is. Paul then also mentions various ways in which the word of Christ may be applied: “Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

This instruction of Paul, given to the Colossians, agrees with the instruction which Jesus gave to His believing disciples. “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him: If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31,32). Similar admonitions may be found in Matthew 7:24; Luke 8:21; John 5:24; 10:16. We also recall Jesus’ repeated exhortation, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 11:15; 13:9; Mark 7:16; also Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:8,13,22).

Only by hearing the word of Christ—regularly attentively—can the members of the Church grow in knowledge and understanding, only by the Word can they preserve their faith and persevere. If they neglect to hear the Word, their faith will languish and eventually die. They will fall prey to their enemies. Just as new-born babes need milk for nourishment and growth, and have a craving for milk, so believers need the pure milk of the Word. As they grow in faith, the very same Word will provide them also with more solid food. The need for the Word continues. And just as babes have a natural craving for milk, just so faith by its very nature has a longing for the Word. If a child has no desire for milk, that is a sure sign of sickness, so also faith that is indifferent to the Word is not in a normal condition. It is diseased and in danger of dying. Normally it will seek the opportunity of hearing the Word.

It will be sufficient to mention in this connection two of the Psalms which extol the value of the Word far nourishing, strengthening, increasing, guiding and directing faith, Psalm 19 and 119. From the latter we quote a few verses. “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver” (vs. 72). “My soul fainteth for thy salvation; but I hope in thy word” (vs. 81). “Unless thy law had been my delights, I should have perished in mine

afflictions” (vs. 92). “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (vs. 103). “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (vs. 105).

As these few verses from Psalm 119 clearly indicate, a Christian realizes his need for hearing the Word of God. He will seek opportunity to satisfy this need. There is another need. Just as God has given us His Word for the purpose of nourishing our faith, so has He also instituted a special sacrament for the same purpose, the Sacrament of the Altar. In the night in which Jesus was betrayed, the night in which the Old Testament types and prophecies came to their fulfillment, the night from which onward the real blessings, prefigured in Old Testament types, would be dispensed directly, in this night Jesus took bread, and blessing it gave it to His disciples with the solemn announcement that therewith He was giving them His very body to eat, and that with the cup He was giving them His blood to drink. It was His very body which was given into death as a sacrifice for our sins, His blood, shed for the remission of our sins. Eating and drinking these elements of our redemption should serve the purpose of sustaining our remembrance of Him.

The Supper was instituted to supply a need which we Christians have. And just as we by our Christian nature are eager to hear the Word, so will we also be eager to avail ourselves of the Sacrament.

We can look at our need from another angle. To the Colossians Paul wrote that they should teach and admonish one another. Yes, we need the fellowship and the support of our brethren. When you are alone, your thoughts may easily wander off in the wrong direction. When you are alone, and there is no one to check your wrong ideas before they go too far, you may become so hopelessly entangled in your error that it becomes practically impossible to extricate you, and that you make corrections, even if some one tells you the truth. Such is the power of error. We need the companionship and support of brethren to keep us from falling into error.

We need the support of brethren also in our struggle against temptation. We need brotherly support in our afflictions. When our eyes are dimmed by the grief and sorrow which we endure, we easily forget about the goodness of our God and become despondent. We need brotherly comfort to keep up our spirits and our hope.

We need our brethren to assist us in praising God in word and deed. Paul writes to the Colossians about singing. He is not speaking about solo-singing. He has joint singing in mind, community singing. They are to sing from the heart to the praise of God, but by such singing also teaching and admonishing one another.—He is thinking also about our work of sanctification. He writes: “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (chap. 3:17).

As Christians we have various needs for nourishing our faith, sustaining it and growing in it. We have need of the opportunity to hear the Word of God. We have need of the opportunity to receive the Lord’s Supper. We have need of the support of brethren, of their cooperation, their comfort, their warning, their admonition, their encouragement.

This might be carried out much more in detail, but let these few remarks suffice for our present purpose.

III.

To the Christian have been given also some *special assignments*.

