

## THE FREE CHURCH FELLOWSHIP<sup>1</sup>

by Georg Sverdrup<sup>2</sup>

*Lutheranen og Missionsbladet, 1877, 1878.*

Georg Sverdrup, *Professor Georg Sverdrups samlede skrifter i udvalg*, Andreas Helland, ed. (Minneapolis: Frikirkens Boghandels Forlag, 1910), 2:54-100. Trans. Martin Bjornson.

## THE CONGREGATION

It is now quite some time since the Norwegian church fellowships began their activities in America, and during this period there have already been many experiences, both bitter and pleasant; and from these experiences people have learned much that will not easily be forgotten. That which has cost sorrow and tears, that which has severed the tenderest of ties, sometimes between pastor and congregation, sometimes between

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<sup>1</sup>Sverdrup's use of this word is tricky. He does not want to use the word "church" for important reasons. He is trying to speak of what we would call the "national" church.

<sup>2</sup>Georg Sverdrup, a theologian from an aristocratic family of the Norwegian left, came to America in 1874 to teach at Augsburg Seminary. His uncle, the Prime Minister of Norway, had made common cause with the rich farmers against the upper classes, or "conditioned" classes of Norwegian officialdom. Sverdrup had been a student in Oslo when Herman Preus returned to Norway in 1866-1867 and presented his "Seven Lectures" about the state of the church in America. In those lectures Preus created an uproar when he defended his unpopular stand on slavery--that it was a "moral evil, not a sin." Events like these caused the Norwegians to think of the Norwegian Synod which Preus led as a hierarchical copy of the state church in Norway. Sverdrup certainly gave evidence that he interpreted the Norwegian Synod in such a light when, as a very young man, he arrived in America to teach at Augsburg Seminary, and gave his first speech setting forth his dreams of "free and living congregations in a free country." The articles he published in Lutheranen og Missionsbladet ("The Lutheran and Mission Paper"), the paper he edited for the Conference, the middle of the road synod which supported Augsburg Seminary, over which Sverdrup presided, laid the foundation for his dream of a Lutheran Free Church, which he thought the United Church of 1890 would be, until, because of the intransigence of both parties concerning the place of St. Olaf in the new church, he walked out with his friend, Sven Oftedal, to found the Friends of Augsburg, which in 1897, became the Lutheran Free Church.

brothers and sisters in the same congregation, sometimes between man and wife, parents and children, is etched into a man's heart in such a manner and with such sharp pains, that it is not effaced as long as there is yet life and breath.

But though these are very solemn matters which no serious person will disregard nor pass by, there is a still deeper inscription on the congregation of God, the blood that is sprinkled on its door posts, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, wherewith it was redeemed by God to be his free, pure and undefiled bride. For God has not left his congregation without guidance in his holy Word, but he has redeemed the people and teaches them the way they shall walk. Therefore when we are to consider these matters, we must first turn back to God's own Word, and according to that judge, to the extent possible for us, the experiences we have already acquired in America and the conclusions to which certain developments have brought us.<sup>3</sup> We will begin with that which is the first and also the last in church fellowships: the congregation.<sup>4</sup>

God is himself the founder of the congregation, he is its Father, its Creator; the Son is its Redeemer, its King, its Head, its Bridegroom; the Spirit is its Life, its Liberty, its Comforter, its Earnest. The congregation itself is an assembly of people whom God has justified by faith in his Son, born again in the life of the Spirit and given sonship and the life of a child of God and the right of inheritance with the Son in heaven and the eternal life in the Spirit.

When we thus speak of the congregation as the fellowship of the Spirit, the communion of Saints, and the glory of this fellowship, we speak of things invisible and eternal, which are the object of faith, not of sight. But nothing can be the object of faith unless it is revealed. No one can believe in God if God is only invisible. Because God was manifested in the flesh and the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the

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<sup>3</sup>Sverdrup has been in America since 1874. Immediately upon his arrival in Minneapolis he leveled a broadside at the Norwegian Synod for its connection with the Norwegian State Church and laid out his own plan for free and living congregations in a free country.

<sup>4</sup>No word is so dear to Sverdrup's heart, but his understanding of it, as will become clear in the article, is different from congregationalism. To be fair to Sverdrup, it must be said that he translated the Greek word "ecclesia" to mean congregation, even where some would have used "church" to mean all the congregations.

Father has declared him, it is possible to believe. The invisible in which faith trusts is also visible in its manifestations. The Apostle Paul says plainly, that the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen. Thus also it is with the Communion of Saints, the congregation. It is invisible because its life is hid with Christ in God; it is visible because its life, God's own Holy Spirit, is given it by visible means, the Word and the Sacraments, and because it consists of actually visible human beings. It is also visible because it has recognizable qualities and is even a shining light in the darkness of the world, a city that is set on a hill that cannot be hid.

The congregation is then both invisible and visible, even as God himself is invisible and visible (see John 14:9: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father") as little as anyone could believe in God if he was not revealed, just as one can hardly believe in the Communion of Saints if it is not revealed. God has manifested himself in the Son, who himself is God's Word; the congregation manifests itself in believing human beings who by the Word and Sacraments live a spiritual life, rich in the fruits of mercy. And as God's manifestation of himself in the Son is in humiliation, low estate, poverty, and in the limits of time and space, thus also the manifestation of the congregation is in weakness, in low estate, despised, and limited to definite times and definite places. We must, however, maintain that as it is the same one true God who is invisible and manifested, so it is also the one and same congregation of God who is visible and invisible, for thus saith the word of God: "You are the light of the word, a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid."

Immediately we add, that though there is a similarity between the manifestation of God and the manifestation of the congregation, there is also dissimilarity. For in the Son, God has revealed himself in a perfect manner, both by the perfect Word and the perfect work of love; the congregation, on the other hand, can only manifest itself in a perfect manner by the Word and Sacraments and even there it will often not do so to the extent it could by the grace of God.

On the contrary, its works of love are never perfect. It has sin in its own flesh, and this will beset the work of the congregation even in its best efforts; therefore, the congregation as well as every individual Christian must daily pray: "forgive us our sins!" The visible congregation will often present a spectacle not only of weakness and insignificance, but also of the contamination of sin. Its glory is not only hidden, but,

what is worse, it is often darkened by hideous blemishes. To these blemishes belong all the "dead members" of the congregation, though even the living members themselves must many a time deplore that the power of darkness is strong in their flesh.

The Holy Scripture speaks about the congregation in two ways. It speaks of one congregation and of many congregations. It is about the one indivisible congregation Jesus Christ speaks, when he says to Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my congregation." (Matt. 16:18)

About that Paul writes to the Ephesians: "and gave him to be the head of all things to the congregation" (Ephesians 1:22) and again: "Christ loved the congregation, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious congregation, not having spot or wrinkle." (Ephesians 5:25-27. Cf. Colossians 1:18, Acts 20:28). But the Word of God also speaks about many congregations, a congregation in Jerusalem, a congregation in Rome, congregations in Macedonia, congregations in Asia Minor, and each individually is called God's congregation (I Corinthians 1:2). Is this two different things, two kinds of congregations? Far from it; they could not then be called by the same name. It is the one and same body of Christ manifesting itself in different places. God has sent his Son once, to one people, to one country, but the Son has sent his messengers to preach everywhere. In every place his own Word of repentance and remission of sins gathers in every place those who were grafted into the true vine, and who became members of his body. All that is said about the one holy congregation is also said about each individual congregation at every single place. The whole congregation, what we commonly call "the church" (a word that Scripture never uses) is invisible and visible; the individual congregation is exactly the same: its holiness is hidden, and, sad to say, often obscured by sin; its light is nevertheless shining by the Word, by the Sacraments, by the devoted love of believing people to lost souls. The church is therefore not a fellowship of a higher order than the congregation, but it is the communion of all the real congregations. It is every place where there is a congregation, but neither is it in any other place. That Scripture everywhere uses one and the same word for the church and congregation is sufficient proof that it does not distinguish between church and congregation. Our head, Christ, is revealed once to bear the sins of all; his body, living and active by the Spirit is manifested

every place where the Word is preached, and at all times. The Kingdom is extended until it fills the whole earth.

With might and main we will hold fast to this: that it is the one and same congregation which is invisible and visible; and we believe that this is of the utmost practical importance. We are well aware that scorners say that a thing cannot be both visible and invisible, it must be two different things. In his heart a fool also says: there is no God. A fool also says: God is invisible, he cannot be manifested in flesh. But the Word of God which says: "Our life is hid with Christ in God," also says: "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works." Why emphasize this? Because this talk about visible and invisible congregation, unfortunately, has caused not a little slothfulness and indifference among us. There is, for example, a man who does not belong to any congregation. According to his own imagination he belongs to the fellowship of believers, but he does not want to be a member of a visible congregation, for that is so polluted, so impure, so promiscuous. So he remains outside. The visible congregation does not matter to him. He does not go to church, he does not receive the Sacrament, it is all so polluted by the commingling. Thus a soul is lost, and the congregation of God loses a worker, because he wanted to have the invisible congregation and its glory, though not the dishonor of the visible. There is a man who is pastor of a congregation. He is working under the impression that the congregation which has called him as pastor is only the visible congregation, the invisible congregation is another matter. His visible congregation is but the outer circle out of which it is possible one or another may be admitted into the invisible congregation by faith. So he becomes negligent concerning the outward aspect of the congregation, and the congregation becomes negligent about itself and so, by negligence and apathy, the salt loses its savor; wherewith shall it then be salted? Nay, this spirit of drowsiness and slothfulness which we all carry with us from the state church must be banished from us. We must pay attention to the fact that it is each individual congregation that is God's congregation; that it is each individual congregation which is redeemed by the blood of Jesus; and that each individual congregation is one of the seven candlesticks John saw. Each one of them shall be manifestations of the body of Christ in the world. If this becomes vital to us, what earnestness and holy trepidation would there not come upon all of us who are in the congregation and a heavy responsibility fall on us because of the sorry

appearance that our sins have given the congregation of God. We know that we cannot try people's hearts and minds, and certainly many will come in who do not have a wedding garment, but it is hardly as easy a matter for somebody to run around to the stores in town and organize a congregation by getting the names of the clerks in a book because he bought his clothes at one place and flour at a second place and tobacco at a third place. Many will surely come in response to the invitation: come all! and many will later be a disgrace to the congregation, but then there would likely be one or another who would stop and consider the matter. To join the congregation should be tantamount to saying "From now on I want to be a witness to Jesus Christ, for he has redeemed me by his blood." No one can preclude hypocrisy, but vigorous preaching on the true character of the congregation can, nevertheless, by the grace of God, prevent much thoughtlessness and indifference both among pastors and parishioners.

#### THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

It is quite impossible to point to a more convenient time for the establishing of a real free church than that in which the Norwegians came to America. It is superfluous to recall that from the beginning of this century clear down to our day the Church of Norway has had a time of visitation that, as far as history knows, it never had before. And as dark and dead as it still is in many places among our people, alas, there is, nevertheless, hardly a single family among the whole Norwegian people which has not in one way or another come in contact with "the Awakening" or the "awakened."<sup>5</sup> Some have been gripped by the Spirit of God and, profoundly burdened by sin, have learned to know the Savior as their Savior; others have gone with the crowd and, though they have not themselves come to a personal experience of life in God, they have, nevertheless, acknowledged the Christianity of the "awakened" as a living fruit of the work of the Spirit, and many a time they have secretly groaned within themselves: "O that I was like one of them. My soul dies the

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<sup>5</sup>This is, of course, the awakening that came with the preaching of the lay man Hans Nielsen Hauge whose preaching changed the face of Norway.

death of these righteous, my end be like theirs," even though they have lacked the full sincerity to experience the depths of both sin and grace. "The awakening" has nevertheless not passed them by and left them altogether untouched. Some have indeed even hypocritically gone with "the awakened" and they have unfortunately many a time become such spots and blemishes as have been an offence to the children of God and have caused the name of God and the work of his Spirit to be blasphemed by the children of disobedience. Some have conceived a radical, almost devilish hatred toward this work of God, and they have not only blasphemed when the shame of the hypocrites was exposed. They have also called godly sorrow and the joy of the Lord fanaticism and madness. But hardly anyone has been permitted to sleep entirely in peace, altogether untouched by the mighty movement; nearly everyone has in one way or another decided for or against the Lord. It is therefore an obvious matter, that a time of decision such as this was an appropriate hour of the Lord, which he himself had chosen, that a free congregation might be established which was permeated by an intense conviction as to what Christian faith and Christian life is. It was an hour of the Lord in which a choice and a decision was made in so many hearts, and in such a period that a sifting out could take place, which was necessary in order that a free congregation could be established that would freely confess Christ. Mass Christianity and mass congregations were doomed by the awakening; and when the free congregation was established, they who in their hearts hated and persecuted living Christianity would naturally withdraw. And thereby it became possible for self-governed congregations to actually be governed by the Spirit of Christ, even though it might contain many dead members, for even these had in a certain sense really submitted to the Word of God, which many of them were disposed to wish might bow their hearts to a full knowledge of the truth that they too might become the children of God.

Nor can we be blind to the fact that it was a distinct mercy of God that just at the time when, according to this counsel, the free Norwegian congregations should be established, he led us out to this new country, where we had to begin entirely anew. We came to a country where the liberty of the congregation was respected by the state, where each one, unhindered by the laws of the land and inviolate in his civic rights, was at liberty to be within or outside of the congregation. We came to a country to which we brought nothing with us except the Word of God and our good confession where there was no ancient church property to

quarrel about, no church officials of whom to ask permission, no priesthood that immediately could begin trying to preserve the old class rights. These things may not be done in the free church. The Norwegians were in a condition of great poverty in the foreign land, but they had the prairie before them and nothing else was required than the blessing of the Lord and hard work in order that it might be transformed into a blossoming garden, both in a temporal and spiritual sense. We thank God that both have attended us to this day when it dare be said that we now, at least in some measure, can speak about a free church fellowship among the Norwegians. This is due to the singular dispensation of the Lord, that he, at the very time when the fire of the awakening swept through Norway, led so many Norwegian men and women, who had been gripped by the Spirit, across the sea to a land of liberty, where the congregation was permitted to grow in peace according to the statute by which God gave grace. That the Word of God in the old country awakened souls both to a living love of and conscious opposition to Christ has been a benefit to the Norwegian-America congregations, because for a free church to originate in the tepidness and lethargy in which the state church finds itself most peaceful and most comfortable would be the most dreadful of all.

Hence it came entirely as an unmerited benefaction to the congregations which were organized in America, that in the very organizing of the congregation there had to be as well nigh as complete voluntarism as human circumstances would permit. It certainly cannot be denied that in spite of the revival's great separation between "living Christians" and "dead children of the world," and in spite of the changed conditions, "common practice" nevertheless in America made it likely that people would join the congregation. It is also true that no Christian can but sorrow to think about the many, many Norwegians who in the foreign country have entirely forsaken their church. Consequently they who earnestly desired to further the welfare of the congregation wished to have as many of their countrymen join the congregation as possible. It must also be admitted that both on the part of the pastors and parishioners it was an anxious fear as to the pastor's salary and the expenses that led them to use various unchurchly means to get people to join congregations. And finally, their altogether lonely position in the foreign land was naturally a strong incentive toward building together in every way.

However, it must be said that as a rule there prevailed a full voluntarism in organizing the

congregation. It is the command of the Lord that we should "compel them to come in," and it is not our affair to examine whether or not they who come in are wearing the wedding garment. The Lord will himself investigate that in due time. That compelling which the Lord speaks about is no external compulsion whatever; it is like a kind man urging a wayfaring stranger to put up at his house by showing such kindness that it is impossible to decline the invitation. We must say that as important as it is that there is complete liberty in the organizing of a congregation, so is it necessary that by the Word of God there is a real urgent "compelling to come in." It is the Word that must assemble a congregation. Even among the Norwegian emigrants, though all of them once were accepted into the church of God by baptism, it would have been better that they had never organized a congregation or solicited parishioners in any other way or by any other means than by the public and private preaching of the Word of God. For even baptized people, alas, are many a time in such a state that it is better both for themselves and for the congregation that they "stand without" and are the objects of the influence of the congregation, than that they are inside and perhaps there sleep the deepest sleep just because they are "in the congregation." Many times also, to be sure, too hasty admission into the congregation has been followed by open offence in the congregation, and then they have had to resort to church discipline and excommunication; and as necessary as this remedy is, we know that its application, unfortunately, is attended by such grave dangers both for the congregation that disciplines and for the one who is disciplined, that in many cases and in many congregations it were better if it could be avoided. We therefore stress that the congregations must be assembled by the Word of God and that it is the persuasion and influence and invitation of the Word alone that is to be used to bring people into the congregation. If the Spirit of God is permitted to create this decision in a person so he applies for membership in the congregation, then he is a real accession to the congregation, even though he has not come to faith's peace with God; without this, he is but a detractor from the true strength of the congregation. We will add here that not everywhere is there that faithfulness in "compelling them to come in" which there should be. Dreadfully much is lacking in that all pastors and parishioners in this respect can say with Paul: "The love of Christ constrains us to bearing the testimony of the death of Christ before all without partiality." May the Lord send us in all our church fellowships and in all our congregations many crying voices which compel them to come in so the house of

the Lord might be filled.

On the other hand it cannot be concealed that there is a considerable number of congregations in America which have been founded on quite other principles than the preaching of the Word of God. Even within the little circle where we are acquainted, there are congregations whose existence, we fear, is due to party spirit and hate and purely carnal motives. There are many parishioners enrolled in the register who would have never been there, had not purely external, purely carnal advantages been used as bait to get them in. There has not been the proper respect for the liberty of the people nor the proper reverence for the purity of the congregation. Therefore it is natural that such congregations will reap as they have sown. They have at times had a rapid growth, because passion and fanaticism are powerful forces to quickly drive a congregation to a certain eminence. But they have the germ of death in them, and if the Spirit of the Lord is not permitted to inspire them with another fire than that of passion, the artificial fire of fanaticism will soon consume them.

That which therefore is of prime importance for the congregation is that it be established in a proper manner. We must rejoice over the infinite grace of God which so wondrously has paved the way for the founding of free congregations so that it dare be said that there are many congregations in all fellowships in America which have been spared many, many tribulations because there have been few irregularities in their establishment. It was to be expected that the transition from State Church to Free Church, even in the most fortunate instances, would entail great difficulties, and we ought not to be surprised that some must suffer much for their imprudence, but as a matter of fact there is great reason for thanking the Lord that he has spared us to the extent that he has.

The difficulty has naturally been that some have wanted to admit too many, others too few. The "Wisconsinians",<sup>6</sup> who began by being Grundtvigians and thus attributed to Baptism a false meaning and who ended by preaching "world justification" and therefore attributed to absolution a false meaning, have naturally by their very doctrinal position been driven to an extreme laxness in the establishment of the

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<sup>6</sup>An appellation for the Norwegian Synod often used in the 1870's, as well as the Norwegian Synod's strictly orthodox teachings and view concerning the church. The name comes from the fact that the Norwegian Synod was also called "The Wisconsin Synod" by the Norwegians in America

congregation. It is the same, whether one attributes a Catholic meaning to Baptism or to Absolution, of necessity one is driven to practically follow the Catholic conception of the congregation. One can therefore be quite sure, that where "world justification" is preached, there the congregational consciousness is to a high degree lacking in life and power. We hope, however, that this is not often the case.

On the other hand the Eielsen Synod has undoubtedly in its day gone to another extreme.<sup>7</sup> The "old constitution" was certainly not in this respect in full harmony with the order of God's kingdom. There were evidently no particular difficulties connected with being admitted into a congregation above any other place, but that which was erroneous was that they who were admitted into the congregation, were by the admittance itself characterized as "converted" or on the way of "conversion" and this naturally had a detrimental influence on the proper growth of the congregation.<sup>8</sup> For we all know how ready the natural man is to derive consolation from all such external things. There is hardly any doubt but that various congregations, just by this fancy that they above other congregations were Christians, have lost a good deal of sincerity and uprightness.

With these dispensations of God and these peculiar dangers in view we therefore believe that the best method of establishing a congregation is that which sifts out of all those who either live in complete indifference or in plain denial, and also a gathering of all those who by the Word of God and nothing else permit themselves to be voluntarily compelled to come in. Let it take time to build a congregation, but let it also be well understood that it is neither pastor nor congregation that shall determine whether those who come in have on the wedding garment. If there has been no preaching at a place for a long time, then let a strong and earnest preaching of awakening be heard, if need be, before a congregation is organized. Let the Word have time to exert its influence both to bruising and resistance, if that must be, before a congregation is established. Remember too that it is not necessary that there should be a pastor to preach at such a place, but if

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<sup>7</sup>The Evangelical Lutheran Church organized by the layman Elling Eielsen in 1846. The "old constitution" was adopted at that time.