To mention one. The very general commandment of love was by Christ specifically applied to the mutual relation between Christians. They should practice it in the form of brother-

love. Jesus told His disciples: “This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). And He repeated in verse 17: “These things I command you, that ye love one another.” Because of this new application Jesus even called it a “new commandment.” “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). To practice this specific form of love, brother-love, is a very important assignment. Jesus declares this to be a distinguishing mark of His disciples, which even the unbelieving world will not be able to ignore, of which it must needs take cognizance. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

We add a few admonitions as we find them in the Epistles here and there. To the Romans Paul wrote: “Be kindly affectioned one to another” (chap. 12:10). He adds: “With brotherly love, in honor preferring one another.” This characteristic of brother-love—that we consider our brother as more important than ourselves—Paul repeated in his Epistle to the Philippians: “Fulfil ye my joy that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind...in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (chap. 2:2,3).

The assignment of brotherly love is really so self-evident that Paul says to the Thessalonians: “As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (I Thess. 4:9). But he adds: “We beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more” (vs. 14). And Hebrews 13:1 admonishes: “Let brotherly love continue.” John tells us what this means: “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (I John 3:18).

Love is not only the fulfillment of the Law (Rom. 13:10); it is that which gives value to the exercise of the various gifts of the Holy Spirit; it is something without which the most sparkling works are worthless, no matter how serviceable and beneficial they may appear in themselves (I Cor. 13). Love is the “bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14), and the organ by means of which faith operates and manifests itself (Gal. 5:6).

Besides this general assignment of an understanding and active brother-love Christians have same specific assignments. One is that they confess their faith in the Lord before men. No doubt, Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 10 come to mind: “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (vss. 32,33).—Such act of confession is very closely connected with faith. Faith will express itself in confession, and thus confession is an indication of the presence of faith. St. Paul twice couples the two in a single statement. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9,10). In II Corinthians 4:13f. Paul quotes from Psalm 116, and applies the Word to himself and his colaborers: “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, *I believed, and therefore have I spoken*, we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.”

The importance of confession appears very clearly in connection with the work of the Apostle John in Ephesus. At his time there was a heretic, by the name of Cerinthus, disturbing the Christians in Ephesus. This man Cerinthus taught that Jesus was not the Son of God. He maintained that Jesus was only the natural son of Joseph and Mary. He held that when Jesus was baptized by John, the Holy Spirit descended on him from heaven and remained with him till the beginning of his last great suffering on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. At that time the

Spirit left Jesus again, and thus the one who was crucified and died was the mere man born of Mary and Joseph. During the intervening years (between His Baptism and His crucifixion) Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, performed miracles and revealed and proclaimed the heavenly Father;—but then suffered and died as a mere man.

That was a faith-destroying error. To guard the Christians against it John wrote to them: “Beloved children, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (I John 4:1). How should they try the spirits? He wrote: “Hereby know ye the spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (More exactly and more pointedly the translation of the Greek should read: “that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh”). John continues: “And every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (vss. 2, 3). He adds the comforting invitation: “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (vs. 15). And the warning: “Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father (but only) he that acknowledges the Son, hath the Father also” (chap. 2:23).

Thus it is an assignment for a Christian not only to confess his own faith, but also to check the confession of others. A person’s confession in word and deed is the only means we have of recognizing a believer and of distinguishing between believers and unbelievers.

A very important and comprehensive task assigned to all Christians is the preaching of the Gospel. We are to go into all the world, we are to teach all nations and to bring them to Christ as His disciples, we are to preach the Gospel to every creature.

If we look at the field, it covers the world far and near, North and South, East and West, it covers the islands as well as the continents, it takes in cities, villages, and the countryside, hills and valleys, plains and mountains, deserts and arable lands.—It includes all people of every kindred, color, and race. It includes rich and poor, civilized and savage, educated and illiterate. It includes schools and hospitals and nursing homes. We should bring the Gospel to children, to adults, to teen-agers, to the hoary-haired; at home and abroad. We are to do it in person or through representatives.

Those who are to preach the Gospel, be it to us or for us, must be trained for their work. How? Jesus Himself set us an example. The Apostles whom He would send into all the world were first gathered about Him. They accompanied Him for some three years. They observed Him in His work, and heard Him teaching the people. They frequently asked Him for special interpretation of some of His parables. Jesus at times retired with them to some secluded place for further instruction and training.

Paul instructed Timothy, who was at that time serving as a sort of superintendent over the churches in Ephesus and vicinity (cf. I Tim. 1:3; II Tim. 1:6; I Tim. 4:14), that he should train men for the ministry, as he himself had been trained by Paul. “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2). He devotes the whole chapter from which we just quoted verse 2 to impress on Timothy the proper training which future pastors must receive. He warns Timothy not to lay hands too hurriedly on any one for ordination, but to let those who desire the office of a bishop first be tested and proved; else Timothy might become a “partaker of other men’s sins” (I Tim. 5:22; 3:10).

Much more might be said on this assignment to Christians, but there are too many points yet to be discussed, that we probably had better move on.

IV.

So far we have been speaking about the individual Christians, their nature and qualifications, their needs, and the tasks assigned to them. Let us now take a look at the Christians collectively, under the heading *the Church*.

The Greek word for Church is *ekklesia*.

According to the etymology and original usage of the word it means an assembly, a gathering of citizens called out of their homes to attend a political meeting.

In this sense the word occurs in Acts 19. The story is that of a riot in Ephesus, raised by the silversmith Demetrius against the Apostle Paul. Verse 41 tells us that “when he (the town clerk) had thus spoken, he dismissed (i.e. adjourned) the assembly.” It had been an unlawful assembly, in which “some cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together” (vs. 32). It was an assembly so illegal, the town clerk said, that they might be charged with “uproar” on account of it, and they would have no good cause to state as an excuse against the charge (vs. 40). The word *ekklesia* is used three times for this “assembly” (in vss. 32, 39, and 41).

By Stephen the same word is used for the whole people of Israel. This was in his address before the Jewish Council, which rushed him out of the city and stoned him. Acts 7:38 reads: “This (Moses) is he that was in the church (i.e. the assembly of Israel) in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai.”

A few times the word *ekklesia* is used by Paul for a meeting of Christians, assembled for divine service. In I Corinthians 11:18 he says: “First of all, when ye come together in the *church*, I hear that there be divisions among you.” Assembled to partake of the Sacrament which was instituted, among others, to cement the unity of the believers, they allowed their party spirit to display divisions among them.—Again in chapter 14, where he speaks about the proper way of using the particular gifts of the Holy Spirit, he says that he himself when he is alone speaks with tongues more than they all, “yet in the *church* I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” (vs. 19).—Again in verses 34 and 35 he says: “Let your women keep silence in the *churches*...for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” He is speaking about the prayer and worship meetings of the congregation in contrast to conversations “at home” (vs. 35).

“Assembly” is the original meaning of *ekklesia* and the word never seems to have lost that meaning completely, when applied to the totality of Christians or to a partial grouping of them.

In an earlier part of our study we saw already how, according to Jesus’ words, people qualify for membership in His *ekklesia* by faith in His redemption. Accordingly Paul uses the phrase: the “churches of saints” (I Cor. 14:33), the assemblies composed of saints (forgiven sinners). In the salutations of his letters he sometimes spells this out more definitely. For instance, in I Corinthians 1:2 he adds to the word “church” the explanation: “to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” In I Thessalonians 1:1 he explains church as an assembly “which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Similarly in II Thessalonians. Sometimes he does not even use the word church, but simply addresses the group as Christians: “To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints” (vs. 7). Or: “To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (vs. 1). Or: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi” (vs. 1). Or: “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae” (vs. 1).

Jesus said: “My church.” Accordingly Paul writes to the Romans: “The churches of *Christ* salute you” (chap. 16:16); and in Galatians 1:22 he speaks of “the churches of Judea

which were *in Christ*.”—Often such assemblies are simply called “the churches of God.” So in Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 11:16,22.—Often the word *ekklesia* is used without any modifier, the context showing that a group of Christians is meant. This occurs also in one letter salutation, in that to the Galatians. To understand a group of Christians when speaking of an *ekklesia* became so common that the word “church” could even be used as a class name. In warning the Corinthians against giving offence to anybody Paul mentions three different classes of people: “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (I Cor. 10:32).