<sup>8</sup>The "old constitution" required that a prospective member of the congregation be a "living" Christian.

you live there and the Lord has given you to know your Savior, then begin at once, wherever you are, to gather people to devotional meetings and the reading of the Word of God. That is the first step toward establishing a congregation. There are congregations that quickly are brought to nought because this was neglected before the congregation was established. But above all, let us be careful that it is not the bitterness of party spirit that gathers the congregation, in place of the love of Christ.

### THE MINISTRY IN THE FREE CONGREGATION

There is hardly any question within the Christian church which has caused so many difficulties and so much strife as the question about the ecclesiastical office. Personal passions, eagerness and zeal, void of understanding, carnal pride and spiritual inferiority have steadily and constantly asserted their influence in throwing confusion into a matter that not only concerns the upbuilding of God's kingdom in the Spirit, but also many personal interests of a purely temporal nature. It was unavoidable that since pastors are human beings, they are subject to the conditions of temporality, and since temporal interests came to be inseparably linked with the work of the Kingdom of God, there had to be many conflicts. The free church fellowships have no way of escaping this difficulty. The state church may well have made the question more complicated and rendered its right solution impossible, but the actual struggle concerning the proper place of the ministry, however, primarily begins within the free church. In the state church the ministry has, things being as they are, been placed in a completely odd position, and there is no one who expects or demands that it should be otherwise, but in the free church the demand comes that the ministry should be in its right place, and as this is a laborious place, the opposition to the labor and authority of the ministry comes both from carnal pastors and dead congregations.

Nothing is found in the Word of God that sanctions the carnal mind. Though both bishops and popes have labored to interpret the Word of God to their carnal advantage and in favor of a proud official aristocracy, it is nevertheless equally certain that in the Word of God there is no room for a large, powerful priesthood which demands a special divine authority and a peculiar position between the congregation and

God, different from that of every other Christian. Though the Word of God does not recognize any official ministry, it throws into sharper relief the necessity of the ministry, the ministry of the Word, the work of preaching to be exercised by the congregation through such Christian people as are fitted by the gift which the Spirit of the Lord has given them. Equally far, therefore as the Catholic idolatry of the priest is from the Christian faith, so far is the pastorlessness of the Quakers from the true form of the congregation of God.

We thus soon see that here the way of truth is as narrow, as sharp as a knife-edge, and it is clear that here contentions had to come. In America these have assumed the form that, on the one hand, the assertion has been made that the pastor and congregation are bound to each other like husband and wife, with the understanding, of course, that the pastor is the man and that he thereby has sundry advantages which the wife, or the congregation, does not have. Likewise, from the same quarter have come the greatest efforts to stamp out so-called "layman's activity" in the congregation. On the other hand, there has been advanced the wicked assertion, "The pastor is the servant of the congregation," and thereby they believed that the whole matter was settled without further difficulty. Both these views, which can be summed up in this question, "Is the pastor the master of the congregation or its servant?" are equally unsuited to give the ministry the meaning and place ascribed to it by the Word of God.

In the state church the ministry and the pastor at once come into the most absurd relation to the congregation because the pastor is an "officer of the King" and is appointed by the King without any cooperation with the congregation whatever. No way could be further from Christian truth than this. Absolutely torn loose from all foundation in the Word of God, it is so altogether remote from all connection with the life of the congregation, that nothing else can be expected but that it will do harm. And harm it does. For the pastor comes to the congregation as a stranger, stays there as a stranger, and is "transferred" to a "more lucrative" call, without the congregation getting any other impression of the matter than that it has been a living for the man for a while, until he could get something better. That this is not propitious for the work and fruit of the ministry anyone can comprehend. If the pastor himself is a man who works as an "officer of the King," which according to the demands of the state church he ought to be, then it is clear that such a man becomes first the servant of the King, then the servant of the church and then, perhaps, if it can be done, in a

trifling measure, the pastor of the congregation. That in the state church there are pastors who, independent of all commandments of men, occupy the place that the Word of God assigns to the pastor, is a different matter, but they are few, and they are absolutely not genuine state pastors. He who would be a good "officer of the King' in the parish must first through a godless schooling and then through an extremely questionable student life have all sharp edges ground off, all independent conviction, all powerful avowal of truth and then when he has learned to bow and bend both himself and the truth, he is finished and can, by the grace of the King, conduct his office with just as much dignity as the clerk and the bailiff. He who has become sufficiently smooth can as a consequence be securely confident that for him the promotion ladder will be tolerably easy to ascend step by step until he obtains a "quiet call" in his old age. But according to its very nature it is all a consummate caricature of the order and mode of the congregation of God and therefore only adapted to bring pastor and congregation into a false relation to each other. Even where the pastor is a sincere man, as sometimes happens, and the congregation is somewhat serious minded, even there this perverted relation, that the pastor is an officer of the King in place of an officer of the congregation will to a high degree be detrimental to a sincere cooperation for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God.

In the free church this matter will naturally be corrected immediately by necessity. At least it has happened thus among the Norwegians in America. Since no one sent them pastors, the congregations themselves had to elect them. It is our good fortune that the Norwegian church is a state church, and that the king sends pastors to the congregations. For had it been true in Norway, for example, that an ecclesiastical authority had sent out pastors, it would naturally have also sent pastors to the emigrants, and it might have taken a long time before the matter had gotten into its right order. There was, understandably, no opportunity for the Norwegian king to send pastors to a foreign country. Nevertheless it was not altogether unusual that in the beginning both people and pastors considered themselves not only a branch of the Lutheran church, but also of the Norwegian state church, and even this very day the Norwegian Synod is often called simply the state church. It is also true that a congregations was organized one place in America with the definite understanding that it should belong directly under the Norwegian church department, which shows that it did not at once dawn upon everybody that it really was a free church which was in the process of being formed.

Those times are nearly over, and it has become a recognized matter that among us that the congregation and it alone has the right to call pastors. No doubt it is practiced quite frequently, especially in the Norwegian Synod, that the right to call a pastor is left to a few persons or to the Church Council, but it is readily acknowledged that this is an emergency that should not be. For our part we can absolutely not perceive that such an emergency is compelling and we hardly believe that there is a congregation in the whole Conference which would do that.<sup>9</sup> We are certain that no congregation ought to do so. That it may be difficult for a congregation to secure a pastor when the congregation itself is to call one, may well be, but we are also very apprehensive when we hear that someone purposes to take work and responsibility from us, for we know that they always take our liberty. Therefore we combat all who would take this "burden" from the congregation, because it cannot be taken without the congregation at the same time suffering the loss of its most precious rights.

A real congregational call is thus the way in which our pastors are chosen, and there is likely no one who has ever tried to deny that this is a legitimate call. With that the question as to whether the pastor is the master or the servant of the congregation is far from settled. That he is congregationally called in full accord with the Word of God does not as yet decide his future position. It has been shown that the free church with congregationally called pastors has been able to go to the greatest extremes on both sides. Oddly enough, hierarchical tendencies frequently unfold themselves in the free church.

There are two ways in which the hierarchy easily forces its way into the church of God when she is left altogether to herself. The pastor and the clergy may strive for power either from the basest motives, or for the most noble reasons without proper insight into the nature of the congregation. There are clearly pastors who seek power for the sake of "filthy lucre." Their number has always been large. In the free church these have an excellent opportunity. They use as their medium the most distressing politics. They establish church

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<sup>9</sup>Here Sverdrup is speaking of the Conference ("Konferentsen") as the organization of congregations to which he belongs. It occupied the middle road in Norwegian American Lutheran churches until its merger, in 1890, with the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood and the Norwegian Augustana Synod.

fellowships where pastoral agreements assure them against the possibility that the congregation can secure any other pastor than the one whom the pastors between themselves agree upon. When they thus are secure from that angle, they protect themselves against the congregation's discharging them by getting the congregation to consent to such regulations concerning the pastor's discharge, which as a matter of fact, makes it impossible. Finally, through personal means they secure for themselves a few "safe men" in each congregation, and then little by little the demands begin to grow. That matters can be driven quite far is plain enough to all who know how conditions are among a large portion of our people. When also at the same time such a pastor suppresses all laymen's activity in the congregation, and seeks to extinguish all awakening wherever it is perceived, and with half-closed eyes passes by dancing and drinking and debauchery in the congregation so that finally the people's religion consists in going to church and paying the preacher, then it is clear that the people lose their Christian liberty because they have no use for it.

Turning, however, away with the utmost disgust from that sort of conduct of the pastoral office, which in the free church, alas, is a corroding poison leading some people into the hands of sects and some into impudent atheism, there is another kind of hierarchy which seems so desirable that we are almost tempted to wish more of it than there is to be found in America. There are pastors who, permeated by the consciousness of their great responsibility and their holy calling, are working with indefatigable zeal for the salvation of souls, but who forget the congregation's own responsibility and the congregation's call to work with the gifts that the Lord was given it by his Spirit. They take it for granted that the congregation is no congregation unless it consists only or nearly only of living children of God. In order to know who the children of God are, they cut a pattern of these according to their own experience, and then they judge others by that pattern. When it appears that this uniform does not fit everybody, then it becomes but a poor congregation, and the pastor becomes more and more zealous. By his influence alone he comes as near the pattern of uniformity as possibly. That kind of a hierarchy also has a decided enmity toward the liberty of the congregation, toward lay activity, toward all activity, which is not directed by the pastors. They certainly are working for Christian life according to their understanding, but as they hinder the proper exercise of life, they are apt to kill the life of the congregation by a stifling uniformity. For this sort of effort the free church indeed affords wide berth,

and it invites this kind of zealous work because for a time it seems very fruitful and edifying. In the meantime it was on this road particularly that the Catholic church arrived at its absolute domination by the priesthood.

These two sorts of pastoral domination might seem absolutely to repel each other and be impossible of agreement. Experience, however, shows the contrary. The free church has at all times had both kinds, and it is greed of power that reconciles the sharpest extremes. There are certain principles of which these two kinds of pastors agree admirably. They can agree on "the concept of the pastoral office." They are both agreed that it is directly from God, for the one sees therein a support for his personal profit, the other sees therein an aid for his spiritual work. They are both agreed that the pastor's wishes should be much as possible law in the congregations, for thereby they both could most easily further their plans. They are both agreed, each for their reasons, that all spiritual activity which they cannot control is extremely dangerous, and thus by these two kinds of pastors some curious ropes and fetters are plaited, with which to shackle the congregation. In reality it is when they have cut the congregation off from its true relation to God that they both gain their ends. Like a Samson with shorn locks the giant is then easily led into bondage.