From Jesus’ word in Matthew 16, “On this rock I will build my church,” we can easily see that He has the whole number in mind of those who obtain forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through Him. He is there not speaking of a mixed group, some believers, some scoffers, some hypocrites, but of such people only who accept Him as the promised Messiah. Moreover, He does not limit the believers as to space or time. Just as He later directed His Apostles to go into all the world with His Gospel message, so also His Church will be found in all the world, wherever the Gospel wins adherents. And just as He could say that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, so the Church extends backward to include the very first believers in His sacrificial death, Adam and Eve. It embraces the total number of believers, anywhere at any time, and is co-extensive with this totality. If we speak of the Church of a given time, e.g. the Church of the Middle Ages, of the Reformation, of the time of the Enlightenment, it is the universal Church as it manifested itself in that specific era. The same applies to space. If we speak of the Church of Europe or of America, of Arizona or of Wisconsin, of Tucson or of Thiensville, it is always the universal Church of Christ, that one Church which Christ promised to build, as it happens to come to the fore in a certain locality.

The Church, being built by the Gospel, manifests itself by the use of the Gospel, by hearing and by proclaiming it. Word and Sacrament are thus known as “marks of the Church.” It manifests itself also by calling on the name of the Lord. Paul in First Corinthians identified the Church as those “that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (chap. 1:2).—Ananias uses the same mark in identifying the Church, when he hesitated to go to Saul (Paul). He explained to the Lord: “He (Saul) hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name” (Acts 9:14). But the Lord quieted his fears when He in turn identified Paul as a member of His Church by saying, “Behold, he prayeth.”

All local groups of people, then, which show the identifying marks of the Church, manifest thereby the presence of the universal Church of Christ (called the *Una Sancta*), and are themselves also simply called churches (in the singular or in the plural), literally, assemblies.

V.

The *Una Sancta* embraces both the Church triumphant in heaven and the Church militant on earth. We are concerned with the latter. Christ has a Church here on earth.

In His high-priestly prayer Christ voiced also this request: “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). His believers are in the world, though not of the world. Being in the world and being required to carry out the task assigned to them in the world, they must lead their life and carry out their assignment in accordance with the natural conditions obtaining on earth. They have to use this world. Yet, while using it, they must be careful not to abuse it (cf. I Cor. 7:31). They must not love this world, but must avoid its lusts (I John 2:15). They must not fashion themselves according to their former lusts of ignorance (I Pet. 1:14). “Be not conformed to this world, but be

ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof” (Ps. 24:1; I Cor. 10:26). Then it would be wrong to denounce any of the natural matters and forces of the world and their use as sinful in themselves, and while living here on earth to insist on any ordinances like those of the Gnostics: “Touch not, taste not, handle not” (Col. 2:21). “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink” (Rom. 14:17). “Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (I Cor. 10:31).

All of this is implied when Jesus prays His Father not to take His believers out of this world. The Church is to live in this world, using all the material, physical, and mental facilities which God has bestowed, and all the forms of individual and communal life with their ordinary rules and regulations which God in His creation has ordained for people on earth. Paul sums it up very briefly, but comprehensively: “All is yours” (I Cor. 3:21). “And ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (vs. 23).

What are our needs? We repeat: We need to hear the Word of God, we need to receive the Lord’s Supper, we need the support, the instruction, the counsel, the exhortation, the warning, the encouragement of our brethren. What are our assignments? We are to preach the Gospel, we are to practice brotherly love, particularly to those who are weak, in danger from temptation and error. How are we to supply our needs? What method are we to employ in carrying out our assignments? We scan the New Testament in vain for a word of institution prescribing some form, nor do we find any record that such an institution ever took place. In answer to our question for mode or manner or form we are told: “All things are yours.” Use any means at your disposal. Do so as an expression of your faith and love. Do it decently and in order. Do it as effectively as you know how with the ability and the special gifts which the Lord provides.

In the Old Testament God had prescribed everything in great detail. He appointed the priests that were to appear before Him and to function in the public services of His people; He gave instructions even regarding their physical condition. He prescribed the place and the building of His house with its arrangement and all appurtenances. He fixed the days, the months, the seasons and years to be observed. He even gave precise orders for the garments the priests were to wear. It was as Paul expresses it in Galatians 4:2: He placed His children under “tutors and governors.” This order was in force until the fullness of the time was come.

In the New Testament we find no such uniformity enforced, in fact we find no instructions whatever beyond those of love and order. The New Testament does indeed give us a vivid picture of the life in the early Church. The Christians congregated in a manner that best served their purpose. In Jerusalem there was one congregation, numbering 3,000 souls on Pentecost, soon increasing to 5,000. But although they all “continued steadfastly in the...fellowship” and “continued daily in the temple,” even holding a common election of almoners, they broke “bread from house to house” (Acts 2:42,46).

About Paul we are told that in Corinth he worshiped with the believers in “a certain man’s house named Justus” (Acts 18:7). In Ephesus he “separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9). In Troas “the disciples came together to break bread” and “Paul preached unto them” in an “upper chamber” on the “third loft” (Acts 20:7-9). Several times churches in private homes are mentioned.

Very little is said about organization. Elders are mentioned in Acts 14:23 for the churches in southern Galatia; in Acts 20:17 for Ephesus; bishops and deacons are addressed in Philippians 1:1.—Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers are enumerated in Ephesians 4:11. Other

enumerations we have in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12. Qualifications for elders, also called bishops, are listed in Titus 1; and in I Timothy 3 for both bishops and deacons. Hebrews 13 speaks of “them which have the rule over you” (vss. 7 and 17).

About the form of service we hear very little. In Corinth they over-estimated and over-practiced the gift of glossolalia; besides there were sitting prophets, whom Paul instructs to speak in turns, two or three, while the others judge.

So much is clear: the Christians living in a certain place were joined together in some form of organization, and held divine services with singing, reading, preaching, and the Lord’s Supper, the arrangement apparently not at all being uniform everywhere, but differing according to circumstances, and as the special spiritual gifts which God had given them made possible.

We find no instructions to the believers to organize local congregations. No such instructions were needed. When the Holy Ghost brought a man to faith, He did not create him as an individual Christian to live his faith in isolation; He created him as a member of Christ’s spiritual body, as a member of the Church. There were not two steps: The believer did not first become a Christian and then join the Church. He was born into the Church; just as a child by his natural birth comes into the world not merely as an individual, but at once as a member of a certain family. Thus wherever two or more Christians found themselves living in the same place, they, realizing their spiritual fellowship, spontaneously (not to say automatically) began to exercise it. No special command was needed.—Yet this we do find. The New Testament speaks of one case where some members for certain reasons failed to attend the service meetings of their groups. It was the church to which the Epistle to the Hebrews is addressed. The Epistle warns them: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is” (chap. 10:25).

We find more said about the association of congregations located in close proximity to one another, perhaps in the same province. The churches of Galatia had common problems. Paul groups the churches of Macedonia together, likewise those of Achaia (cf. II Cor. 9:2). Peter addresses his First Epistle to the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. This was not merely a convenient way of naming them, no, they had common problems and were engaged in joint endeavors. When Timothy’s name occurs for the first time, he is mentioned in connection with the congregations in Derbe and Lystra (Acts 16:1). But immediately we are told that he “was well reported” also by the brethren in Iconium. The word translated with “report” really means more: it is the testimony of a witness. Timothy had been doing Gospel work for at least two, more likely three, congregations. On this the Christians reported to Paul.

When Paul sent a man from Macedonia together with Titus to help the Corinthians finish their collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem, he describes him in these words: “We have sent with him (Titus) the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches; and not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace” (II Cor. 8:18,19). This man did Gospel work for the churches in Macedonia, and had in addition now been chosen by them to go as their representative with Paul to Jerusalem to deliver the collection. Thus we get a glimpse of the cooperation practiced between the congregations of Macedonia.