The free church is thus in the greatest danger of being tyrannized by worldly pastors and by one-sided, earnest men. The dogma that the relation between pastor and congregation is like that of the husband to his wife is certainly in many respects pleasing enough, but it lacks foundation in the Word of God, and therefore it leads to bondage. The free church is also subject to another danger, which is expressed in the proposition: the pastor is the servant of the congregation. The proposition is correct enough, if its intent is correct, that is to say, if it is an expression of the simple truth of God's Word, that all the work of the pastor is ministry of reconciliation to draw souls to God, a service in the congregation and for the congregation, a service in the footsteps of the one who came to serve all. There is another construction of this word after which it simply means that the pastor shall do what the congregation commands, whether it be the one thing or another; in this sense the proposition becomes an outright denial of the truth that the pastor is the servant of the Lord and can only do what God has commanded for the service of the congregation.

The conception that the pastor in every respect stands in the same relation to the congregation as a hired servant to the one who hired him, of necessity creates hirelings who willingly pervert truth and judgment

for a morsel of bread. There may be more of that kind of congregation, who gladly hires a hireling, than anyone would believe. This is a terrible danger for the free church because where the congregation not only manages its own affairs, but also rules the Word of God and gets the pastor to assist it in doing things that are unchristian in their innermost nature, there the whole congregation become saltless and soon a completely corrupt tree which, under the rapid developments appropriate to free conditions, must fall. When the wolf comes, the hireling flees, and the sheep are torn asunder. It is likely difficult to deny that there are various things in the free church, which soon may beguile the congregations into such a conception of the pastor and his office. Where a worldly spirit and tone become dominant in a congregation, and the pastor does not all the more firmly maintain his office as a service of God, there soon the one consideration and soon the other consideration may make him a slave instead of a servant, and both congregation and pastor are soon equally far from the true way of the Lord, himself to condemnation, and as an offense to the congregation of God.

There is nothing that is so heart-breaking as these caricatures of God's order of the congregation in the free church, because there is nothing that is so lovely and beautiful both before God and all the people as a true Christian congregation, where brotherly fellowship thrives, where the Word of God has its proper place, where the Lord's Spirit guides both the shepherd and the flock, so that together they go in and out and find pasture. If one had but the Spirit and grace to paint such a picture of that it might melt cold hearts both among pastors and congregations so that they no longer resisted the Lord, who is so willing to establish a true congregation among us! If it is not to be only a picture on paper, but become a living reality around about us and in us, the pastors must cease to stand in the way of the spiritual liberty of the congregations and the congregation must cease to stand in the way of the proper administration of the pastoral office. Unfortunately we must complain of both among our beloved people.

The pastoral office is a service of God. It is God himself who sends true pastors into the ministry of reconciliation. He sends them with the gifts of the Spirit to cry aloud about sin and invite and call sinners to the Savior. The Word of God shall not come to the people only in a printed book, but after the order of God it shall be brought by witnesses who themselves have experienced that the doctrine is of God. God himself lays the work on the hearts and shoulders of his servants and by his power shall even the least among his witnesses

speak. The pastor is responsible to God who is his strength. And when neither the pastor or the congregation fails to recognize that the office of the ministry is that of proclaiming the Word of God and that God himself is the one who will demand an accounting of how the pastor has performed his work, that pastor is no pastor and the congregation not a Christian congregation. Therefore it is this question that is of the greatest importance for every pastor and every congregation: Is the Word of God in its bruising severity and life-giving power what is being spoken and preached? If it is, then cast yourself down, sinner, and let yourself be raised up, you who are bruised, for it is the Lord who speaks to you through the mouth of his servant. If, however, it is not so, then let it become so. The grace of the Lord is ready and he is willing to send it to you anew if you will open your heart to him.

The office of the ministry is a service of the congregation in this Word of God. Here is the other side of the matter. The congregation has a right to demand that the pastor really in Spirit and truth "serves" it with the Word of God. The body of Christ shall grow by the same Word whereby God's life is awakened. Not for his gain or his honor does the pastor preach, but to the edification of the congregation. As independent of all fear and favor as the pastor should be in the ministry of his office, so humble and willing to serve shall he be when it is a question of preaching the Word in season and out of season. Always willing to exhort the unruly, to teach the ignorant, to comfort the sorrowing and bear with the weak, he must not hesitate to become the least of all. It is with the pastor's office, as with the position of a Christian in the world, that there is a spiritual dignity and power because it is the Spirit of God which sends him to cry in Christ's stead, "Be reconciled to God." But there is also the humility and poverty of the Spirit since there is the contradiction of sinners' sorrow over their erring, shame that their pride has to suffer. Through it all it is love that gives strength and wisdom, fortitude and patience in the work, of the ministry.

Consequently, if pastor and congregation are to stand in right relation to each other, it is necessary to maintain with unswerving faithfulness that the ministry is the service of God in the Word and the service of the congregation in the same Word. If the one is misunderstood or the other forgotten, then the relation becomes perverted. Let the pastor stand manly and fearless on the truth of God and the congregation submit itself under the Word; and let the pastor be always surrendered to the service of all and the congregation eager

to be served that Word which the Lord has entrusted to it. Then all will be well in the house of God which is his congregation. Then the faithful promises of God that his Word will be meat to the hungry, a hammer to bruise hearts, a balm to heal the wounded, shall prove themselves a living truth in the congregation, and there will be a fellowship of love. Irresistible power will attract more and more to itself and to God.

Now if this is the right relation of the ministry to the congregation that is the preaching of the Word which the congregation by its election delegates to the one whom God has sent and sends, and that it is both a service of God and a service of the congregation in the Word, then the question is: Is the congregation bound to be edified by the pastor alone, or is it its duty and privilege to edify itself? In other words, Is lay activity abolished by the congregation's call of a pastor, or is it confirmed. We will speak further about this matter which is so very important in these days.

#### THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY AND THE ACTIVITY OF LAYMEN

The New Testament testifies distinctly that the first Christian congregations had both a special office of teaching and free preaching of the Word of the Lord in their midst. To the Ephesians Paul writes, "and he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-12) There is no one who can deny that Paul is speaking of people, who by their gifts were capable of being officers of the congregation. Christ himself gave them the gifts, awakened them in the midst of the congregation, the congregation elected them (Acts 6:5; 14:23) under the powerful cooperation of the Spirit of God (Acts 20:28) and laid their hands on them (Acts 13:3). To the Colossians the same apostle writes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." (Colossians 3:16). Again there is no one who can deny that this is spoken of everybody without regard to a call by the congregation or any other kind of "external call." All who have the Spirit of Christ are here admonished to praise the name of the Lord for salvation that it may be to the edification of those who hear.

It is therefore of prime importance for the church of Christ to have an ordered ministry in its midst, assigned by the call of the congregation. It is an equally serious demand to the congregation that its members bear witness to their Savior from believing hearts and the experience of life.

Here in our free congregations where old customs and practices alone cannot decide what is right, but where the Word of God must ever be the foundation of our congregational order, it is fitting above all to lay the most serious stress on both these things. What we must give proper attention to is that the ministry does not hinder the free preaching of the Word, and that the free preaching does not weaken the work of the ministry.

There is a logical chain of reasoning that will always be advanced against layman's activity in the free congregation. It is this, "the congregation has the right to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments." As not all can exercise this right, it is delegated to one person (the pastor) by the election of the congregation. Thereby the one elected becomes the sole possessor of that right, and therefore no one else can either preach or administer the sacraments. Anyone who preaches or teaches, except the pastor, is consequently a thief and a robber. There is another equally logical chain of reasoning that will always be used to destroy the special position of the ministry in the congregation. It is: "The people of God are a people of priests, called to show forth the praises of God," and as no one can take from God's people their call, the call of a pastor is no delegation of the preaching to only one person, though when one is specially elected, it is only that he should be ready to preach when the Spirit does not come upon anyone else, and for the sake of order he ought to perform "ministerial acts." Therefore, if the pastor preaches and teaches in the congregation as the one who has the right and duty to do so constantly and as his daily calling, then he is one of those who would be "lords over God's heritage."

Both these chains of reasoning seem excellent, and yet both end by coming into conflict with the Word of God. It is contrary to the Word of God that one person alone should have the right to testify and teach in the congregation, for what then becomes of the admonition that Christians should be "teaching and admonishing one another." It is contrary to the Word of God that the one who is elected to teach in the congregation has not thereby received a special calling which the other members of the congregation do not

have, for what then becomes of the Word of God that Christ sent some to be apostles, etc. And of the commandment "that they which preach the Gospel should live the Gospel?"

The error in both these contrary chains of reasoning is that they do not sharply distinguish between the two different matters of the calling and duty of the congregation and the calling and duty of the individual Christian. It is the calling of the whole congregation to proclaim the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10), and it is the duty of every Christian to show forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. The individual cannot seize the work of the congregation, and the congregation cannot deprive the individual of his work. If a property is owned by the state, no individual can take it as his own, and conversely, no state has a right to deprive the individual of his property. What is common property we can delegate to an officer to manage for us, but that which is our private property, we each manage for ourselves.

Thus, when a congregation elects as its public teacher a person qualified by the Lord, he is thereby set apart for a special calling, becomes the congregation's officer, and shall have that as his life work, and as his living, to be a preacher of the Gospel, the administrator of the sacraments, and the servant of God who unhindered can give himself to the study of the Word of God and its propagation. He shall daily study all the counsel of God and become a scribe instructed into the kingdom of heaven, able to bring forth out of his treasure things new and old. He shall be an instrument of God to hold forth Jesus, the Word of God, the crucified Savior, the true Bride of Christ, and the individual Christian's true qualities. He shall be the congregation's shepherd who leads it to the true pastures, the keeper of the congregation, who with the Word of God fights against the sins within it and the seductions around about it. He shall, so to speak, be the conscience of the congregation, in that he with the Word of God shall rebuke sin and comfort faith, meanwhile being a continual reminder of what the congregation is and what a Christian is. So far from being the only one who should live and work in the congregation, there is, on the contrary, a great danger that he is not what he should be if he got to be alone in life and work. As the heart cannot beat with the throb of life in a dead body, so it will be very difficult to be a true pastor if one's activity and work does not beget the activity and work around him. Consequently, it is the congregation's great united internal and external work with the Word

of God that is particularly entrusted to the pastor, although the Christian duty of all the individual members of the congregation is thereby very far from being laid on him. The duty of Christians each for themselves to bear witness to the Savior in word and deed rests on them nevertheless. There are pastors who readily would be alone about the work and life of the congregation, who readily would have their congregation, which neither works nor lives, a dead mass, for that is the easiest for a pastor. There are plenty of parishioners who readily would have the pastor both live and work in their stead. That, however, is pure Catholicism, and should not find advocates within the Lutheran church. The Holy Scripture describes the individual Christian both as living and working, bearing witness and prophesying. It will not do to let everything be done for oneself by a salaried pastor by virtue of his office.