When Judaizers from Jerusalem came down to the Church in Antioch of Syria and troubled the Christians with their error, the latter sent a delegation to the Church in Jerusalem to study the problem jointly with them. The problem concerned them both, so they acted together.

There was one congregation which acted rather as self-sufficient, with little regard for other churches. That was the congregation in Corinth. But Paul took them sharply to task for it.

In the salutation of his first letter he at once reminded them that they are not an isolated, autonomous group of Christians: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth...called...with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." Throughout the letter he calls their attention to the situation in other churches, which they must consider, e.g. chapters 4:17; 7:17; 11:16. The most piercing word on their isolationism he penned in chapter 14:36: "What? Came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?"

Thus in the New Testament we find that there were local congregations and groupings of local congregations; although about their organization nothing is said in either case. No divine institution is ever hinted, although the neglect of cooperation both in a congregation and between congregations is sternly reprimanded.

A very important question in studying the organization of the New Testament Church is the matter of church discipline, the office of the keys. Who had the administration of this office? In particular, who had the right to excommunicate an impenitent sinner?

It is evident that the keys originally belong to Jesus Christ. He died to redeem us, and thus, because He became the Son of Man, the Father placed all judgment into His hands. The question is, To whom did Jesus commit the administration of the keys? There are some who maintain that this function was given to the local congregation as such exclusively.

That Jesus, the proprietor of the keys, entrusted the administration to His Christians on earth, is stated in several passages. We list three.

Matthew 16:18,19: "I say unto thee, that thou art Peter...and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Matthew 18:18: "Very I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

John 20:22,23: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

These passages are clear in themselves: the keys are entrusted to the believers. The only question then is as to how they shall perform this function, perhaps in a certain group formation, and only by means of that group formation. Jesus Himself discussed the matter by presenting a hypothetical case (in Matt. 18). Paul had to deal with the matter more frequently in actual cases. While in several instances he merely states the outcome, in one case he left us a more detailed record. We briefly look at both.

Jesus prefaced His case with the parable of a lost sheep, which the shepherd seeks with unrelenting zeal, thus impressing on His disciples with what fervent love a Christian must endeavor to save a brother from a sin into which he has fallen. Do not simply drop him, but try to convince him of the error of his way. If he is not impressed, reinforce your testimony by calling in the support of a witness or two. If your combined testimony fails to move him, then "tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:25-18).

We note that the church is not called in until the final step has to be taken, called in as a last resort. The efforts of the first brother have failed, so have the joint efforts of the two or three brethren. Then the church is to be called in in an effort to impress upon the sinning brother the seriousness of his case. If the whole church admonishes him, that should make an impression, should make him come to his senses. Jesus does not say that the church should take any further action, the final step of declaring the sinner to be outside the brotherhood is left to the individual brother: "Let him be *unto thee*."

What is the “church” in this case? There was no local congregation in existence at the time Jesus gave these instructions to His disciples. Nor do we hear that Jesus at any time discussed the matter of local congregations with His disciples. Jesus here speaks of a numerical progression: first one brother, then two or three brethren, lastly the Church. “Tell it to the church” evidently means, Call in the brotherhood for a last attempt to rescue the sinner, whatever brethren may come into consideration or may be available.

The case on which Paul records some details was the incest case in Corinth (I Cor. 5 and II Cor. 2). In First Corinthians Paul chides the Christians that they did not at once rush to the rescue of the sinner. He does not mention their church as a group, but speaks to them as a number of individuals, summing up his instruction in the word: “Put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (vs. 13). The Corinthians obeyed God’s order; and their action had the desired effect. The conscience of the sinner was struck with terror at the deed he had committed. He repented.

In II Corinthians 2 Paul comes to the case. We note that this letter was addressed, not to the Corinthian congregation alone, but included “all the saints which are in all Achaia” (chap. 1:1). In the Roman province of Achaia there was, besides Corinth, also a church in Cenchrea (the eastern harbor of Corinth) and there was a group of Christians in Athens. In II Corinthians 2 Paul says that they all are involved in dealing with the sinner: he had grieved them all, at least in part (vs. 5). Now, having been punched by the “many” (The Greek has the comparative degree: by an ever increasing number.) he repented of his sin. Paul therefore urges them to reinstate him formally, “lest he be swallowed up by overmuch sorrow” (vs. 7).

To apply the binding key and to excommunicate an impenitent sinner is the sad task of every individual Christian, after all resources for winning the guilty brother have proved ineffective. No group organization of Christians is mentioned in any of the cases which we studied.

Only once do we find the expression used: “to cast out of the church,” but that in connection with an abuse of the keys (II John 10). Diotrephes, an arrogant, perhaps self-appointed, leader refused to receive John or the brethren, and if any member of the church did receive them, Diotrephes “casteth them out of the church,” certainly not out of the Una Sancta, but out of some organized group formation.

There is one more point that we take notice of in regard to the New Testament churches. There were different stages of development in the faith of the individual Christians. Some had reached a more advanced stage, while others were rather retarded. There always were some weak brethren, weak in understanding, weak in faith, weak in love, weak in sanctification. No two Christians were perfectly alike, and even in the most advanced there was still room for improvement. Some were more prone to yield to error and temptation. Such weaker ones were to be given loving support by their stronger brethren, which they were to receive with gratitude. Mutual giving and receiving between the members was one of the purposes of the congregation.

Similarly, there were differences between the congregations. They all had their problems, all had troubles of one kind or another. Just as the individual members should come to the support of one another, so also the congregations. Most of the Epistles in the New Testament were written to congregations to assist them in coping with their special difficulty.

For an illustration we turn to the seven churches in Asia Minor, whom John addressed by order from the Lord. These letters are recorded in the Book of Revelation, in chapters 2 and 3. A number of times we read the remark: “I have somewhat against thee” (Ephesus, chap. 2:4; Pergamus, chap. 2:14; Thyatira, chap. 3:20); or: “I have not found thy works perfect before God”

(Sardis, chap. 3:2); or: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot" (Laodicea, chap. 3:15). That is, five out of the seven churches addressed by John showed some marked deficiency. This does not mean, of course, that these deficiencies must be taken up into the concept of congregation. They were foreign elements which threatened the very life of these churches; and if they permitted them to continue uncorrected, the churches would be rejected by God. Yet John does not break off relations with them at once in a mechanical application of the principle laid down in Romans 16:17, but in fervent love and in stern earnest he tries to rouse them out of their lethargy to take action toward eliminating the putrid spots. If they fail to heed his warning, their blood will be on themselves.

Briefly summing up what the New Testament records about the primeval Church we can say that we find a rich and varied expression of the spiritual life among the members of the local churches both within and beyond the boundaries of the congregations; that while the expression of fellowship is more or less taken for granted in the form of congregational life, the Apostle finds it called for to emphasize the necessity of inter-congregational fellowship. Yet there is never any particular form prescribed, neither for the local congregation nor for larger groupings.

VI.

It should not be difficult to apply the principles followed by the early Church in organizing its work and in providing for the needs of its members to our modern conditions. A basic fact to be remembered is that there are no rules, hard and fast iron-clad rules, in fact no rules of any type at all. Any attempt to regulate the life of the Church by rules is contrary to its very nature. The Church consists, not of a group of slaves under the lash, but of brethren, children of God, whom God, moreover, does not consider as babes, but as mature sons, who with understanding, with loving and earnest zeal have the welfare of His kingdom at heart.

In our day particularly two forms of communal life have been developed to serve the purposes of the Church: the local congregation and the synod. Through the local congregation the Christians attain some of their aims; others, which lie beyond the ability and the resources of a single congregation, the same Christians endeavor to achieve through the organization of a synod.

In the local congregation divine services are held regularly, one or more men being called to conduct them. The Sacraments are administered regularly. The cure of souls is provided for. The proper training and instruction of the children is taken care of; so is also the instruction beyond the elementary grades, e.g. in Bible classes. Usually there are special organizations within the local church to serve special purposes: there are choirs, ladies' aids, men's clubs, and the like.