It is therefore an established fact that the congregation's election of a pastor does not take the place of the Christian responsibility to edify the body of Christ. Instead, it confirms it. The selection of a pastor places in the midst of the congregation a living center for the work of the congregation, and the edifying work of the individual Christian shapes itself about the work of the pastoral office. The office of the ministry is as the firm trunk of the work which is continually operating to carry nourishment to the other branches of work. The work of the ministry is regular and permanently prescribed and precisely ordered. The work of the individual Christian is more contingent upon opportunity and chance, on the Spirit's individual gifts and prompting. It is the business of the congregation to see that the work of the ministry is carried on with zeal and that the work of the individual members is done unto the edifying and not to the troubling of the assembly of God.

How far does the duty of the individual Christian to bear witness reach? Can any law or rule be set for it? The Word of God gives this general rule: "All things should be done unto edifying." The Word bears witness that everyone should use his gift to the edification of the congregation in the one and same Spirit. It is exceedingly dangerous to draw other limitations. It goes without saying, of course, that the duty of the individual may, under extraordinary emergencies, go so far that he simply must try and do to the work of the ministry, although it is nearly unthinkable in the free congregation since the congregation will step in and seek to remedy the need in a regular and orderly manner. Under general conditions, when the ministry is conducted in the right spirit and according to God's Word, there is no other rule to give than that which is

given by the diversity of gifts and the unity of the Spirit in connection with the different temporal callings. There comes, to be sure, a necessary and legitimate limitation in the edification of the individual members whereby they each have their daily work with temporal things, whereby they must and shall seek their daily bread and the necessary means to support the ministry and the congregation in their midst.

We cannot omit mentioning, however, that both congregational meetings for the management of the affairs of the congregation and devotional meetings for the congregation's growth in the faith are so natural and regular a form for the use of the gifts, that it is very difficult to conceive of a free congregation without them. There is no particular doubt that congregational meetings are primarily a lay activity, even though there are many congregations in America where congregational meetings are simply a form of the pastor's solitary activity. The congregational meetings, however, have of themselves become unavoidable everywhere. Devotional meetings where lay people both pray and exhort seem, on the contrary, to be the object of bitter hate on the part of many pastors. Yet it is absolutely inconceivable how anyone can find room for spiritual gifts unless such meetings are held. Whether the pastor approves or not, even though he opposes them, it seems absolutely necessary for the congregation to make use of all its gifts in this manner as well. It is at least certain that the meetings of the first Christians were primarily of this character and it is a fact that at all times in the history of the church when there has been any spiritual life, the desire for these meetings has been so strong that neither decrees of priests nor ordinances of police could prevent them. From such gatherings the Lord's witnesses have been brought before tyrannical judges and exiled and cast into prison and slain, and yet, the people of God have ever been renewed to find time and place to assemble for the purpose of praying with one another and for one another and to be strengthened by the brotherly exhortation and instruction. Strange it would be indeed if Christian people should not be permitted to assemble around God's Word and commune with one another and instruct one another concerning the wonderful works of the Lord! Assuredly, we must rejoice for every congregation where such gatherings are held, and we must grieve over and deplore every assembly of people calling themselves a congregation and yet which has not any gift of the Spirit they can make use of in this manner.

It cannot be concealed, however, that as there are pastors who are not true shepherds in the

congregation, so there are also lay people who preach the Word of God from purely carnal motives. If the ungodliness of individual pastors does not give us the right to abolish the ministry, neither do the transgressions of individual lay preachers give us the right to forbid the free preaching of the Word in the congregation by lay people. Let us do what we can to stir up the spiritual gifts and promote their employment, and when we have done what is in our power for the cause, then we have thereby also provided ourselves with the authority to censure the abuses. He who does nothing in order that the congregation may be able to edify itself and work and labor in every direction for the propagation of the kingdom of Christ, let him rather be silent himself than to try to put a muzzle on others.

The Norwegian-American congregations are exposed to danger from persons who seek to intrude themselves into the ministry without having the most elementary qualifications. When such come into the ministry they are very prone to improper imperiousness and to wanting to prevent all lay activity. On the other hand there is danger from such lay people who from laziness or arrogance or for the sake of gain would travel about and conduct devotional meetings instead of working with their hands. If these first gain some following they will readily scorn all congregational order and seek to create suspicion against the pastor wherever they come, perhaps in order to be elected pastors in place of those slandered. Against both these dangers there is a remedy. It is the life and liberty of the congregation. Fervent godliness and manly independence in the congregations and a true and sincere cooperation between pastor and people is the protection against the disorders that foolish pastors and foolish lay people will cause in our free conditions. That the authority of the congregation should be able to limit, where necessary, both the encroachments of the clergy and the arbitrariness of the laymen, is a matter on which we all ought to agree in the free church. The congregation's rule is this: All things that are done, must be edifying.

#### THE OFFICE OF DEACON IN THE CONGREGATION

It is impossible for us to turn from the individual local congregation in the free church to speak about the confederating of the congregations into a fellowship without first speaking about an extremely essential

office in the congregation: the diaconate. It has already so forced itself into the consciousness of the church among us, that we can hardly consider a free congregation as organized if it does not have deacons. Yet there has hitherto been little written about this work and little information provided as to how the work is practiced in the different congregations and fellowships. If one is to form a conception as to what place the deacons really have in our congregations one has to be satisfied with the short and dry statutory provisions in the constitutions of the congregation. Certainly, however, in many congregations in America, much work is done in secret for God by the deacons, while in many places, the diaconate occupies imperfectly the place it should have.

It belongs to the Christian congregation's consciousness of sin that it both knows and bitterly feels that it is imperfect in all that it does. When we especially emphasize that much is lacking in the work of the diaconate, we mean thereby something more than that imperfection which adheres to all the congregation's work on earth. Undoubtedly both the congregations who choose and the men who are chosen to this office are often lacking the right consciousness of what the work of the diaconate is. For that reason the men whom the Lord has endowed with the gift for this service may not always be chosen, nor can the gifts be rightly developed, trained, elicited, where a clear and thorough understanding of the real importance of the service is lacking. The reason for this is partly that from the church of the homeland this office was not known, nor has it been revived by an independent development with the Norwegian congregations, but must rather be considered as transmitted from American congregations to ours. It might therefore be of some benefit to try to throw some light on what this office is and how it might best become a blessing to the congregations.

Deacon means a servant, and the name is therefore lowly and humiliating to our flesh, but it has a wonderful delightfulness and beauty for Christians to whom it is a name of honor, since the Son of God willingly took it upon himself and came not to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his life as a ransom for many.

It is the greatness of all Christians to become humble and servants in order to win others for life eternal, if it were possible. In that way, they walk in the footsteps of their Lord, follow him in obedience and suffering, love with him, work with him, strive with him, are resigned with him, in order that the glorious

blessing of reconciliation both by word and deed may be brought as close to as many hearts as possible. It is especially fitting that in Christian practice the service of love where want and misery have made the sinful life of the world wretched, where sin has brought great distress and suffering, and where suffering often has humbled hearts so that they are receptive to the true remedy against sin and want and death the precious Gospel of our Lord and Savior. As the Savior himself was not received by those who were filled and rich, and had many goods, and had need of nothing, though he was all the more welcomed by those who suffered and were troubled, so also believers in Christ will especially become the servants of the suffering and the poor and the outcasts, provided they have otherwise remained faithful to the vocation wherewith they were called.

The narrative in Acts 6 shows us plainly how the office of deacon was instituted. It appears quite clearly from this record that deacons were elected by the congregations to perform a service which was of no different character than that which all Christians are in duty bound to show one another. But we find the same situation here that we previously touched upon when we spoke about the ministry and the work of the laity. All Christians are priests and witnesses, and yet the congregation as a whole must have its pastor who is to perform the congregation's duty of witnessing as a whole. Likewise, all Christians are to be servants or deacons in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, and yet the congregation as a whole will only be able to perform its duty of service through special deacons elected for that purpose. It is also worthy of note that the narrative in Acts 6 shows us that the underlying reason for this office was murmuring and dissatisfaction that was occasioned by the imperfection of Christians; from this we can better understand what the Apostle means in Ephesians 4 when he says that the gifts and offices in the congregation shall minister to the "perfecting of the saints." Through these offices and officers the congregation exercises self-control, self-purification, and self-edification.

That which threatened to cause a division in the first congregation and which occasioned the office of the deacon was a complaint that the Grecian widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Evidently, it was a question of the proper relief of the needy. The service that was to rest upon the deacons is said to be one of serving tables. We remind ourselves that the first congregation had its property in common. They lived together and the deacons were to conduct, arrange and take charge of the feasts of charity. They were

also to see that no one in any way was wronged. From this there likely soon followed of necessity, the idea that if anyone in the congregation could not attend the feast of charity because of sickness or distress, the deacons had to see to it that they were fed and aided. At least we find that later in the history of the church, when the feasts of charity were discontinued, the direct care of the sick was the official work of the deacons. It goes without saying, however, that as little as the office of ministry precludes the work of the laity, so also the office of the deacon does not preclude private charity. We must remember that in those times the world was full of the needy and especially the large cities were burdened to an unbelievable degree with the indigent and helpless.

The apostles prescribed in Acts 6:3 that the congregation would elect men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We find that the results of this new order in the congregation put a stop to the complaints, gave the apostles opportunity to give themselves exclusively to the preaching of the Word, to the edification of the congregation. "The Word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." We find also that some of the deacons took an active part in the preaching of the Word. From this we can conclude that the apostles have considered this office as an extremely essential and important link in the development of the congregation. It is evident that they requested the congregation's best men and that they found in the ones elected great support for their work and that the congregation derived great benefit from securing the right men for the right place.

Later, when the church consisted of many congregations, and the other congregations imitated the congregation in Jerusalem in its organization, we find, as in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, a description of how a true deacon should be. Paul writes thereof, "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding to the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." These words, which ought

to be read and considered again and again in our congregations each year as they elect deacons, give the most excellent guidance in electing the right men. We all know that the free congregation does not depend so much on office and high titles, but the right person in the right place.

If we not consider our own circumstances and our congregations, it is astonishing to see how we find the experience of the apostles confirmed. Not many rich, nor many mighty, not many wise after the flesh are called. Among us there is indeed some measure of poverty and want in the congregations. And yet there is such a vast difference that we in this country can have no conception of the utter helplessness in which thousands of the needy were placed in the time of the apostles. What we see of poverty here is as nothing in comparison to the want and distress which was hid behind the walls of the large cities of the Roman Empire. As a natural consequence our deacons have comparatively little work in the direct care of the poor, but are, on the contrary, assigned to give their attention to the sick, the dying and troubled as the field of work the Word of God points out to them.

We must also note that in the apostolic congregations there was commonly a selected presbytery besides the deacons. We do not elect several presbyters, but only one pastor, and as a consequence it follows quite naturally that our deacons, who together with the pastor usually constitute the congregational council, will have to do with various matters which in the earliest times most likely belonged under the presbytery. There is nothing wrong in that. For they who are qualified for the office of the deacon are also qualified for the office of the presbytery, and where the care of the poor falls away as in our congregations, it would not be necessary to have a special congregational office exclusively for that work.

Most of the provisions concerning the work of the deacons in our congregations are to the effect that the deacons are the pastor's assistants in the spiritual care of the congregation who are charged with visiting the poor, sick and troubled, and that they are the elected and appointed servants of the congregation and responsible to perform such work on behalf of the congregation as is also privately incumbent upon each individual Christian. As the benevolence and assistance of the individual in all manner of need will always be somewhat casual and cannot be counted on to reach everywhere, perhaps even lack the proper wisdom and understanding, the congregation must also as a public institution seek to have the work of service properly

performed by selected men.

Now if great care was required in the election of deacons in the apostolic congregation, then this is no less the case in our day. Or are our congregations further advanced in Christian faith and in ability to serve than they? Rather we must complain that sin and unfaithfulness have increased in the congregations. To have the liberty and suffrage of the apostolic congregations carries with it a grave responsibility. If we do not choose with understanding and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we hinder the kingdom of God from coming to us, in that we hinder the proper application of the gifts to the work in the congregation. If, however, we rightly respect the manifold gifts of the Lord and the works of the Spirit, we know that humble means can do wonderful things in the kingdom of God, provided they are used in the right place and to the service of the Lord.

The election of offices in a free congregation is a serious matter, and it is a very difficult matter to be an officer in the free congregation. Especially is this the case with the pastor and the deacons. The particular endeavor of the deacons should be to be followers of Jesus as helpers and comforters in the many kinds of distress that human life presents. Though poverty is not exactly the great need within our congregations these days, life is far from having been freed from misery. The misery of sin meets us in a thousand ways. There is sickness, drunkenness, family dissension, unbelief and despair, perplexities of all kinds. Who can number all the forms of sorrow and distress? Who can number the tears that flow, often where no one suspects? To come into a house of sorrow and a habitation of distress and be given grace to wipe away a tear, comfort a heart, guide an erring one, exhort an unruly one, that is the beautiful work the congregation lays on its deacons. The Lord grant that there were many qualified for this work and many faithful in its often difficult practice.

The office of deacon is an indispensable support for the pastoral office in our congregations. Deacons can apprise of sickness and spiritual distress here and there. They can visit the sick when the pastor is unable to do so. They can assist with devotional meetings, and conduct services when the pastor is hindered from doing so. They can pray with him and give advice and help where one person would be both perplexed and helpless. It is at once apparent that it is the same now as in the apostolic times. If the pastor is to hold all offices and perform all the work in the congregation then his principal work will be neglected. He will have

so many duties that the one will hinder the other. Such a condition is equally unsound for congregation and for the pastor. Unfortunately, there are congregations in many places that want it that way. Many are the true and well-informed pastors who recognized that the liberty and life of the congregation and the ministry's own grave responsibility demand a division of work. May they become more and more numerous among us and there be steady work for them. For today our congregations do not lack for the gifts of the Spirit. Where nothing is done to test the forces of the congregation, one can be sure that the gifts are hiding themselves. The congregations will be responsible for hiding its own talent in the earth if it does not work.

### THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CONGREGATIONS

Of all the problems the free church of America has to solve, none is so difficult as that of finding the proper form for the association of the congregations. All are agreed that the individual congregations must associate themselves into a fellowship. The reason for this is partly that they have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, one Spirit and this inward relationship impels them to form an external fellowship, and partly, that it comes from the fact that there are certain church activities which, frankly, cannot be furthered except by the united forces of several congregations. On the other hand, it has been apparent through the whole history of the church that the "church," whereby we mean the external organization of many congregations, nearly always has been an enemy of the congregation and its liberty. That should caution us to the most extreme care in our procedures in this matter lest we again fall under the old yoke of bondage. Moreover, we have not the same clear and definite guidance in the Word of God in this matter, as we do in the question concerning the character and rights of the individual congregation.

We have already pointed out that the word "church" is unknown in the New Testament. It would be incorrect if anyone would draw the conclusion, however, that there was no church in the days of the apostles and thus, we should not have one. The New Testament uses, as we have already indicated, the word "congregation" both about the individual local congregation that was established in every place where the Word of God was preached and also about the whole great host of Christians regardless of where they were

found. In such passages, for example, as Matthew 16:18, "Upon this rock I will build my congregation," the word congregation will therefore mean about the same as church, which in our Lutheran Confession is described thus: "The church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered." (CA VII) In this sense there has always been, especially in the days of the apostles, one holy Christian church. In apostolic times, when the congregation lived in the glow of its first love, all congregations were intimately bound together by a fervent love both for each other and their head, Christ. They, more than at any time since, were a people with "one heart, and one way." Hardly at any time since has there been a more intimate fellowship between Christians.

When we, on the other hand, consider the "church" as an outward, corporeal organization of several congregations under a common external polity, then it must frankly and openly be admitted that we do not find any such organization in apostolic times. There is no pope, no president, no synods, nor annual meetings. There is no administration, no constitution, no organized church fellowship outside or over the congregation. The congregation is the only organization found in the New Testament. Recently in Norway, a high-church journal has begun to speak about a "joint administration" in Jerusalem which has power and authority in all the early Christian congregations. This is such a fundamentally unprovable assertion that it would be an insult to our readers if we should begin to substantiate that there was no such administration. Every one who has read the New Testament knows how congregations came about. The apostles traveled about and preached and established congregations and these congregations constituted themselves approximately in the same manner everywhere with their presbyters and deacons. The apostle who was the founder carried them in his heart. If he saw any perils draw near those who were bought with a price, he was immediately with them either by speech or letter to defend God's heritage and preserve their souls from being deceived. This is no indication that it was anything else than the pure, free impulse of love that prompted him to speak or the congregation to hear. The apostleship gives no power or authority other than the power of truth which lies in God's own Word. Paul has that power, Peter has that power, every true witness on earth, even the least, has that power and as the stewards of the gifts of God they should be respected. No constitution or polity gave them power, nor can any human law take it away from them. Any other power or honor or right or liberty the Apostles

never claimed and never had. Where the power of the Spirit and the Word is great and living, as in the apostles, it is both superfluous and wrong to add anything to or take anything from human ordinances and polities.

The apostolic church is therefore the congregations around about in the Roman empire, bound together not by an external polity, but by the unity of faith, the sacraments and the Spirit. From this there can be drawn with precision the conclusion that the church is not an order that is higher than the congregation, or over the congregation. If it was to have been, it would have been from the beginning. Ensuing church history cannot add anything new of a higher character than that which was already at hand. It can only set forth and develop, knit together and unite what already existed from the beginning. Church fellowships can only be a the fellowships of congregations, church and congregations are of the same character. Their difference is only that by church we understand a federation of several congregations. It would be incorrect if anyone should think that since the apostolic congregations were not bound together by certain laws of fellowship, therefore, it is a superfluous and harmful thing for the congregations to confederate themselves in such an external manner.

Already in the apostolic congregations we find plain indications that an alliance between congregations is both desirable and necessary, and that in due time it must come as the mature fruit of development. In order not to become too elaborate we should mention here only a couple of instances. The first notable instance is the message from the congregation in Antioch to the Apostles and elder in Jerusalem, of which we read in Acts 15. The great question at the time was the relation of the Gentile Christians to the Law of Moses. The congregation in Antioch was divided and disagreed on this momentous matter and it concluded that it would arrive at a great assurance of its decision when it secured the advice of others. It desired especially to hear from Jerusalem how they, in the very center of the Old Covenant, regarded the rites of the Old Covenant. A congregational meeting was held in Jerusalem and after much disputation, a few of the apostles spoke and their opinion became the prevailing one and was adopted by the congregation which sent men with a message concerning the matter of the sister congregation in Antioch. In the ingathering for the relief of the brethren in Judea conducted in the congregations under the direction of Paul we have another example of how the congregations needed each others' help and support. We find this mentioned in 1

Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. From these two examples, which are the most prominent and best known, we see that already in the apostolic times there was need of mutual assistance in the congregations both in spiritual and temporal matters. At that time the Apostles themselves had to be the link connecting the individual congregations and bind them together. When an external and formal federation was not arrived at, it was because internal as well as external causes made such a constitutional federation impossible. In the first place, every congregation had an enormous amount of work to do in its own place, and in the second place, we must remember that communication between different parts of the world was not so easy then as now. For a congregation at Jerusalem to get a message to a congregation at Rome would at best take as much time today as to send a message from here to Norway, not to mention that persecutions might prevent it altogether. Such conditions must naturally have contributed much toward making it difficult to establish a permanent federation between the congregations.

We believe, therefore, that we dare assert with perfect assurance that it is entirely unwarranted to claim that congregations ought not to establish external federations, since we do not find anything like them in apostolic times. On the other hand, we emphasize with as great assurance that it is equally unwarranted to make the "church" or the external federation of the congregations into a fellowship of a higher order or of another order than the congregation itself. We will briefly show how the conception that the church is different and superior to the congregations has been a pernicious lie in the church of God which has corrupted both the church and congregation when it became dominant in the polity of the church.