The local congregation, as a rule, is not able to take care of the training of future pastors and teachers, nor to carry on extensive mission work. For that reason the Christians, members of local congregations, spread out in wider fields, join hands and organize synods for that type of church work.—Frequently there are also other inter-congregational organizations for special forms of Gospel work. There are high school conferences, children's friend societies, societies to take care of the aged, of epileptics, of blind, of deaf-mutes, etc.—All of these are established to provide for some need of Christians or to perform some task which Christ assigned to His believers.

Even if a local congregation should be strong enough to carry on all of this work alone, it is not God's will that it should isolate itself from other Christians. It should in some form practice and cultivate the fellowship of the Church beyond its own confines.

Here several questions will come up. A question of prime importance will be: With whom may we join hands to organize a synod? The answer will be the same as to the question: With whom may we unite in local congregations?

We saw that the Scriptures direct us to check carefully the confession of a man, his confession in word and deed. We are to nourish our faith with the pure Gospel, and we are to proclaim the Gospel in its truth and purity, without additions, or subtractions, or alterations. Error is poison, which destroys the spiritual life which the Gospel creates and nourishes. Thus just as little as we may tolerate error in the local congregation, just so little in a synod.

The local congregation watches over the purity of the Gospel in its midst. Error may affect some of its members, but the congregation will endeavor to rescue them from their contamination. If a member proves incorrigible and even insists on making propaganda for his error, the congregation will ultimately find it necessary to declare the fellowship with such a one no longer possible. To be sure, a congregation will not act hastily, it will practice patience as long as possible before taking the final step of excommunication or of severance of fellowship, as the case may be. It may happen that not all members reach the same conclusion at the same time. They all agree in condemning the error, but are divided on the judgment of persistence, and accordingly on the proper mode of procedure. In that case there is no cause for disrupting the congregation, but to continue patiently till unanimity is attained. It is a gross violation of Christian brother love to desert a struggling congregation and leave it in the lurch. It may look like conscientious obedience to the Word of God, but it may, in reality, be nothing but a corruption of the Gospel into a set of rules, rigoristic legalism.

The same principles apply to the organization of a synod. Also here error will raise its ugly head. Now because a synod offers a wider field of influence, watchfulness is all the more imperative. Moreover, just as error in a leader of a congregation dare not be tolerated under any circumstances, neither may it in one who holds a teaching position of a synod. A brother erring out of weakness may be borne for a long time, in some cases even indefinitely, both in a synod and in a congregation, but neither a congregation nor a synod may grant him the privilege of teaching without becoming infected with his error and making itself guilty of violating God's truth.

On the other hand, when error affects a congregation, or a synod, you do not break off fellowship at once, but stretch patience to great lengths, even though at times it threatens to snap, as the letters to five of the churches in Revelation indicate. Yet when persistence, persistent defense and persistent propaganda of the error can no longer be denied, then neither may it be ignored. The confessional unity has been disrupted and can no longer be upheld by joint activity without making oneself guilty of the same error. Unionism is a denial of the truth.

Another question. Congregations frequently hesitated to join a synod, although they recognized it as orthodox, because they feared that by membership in the synod they would lose their local independence, at least it might be seriously curtailed. They were afraid that the synod would usurp the role of a super-church. Today we frequently meet with the same idea. When some one says that the synod is Church, at once the question is hurled at the speaker: What authority has the synod over the congregation?

The thought of authority of any church organization, be it synod or congregation, should be foreign to our mind. Jesus said: "Be not ye called master, for one is your Master, even Christ" (Matt. 23:10). The thought of authority in any church organization violates the idea of Church; it is an erroneous concept. Both the local congregation and the synod are working organs through which the individual Christian in communion with his brethren provides for his own spiritual

needs and carries out specific phases of the task assigned to him. By his call he determines, in conjunction with his brethren, the scope of the work which each organization is to perform. Both are equally divine, both are Church, and must be reverently aware that they are, each in its own sphere, supplying a want and carrying out a definite part of the task which Christ assigned to His believers, the Church on earth. And the more they are conscious of this, the more will they shun any appearance of arrogance, and will with reverent awe, yes with fear and trembling, put their hands to the sacred task to which they have been called.