It was not longer after the days of the Apostles before persecutions and internal tribulations drove Christians to seek a closer federation among themselves. Because of doctrinal controversies they began to hold councils which sought to bring about clarity and harmony on the points at issue. Both by persecution, in doctrinal controversies, and at the church councils, it was the bishops who, at the time, were much the same as what we call pastors, who especially became prominent. The persecutors preferred to slay the bishops in order to smite the shepherd and scatter the flock since the bishops took part in the doctrinal debates as they could more easily meet with the councils. It was, therefore, a natural consequence that the eyes of all were on them and that they obtained an eminent position, not only in their own congregations, but also in all the

congregations. Thus, they became the representatives of the church, the leading men in the church and the spokesmen of Christianity over against paganism. There were often in possession of considerable learning and often had a long period of study and thus obtained the influence which always attends knowledge and discernment.

All this was perfectly proper and an essential matter for the external and internal growth of the church. That the bishops were not only the representatives of the church, but really were the church soon developed. During the many and complicated circumstances in which congregations were placed by doctrinal controversies and other offenses, it became a constant question: who shall decide the dispute, who shall judge in a matter, who can speak with authority so that there will again be harmony and peace and the truth may make progress against lies. The answer seemed obvious: The church--and when one asked where was the church, the answer was: it is the bishop or the assembly of bishops. Thus the conception that the church was an authority above the congregation soon made its way. If one could find this church, it would be in the clergy. Thus the church came to be a new fellowship above the congregation and naturally came to consist of the learned and consecrated in contradistinction to the unenlightened laity. That is the beginning of the system that ended in the papacy.

As long as there was yet a real Christian congregation, however, this remained only an idea. For spiritual life was still strong enough to hinder the corrupting consequences of such ideas. Then, however, came the time when the Roman Empire had to bow before the cross and Constantine embraced Christianity. The bitter fruit the church reaped from this was that the congregation was ruined. When the mighty, irresistible stream of pagans flooded the church, and when they came to understand what they had gained, the whole field of the church looked as though it had been strewn with gravel and sand and great stones. Only here and there were little blades of grace able to sprout. In place of the exquisite small plantings of the Lord which Christianity had created around the Roman Empire, in place of living congregations built of living stones, there arose large, proud church buildings of dead stones, where large masses of heathens could come together to be "influenced" by the Word that the clergy preached. The congregation had disappeared. Over its grave were erected magnificent monuments. That which was now called by the holy name of "congregation"

was, according to the great majority, a dead mass in which the clergy carried on mission work. What the congregation had formerly been in relation to the heathen world, the clergy now became in relation to "dead" congregations.

From this time on the corruption was irresistible. It was a settled matter and an obvious fact that the "church" was one thing and the congregation something altogether different. The clergy is the church, not the congregation. They soon ceased to speak about congregations. It was dead and buried. The clergy inherited all its power, rights, glory, divine truth and might. "The people" became "the laity." It is superfluous to recall how matters developed further along their slippery course until, by this false relation, clergy and laity were equally far from Christianity. This must, however, always be remembered: that gravest responsibility falls here as always on the blind leaders of the blind.

The Lutheran Reformation also dealt with this question of the church and the congregation. For Luther it was settled that the church was nothing else than the congregation. Had it not been for the grace of God who again set the light of the Word on the candlestick, we would not yet have known the appellation "congregation," but still have kept on with the old Catholic confusion about "clergy" and "laity" which to this very day still haunts the heart and soul of so many.

As clear and positive as the fundamental ideas of the Reformation were on this score, and as plain and positive as these are expressed in the Confessional writings themselves, the Lutheran church was not able to carry out this expressed truth in its practice. It is of little use to ask why? There are many things that could excuse the weaknesses of which the Lutheran churches were guilty, and perhaps none of us would have had any more courage than our forefathers. The naked truth is, however, that the Lutheran church threw herself into the arms of the princes. The princes gladly accepted this augmentation of their power. What was not given them willingly, they later seized in spite of the protest of the church.

In this way it came about, after a brief flame of interest in the idea of the liberty of the congregation and the true character of the church, that congregational consciousness again sank down into the depths of sleep and forgetfulness and the old conception of the church as an authority over the congregation again arose, only with this difference: it was now the King and royal officers who were the church and exercised its power,

while formerly it had been the pope and bishops who were the church and had stolen her power.

Therefore we have little reason for boasting in this respect to be better than Catholics. If there is to be a wrong done to the church, it is a more churchly concept to have a pope chosen by the men of the church manage the church than to have a king, who often has no more interest in the church than a Turk, occupy the same position. It is another matter to note that kings may not have always treated the church as sinfully as pope. That is not because royal power is more legitimate in the church than papal domination. It is because people in the Protestant country could not be ill-treated by the powers that be as easily as in a Catholic country. Lutheran doctrine has in it a counterbalance against too much power. Otherwise, royal power has quite often treated the congregation in a manner which is certainly equal to the corruption of papal power. Amidst our enthusiasm for the Lutheran church's clear vindication of God's truth we must also cast our eyes to the ground in shame when we consider what that situation was in regard to liberty and the rights of congregations in Lutheran countries. In Norway we have a striking example of this in the treatment Hans Nielsen Hauge received. Though conditions in our fatherland have since that time improved, it is not due to the King, but to the people.

The conception that the "church" is above the congregation and that she can rule over the congregations at will, is even this very day the dominant one among the majority of Norwegian theologians, and it certainly will take a long time before it becomes a completely settled and no longer disputed matter that the church is the communion of saints where the Gospel is purely preached and the sacraments rightly administered, or that the church is the congregation, and that therefore the confederation of the congregations always is and continues to be a fellowship of congregations. When congregations join, nothing higher than the congregation arises which can bind the congregation. The congregation should establish a fellowship to unite forces with others to further their interests, preserve their liberty and protect their rights.

The unfortunate thing, however, is that the history of both the Roman church and the State church are like scarecrows for us when it is a question of establishing a fellowship. The Norwegian Synod is a frightening example of a fellowship. True, the Norwegian Synod is small and its history brief in comparison to the aforementioned church forms, but on the other hand it is so much closer to us and it provides the crucial

instance that the free church (i.e. a church independent of the state) and free congregations do not always go together. No wonder, therefore, that the long history which shows us "the church," whether it be the Roman church or the state church, as the oppressor of the congregation still have a paralyzing influence on the development of a free church fellowship. On the other hand, we must truly rejoice that we have this history to guide us, even if we are slow in our own development. The dearly bought lesson that is contained therein shall, by the grace of God, be a cogent guide to our future work.

We can sum up the result of our study in two propositions: that Christian congregations, after their nature, must establish fellowships, and therefore always have established fellowships; on the other hand, the fellowship of congregations or the church is not a new authority over the congregation, but a voluntary federation of congregations gathered for mutual help and strength. The federation gives strength, and it is our duty to establish such fellowships so that the church of God on earth can gain greater strength by a federation of congregations.

The question is how this increased strength may evolve to the benefit of the congregation and to no one else. How can the federation become such that it actually operates toward the same goal as that of the congregation, namely, the edifying of the congregation by the words of the apostles and prophets, and the extension of the kingdom of God over the whole earth. About these two things all congregational work revolves. If the fellowship does not serve this purpose, then it is of no importance to the congregation.

Immediately, we add, however, that the power that is strong enough to do good is always strong enough to do harm. Therefore if the fellowship is to be of benefit, what is needed is exactly the same as that which is needed in the individual congregation: that the Word of God and the Spirit must lead and rule in all things. Otherwise, all will be harmful and not beneficial. When the congregations are to establish a fellowship, it must primarily be based on unity in faith and confession and certain churchly objectives must be sought by the federation together. Without a common ground to stand on, no church fellowship can be established and without common objectives it cannot have any increase.

The common ground on which Lutheran congregations should federate is the Lutheran Confession. The common objective toward union is that of the edification of the congregation and spreading the Word to

the ends of the earth. It is these two objectives alone that the Word of God sets before the congregation, and the fellowship cannot aspire to anything else, otherwise there will always be a mistaken work, a wrong objective and a false and pernicious struggle.

Before we proceed further, a question of prime importance needs to be pointed out: Who shall establish such a fellowship? That it is only the pastors who are the workers in the Lord's vineyard and the "laity" is only a dead mass is an ingrained prejudice among many Norwegians. This makes it seem natural to them that the pastors should do all the work in the congregation, and thus, they should establish church fellowships as well. If this superstition is to be removed, we must begin at the root. Again and again it must be preached that every Christian is a priest, and that every Christian is called to be a worker and that no one is a Christian unless they take an active part in the work of edifying the congregation according as God gave them the gift of the Spirit and a measure of faith. If by the light of God's spirit, there first came to be a living acknowledgment that every member of the congregation is called to perform a service for the Lord, and that every member of the congregation should be a living stone in the temple of the Lord, and that every Christian is a witness of the Lord on earth, then it should also soon be recognized that if the fellowship is to be a Christian fellowship and not a catholic hierarchy, then it is the congregations that should establish the fellowship.

Only where congregations really wake up and establish a fellowship will there be a real church fellowship. Only there will there be the right objective, consistent work and the breadth and depth in the word that the Word of God itself describes. Only there can there be a question of intently striving toward this objective: the coming of the kingdom of God in us and about us. Therefore, also, it is only where the congregations actually do establish fellowship that there will be the proper solidarity.

The situation is this: however much a confederation of pastors may at a certain time be entirely devoted to their calling or however much a fellowship may succeed in having as pastors only men led by the Spirit, it is, nevertheless, a sad experience that such times are both brief and few, and hence the times soon come when the desire for domination, gain and honor become stronger motives than the Spirit of God and the call of Christ. Then at times the fellowship is torn asunder by contention and faction. At times it is carried away on an irresistible stream of corruption. The Catholic church is a good example of this. Its priesthood

degenerated. Then they tried societies of laymen in monastic orders, but they too degenerated. There is only one federation that has the promise of eternal permanency and that is the congregation of God, built on the Rock. If church fellowship is not established by congregations, it will never stand the storms of time or against the wiles of the devil.

Short as the history of the Norwegian-American church is, it may nevertheless already present to the careful observer many evidences of a pernicious failing in that the fellowships were all nearly exclusively the concern of pastors. In part these fellowships are consciously or unconsciously drawn along the lines of the old church; partly they are in constant danger of being torn and dismembered by the personal passions and quarrels of pastors. Presumably no further mention, either of the one or the other is necessary. Let each fellowship search its own heart and see if this is not true.

Certainly it is true that if we Norwegian Lutherans in America, as few as we are, really are able to establish a Free Church Fellowship then it must be clear that it is the congregations who founded it. Towards this pastors and parishioners, lay and learned, must work early and late in true brotherhood and full confidence. We are numerous enough, if we really acknowledge this objective as a call of the Lord and go to work with the power which the Lord freely gives those who follow his call and stake their lives on it.

We have already mentioned both the foundation on which such a fellowship must be built and the objective toward which it should strive. Here it is proper to say, at the same time, that when it was said of the fellowship that the foundation upon which it rests is the Lutheran Confession, it is because the congregation builds on the Word of God and that alone. Therefore, by the Word and the Sacraments it is already in fellowship with the whole Christian church on earth which builds on the same foundation. When Lutheran congregations are to establish a fellowship with each other, the common bond which united this particular fellowship was the Lutheran Confession. All Christian congregations are agreed on the great common foundation of the whole church, God's Word and his sacraments. Lutheran congregations that federated into a fellowship are also agreed on this truth: that the Lutheran church has in its confession attained the deepest and fullest understanding of the contents of the Word of God. As long as the church of Christ has been on earth, it has always had to contend with falsehood and error. As surely as it lies in the character and nature of faith to

engender testimony and confession, so it necessarily also belong to the earnest and true faith that it not only testifies to the truth, but also testifies against error and falsehood. It is thus true that the Lutheran church, through its confession, testifies both to the truth it has acknowledged and against the error it has seen within Christendom. It is this Confession that is the bond of unity of the Lutheran church fellowship.

It is, therefore, a necessary demand that Lutheran congregations who would establish fellowship, subscribe fully to the Lutheran Confession. When the Norwegian Synod has gone further and demanded agreement also in doctrinal precepts which go further than, and in part, away from the Lutheran Confession, this is an error in the fellowship which, for them, is essentially a fellowship of pastors. This avoids the fact that congregations cannot acquire as their confession and adopt doctrines which only a handful of pastors agree upon at an annual meeting or pastoral conference. That which should bind congregations in a fellowship together should be the old truth, well tested in the living experience of the church, which through the Catechism has become the personal experience and spiritual possession of each individual Christian. To want to tie any other bond around the congregation would be to court bondage and inward falsehood, no matter how much they paint on the outside of their chains, "This is pure doctrine." The whole thing is and remains a complete misunderstanding both of the meaning of the confession and the character of the congregation and fellowship.

Therefore if there is to be an external fellowship, there must be a definite and recognizable confession binding the fellowships together. If a congregation cannot subscribe to it, then neither can it belong to the fellowship for it lacks that inner unity which is necessary in order for external unity to subsist.

Now if it is granted that we must be in agreement on the Lutheran Confession, or what is just the same, our Lutheran Catechism, it follows that neither can a free church fellowship exclude from itself any congregation which earnestly adheres to this confession, even though the congregation should be unwilling to accept views of doctrines which either an individual or a majority of the fellowship embraces and regards as Scriptural. In so far as possible, there must be in a fellowship that would avoid becoming partisan, full freedom and equal rights for every Christian and every Christian congregation to read and interpret the Word of God according to their measure of faith and the gift of the Spirit. The view of an individual man or a casual

majority on a point of doctrine will always become a strait-jacket when a fellowship is made binding on all. If the fellowship is to be kept in the truth it is necessary that there be room for personal conviction, experience, in a word, room for life. Therefore different opinions must be tolerated, even though it is an imperfection which belongs to the state of the church militant. There should also be opportunity for frank discussion without the one party forthwith starting to pronounce judgments of heresy on the other and threaten the other with expulsion. This can only be attained by a real congregational fellowship. Pastoral fellowships have always proved themselves unfit to preserve that equilibrium which the congregation has because it rests serenely in the Word and Sacraments and inquires first and last after life in the simplicity of the Catechism, not exalted and sublime doctrine. Therefore, it brooks no deviation from the Catechism or the Confession. On the other hand, it is not so quick to pass a sentence of heresy on the one who, filled with conceit over his own wisdom, smells heresy in everybody who does not share his opinion.

Just as important as it is to be fully clear about the basis of church fellowship so that it is made neither too wide or narrow, it is equally important to be fully clear about the objectives it seeks to fulfill. Only in that way may we be saved from harmful tendencies and the most painful experiences. Only when we have the right objective can we also choose the right means with comprehension. The objective which we will work toward must also determine what the concerns of the fellowship and the congregation will be. We have said that the objective is the congregations' own edification and the extension of the kingdom of God over the whole earth. We cannot adopt a smaller or more narrow objective.

It is evident that all fellowships will maintain that they pursue this objective. If they really did, then all church strife would be due either to sheer misunderstanding or to disagreement on trifles or useless questions. Unfortunately, we often find even of church fellowships that they do not do what they say. It therefore becomes necessary to explain more precisely what we mean when we say that the objective is the edification of the congregation unto a living temple of the Lord or for the growth of the congregation upward toward its center, Christ.

We do not mean that the edification of the congregation unto the temple of God is simply a matter of external polity whereby the church is changed into a well-ordered assembly of people who submit to certain

church rules and which, by a fixed eternal system, puts each in his place, from the greatest to the least. By all such external systems they may be able to perfect a wonderful organization, but it lacks everything, especially life. God does not dwell therein. It is then not the Spirit of God which knits the whole together, but it is outward rules and customs.

Nor does the edification of the congregation consist in this, that it places higher and higher dignitaries in its midst, or by beginning with pastors who constitute a higher kind of people than "laity," with bishops over pastors, archbishops over bishops, and ultimately, a pope over the whole. That, too, is a "building up," nay! a rank "towering up," until it becomes "a tower, whose top may reach into heaven;" but it would be passing strange to call it the "edification of the congregation." It is a growth upward, indeed, but not unto Christ. It is self-deification.

Nor does the edification of the congregation consist in that the congregation dons a uniform, so that the congregation becomes like troops in the army. If this uniform is nothing else than an external garb that otherwise has nothing to do with the man, it may serve, it is true, to bring about a well regulated party which may appear good, but when the Lord comes to muster the army, perhaps he will find none he knows there, for his mark is not the external, but the inner seal on God's congregation. "The Lord knoweth them that are his." It is all the same, whether the uniform is a form of doctrine or a form of life whether it consists in a lesson committed to memory or in a habit formed by drill.

All such "edification" of the church and the congregation we ought to fight against. The edification and increase of the congregation is the work of the Word and the Spirit. It can therefore not be promoted, but hindered by all the thoughts of human beings and all their works that are not grounded in the Word and impelled by the Spirit. The edification of the congregation unto the temple of God and its increase unto the Head is primarily effected by the Word of God and the Sacraments and by nothing else. Therefore it must be the highest endeavor of the congregation and the fellowship to preserve these pure and unadulterated. Faith is the true fruit of the means of grace and it is the marvelous power which separates the congregation from the world and unites it with God. By it, Christ becomes ours and the image of God is renewed in the heart. Christ obtains his form in us and the congregation becomes the new generation of the children of God who walk

marked by the cross and stricken, it is true, but also freed and saved through a world that is in bondage. This, then is what we mean by the edification of the congregation, its renewing by faith and its holy union with Christ, its increase in purity and virtue, its increase in liberty and life.

This increase takes place by the power of the Word and faith, both a constant purification and constant sanctification. The congregation is purified from sin, and also separates from itself those who at one time adhered to the congregation, but more and more closed their hearts against the Word of the Lord. The congregation is purified in that it is more and more grounded in the Word and penetrates into its depths and is permeated by the life of God and more devotedly united with Christ, presenting itself more and more as the generation of the children of God where there is liberty of the Spirit and the love of the Spirit in obedience.

To this inward edification corresponds the outward. The congregation thus becomes the habitation of God through the Spirit, the city of God, which is the perfection of beauty, perfectly ordered, where there are no disturbances. The house of God is a house of order, where everyone knows his place. The city of God is the refuge of peace where everything is in its proper place. God's people are in battle ranks and everyone stands at his post and upon his watch. The main thing is this, that the inward edification in the Spirit and faith unto the people of God must be the first and the outward form must follow it.

Alas, you will say, but this objective will never be reached in this corrupt world. It is true that it is difficult, but therein lies the power and the victory. We have a call, an objective, a crown which is set high above the corruption of the grave and death. Therein lies the strength of the congregation and the fellowship of congregations, that they boldly cast their anchor within the vail. There is the harbor, the rest, the crown. If the aim is not high, it will not do. Its glance must be lifted so far and high that it reaches beyond all the greatness of the world and its smallness as well. If it takes a lower aim it will pass away with the world, perish with it, and will fall. The congregation strives toward the goal of becoming the people of God. John says that this goal is not reached until the new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. Then shall the tabernacle of God be among the children of men and he shall be unto us a God, and we shall be unto him a people.

If the congregation has set the right objective for its own edification it has thereby also set the right

objective for its outward activity. If we cannot rest satisfied, we reach the heavenly Jerusalem and only then do we see the problems of the congregation solved when God dwells with his people in eternal glory. Then we cannot pause in our work until the Gospel of the kingdom is preached unto all peoples. Further and further forward, farther and farther abroad the tidings of salvation must go, until the testimony of the Crucified One fills the earth and is heard from sea to sea, from pole to pole.

The kingdom of God overthrows all the kingdoms of the world, itself filling the whole earth. Every Christian fellowship must have in it the nature of the kingdom of God, otherwise it will not do. There are those who often censure the efforts made toward a "large fellowship" and it is proper to censure such work if it is an unsound work, a work in the spirit of the world and by the means of the world. It also, however, belongs to God's call in the Spirit to work in the sincere love of Christ for the salvation of all. That fellowship which is content to think we are enough, or does not want others, who are not like them, in it; or only wants those with a certain rank and experience or learning in it, which is accepted as a measure and mark of Christianity; or which will not cast its net as wide as the sea and draw the net, even though there will be putrid fish in the catch, that fellowship does not have the proper love of God or the perfect mind of Christ. As high as the crown of God and out to the ends of the earth, the Christian fellowship, like the Christian congregation, casts its glance. Even though it knows that death lies between us and the crown, and that heathendom and coldness lie between us and the goal of victory, still it is calm and unafraid in its faith.

He who sets himself a small objective becomes small; he who sets himself a great objective becomes great by his objective. He who dares to stake all on the eternal objective, who dares to give up all worldly objectives in order to gain the heavenly prize, he becomes greater than all. The Captain of our salvation has through his suffering and death won a name above every name and he it is who leads his children to the same glory, if we risk all, give up all, sacrifice all, in order to win him.