

On this fact is based our synodical practice to accept the resignation of congregations from synod if a congregation, in spite of all efforts to dissuade it, remains of the opinion that because of circumstances it would be better for it to sever its connection with synod.

## 3

*Orthodox and Heterodox Churches*

Congregations and church bodies must be divided into two classes according to their public doctrine.

It is God's will and command that in His Church His Word be preached and believed in purity and truth, without adulteration. In God's Church nobody should utter his own, but only God's Word (1 Pet. 4:11). Chaff and wheat do not belong together. All "teaching otherwise," ἐτεροδιδασκαλεῖν, is strictly forbidden. 1 Tim. 1:3: "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine." It is important to point out again and again that in all Scripture there is not a single text permitting a teacher to deviate from the Word of God or granting a child of God license to fraternize with a teacher who deviates from the Word of God. God is against the prophets who proclaim their own dreams (Jer. 23:31 f.). And all Christians without exception are commanded to avoid such (Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 6:3 ff.).

The distinction between orthodox and heterodox church bodies and congregations is based on this divine order. A congregation or church body which abides by God's order, in which therefore God's Word is taught in its purity and the Sacraments administered according to the divine institution, is properly called an orthodox church (*ecclesia orthodoxa, pura*). But a congregation or church body which, in spite of the divine order, tolerates false doctrine in its midst is properly called a heterodox church (*ecclesia heterodoxa, impura*).<sup>29</sup> All children of God should be earnestly concerned to see how real and serious this difference between the church bodies is, because indifference as to the Christian doctrine is rampant today among professed Christians,

<sup>29</sup> Orthodox churches in our day are those Lutheran congregations and church bodies which profess and actually teach the doctrines laid down in the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, because these doctrines, on examination, are found to be the teaching of God's Word. Impure and heterodox churches are the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Catholic Church, the Reformed Church with its many subdivisions, and, moreover, also the church bodies which, though bearing the Lutheran name, do not profess and actually teach the doctrine of the Church of the Reformation.

and the "abrogation of creeds" and substitution for them of a so-called "applied Christianity" is represented as the goal the Church should strive for.<sup>30</sup>

With regard to the orthodox character of a church body note well: (1) A church body is orthodox only if the true doctrine, as we have it in the Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Symbols, is actually taught in its pulpits and its publications and not merely "officially" professed as its faith. Not the "official" doctrine, but the actual teaching determines the character of a church body, because Christ enjoins that all things whatsoever He has commanded His disciples should actually be taught and not merely acknowledged in an "official document" as the correct doctrine. It is patent that faith in Christ will be created and preserved through the pure Gospel only when that Gospel is really proclaimed. (2) A church body does not forfeit its orthodox character by reason of the casual intrusion of false doctrine. The thing which the Apostle Paul told the elders of Ephesus: "Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30), came true not only in the Apostolic Church, but also in the Church of the Reformation and will occur in the Church to the Last Day. A church body loses its orthodoxy only when it no longer applies Rom. 16:17, hence does not combat and eventually remove the false doctrine, but tolerates it without reproof and thus actually grants it equal right with the truth.

We call heterodox church bodies both "churches" and "sects," depending on whether we have in mind the good or the evil in them. Churches they are in so far as they still retain enough of the Gospel of Christ that men can come to faith in Christ and thus can become true children of God. Sects they are in so far as they have combined to further their deviations from the doctrine of Christ and thus cause divisions in the Church and by their errors and separate existence constantly threaten the faith of the children of God.

## 4

*Children of God in Heterodox Churches*

Though God desires that all congregations be orthodox, and though all heterodox communions exist only by God's sufferance and contrary to God's gracious will, still it is a fact that also in the heterodox

<sup>30</sup> *The Expansion of Religion*, by E. Winchester Donald, Rector of Trinity Church in the City of Boston, 1896, p. 125.

communions there are believing children of God. The term "Christians" covers a wider field than the term "orthodox Christians." Though Christ denies to the Samaritan Church the right of existence as a separate church organization (John 4:22), still He repeatedly acknowledged individual Samaritans as true children of God (Luke 17:16 ff.; 10:33). Luther, too, never thought of making the orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church, coextensive with the *Una Sancta*. Vigorously as he fights against the Papacy and expressly declares it an institution of Satan, he nevertheless does not doubt that God has at all times under the Papacy preserved for Himself a Church, yes, the elite of the Christians.<sup>31</sup> Again, earnestly as Luther fights against Carlstadt, Zwingli, and their collaborators for their deviation from God's Word, he nevertheless grants that there were also true children of God who, ignorant of the evil they were thus supporting, made common cause with these pseudo reformers (St. L. IX:44). Likewise our older Lutheran dogmaticians, "zealots for orthodoxy" though they were, nevertheless decidedly rejected identification of the *Una Sancta Ecclesia* with the orthodox Lutheran Church.<sup>32</sup> The Fathers of the Missouri Synod declare it a calumny when the Lutheran Church is accused of identifying the Church of God with the Lutheran Church.<sup>33</sup> They taught: If a person sincerely clings to the cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, if he believes that God is gracious to him because of Christ's *satisfactio vicaria*, he is a member of the Christian Church, no matter in which ecclesiastical camp he may be. By denying this truth one would overthrow the cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, the article of justification. Walther: According to Rom. 3:28 and Acts 4:12 "the unconditional and sole requirement for salvation is fellowship with Christ through faith. The maxim, 'Outside the Church there is no salvation,' 'He who has not the Church on earth for his mother has not God in heaven, for his Father,' is true only in this sense, that outside the invisible Church there is no salvation and no state of grace. It has only this meaning that 'there is no salvation outside Christ'; for whoever is not in inward fellowship with the believers and saints is not in fellowship with Christ either. On the other hand, whoever is in fellowship with Christ is in fellowship also with all those in whom

<sup>31</sup> St. L. XVII:1019 ff. Also St. L. V:468: "Under the Papacy there have always been some believers, and even today there are some whom we don't know, whom God preserves through His Word and Sacrament, though the devil and the Pope do not relish it."

<sup>32</sup> For substantiation see Baier-Walther, III, 646 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Walther, *Kirche u. Amt*, pp. 95—113 (*Walther and the Church*, p. 65).

Christ dwells, that is, with the invisible Church. Accordingly, he who restricts salvation to fellowship with any visible Church therewith overthrows the article of the justification of a poor sinner in the sight of God by faith alone in Jesus Christ." (*Walther and the Church*, p. 70.)

## 5

### *Church Fellowship with Heterodox Churches (Unionism) Is Prohibited by God*

It is common knowledge that the presence of children of God in heterodox churches is urged to prove that it is right, even demanded by charity, to fellowship heterodox churches. This is the exact opposite of what Scripture teaches, for Scripture says, "Avoid them."<sup>34</sup>

The argument of unionists is contrary even to *natural reason*. The old Lutheran teachers point to 2 Sam. 15:11 as an illustration. Just as the fact that two hundred citizens of Jerusalem in their ignorance joined Absalom did not give the rest of Israel the right to desert their king and join the rebels, nor even to connive at the rebellion, so the circumstance that some Christians, from ignorance and contrary to God's orders, follow false teachers does not give license to other Christians to do the same thing.

To say that love demands such a practice is a misuse of that word. Love of God and love of the brethren rather requires the opposite practice. He who loves Christ loves Christ's Word, and Christ commands us to avoid all who teach anything that is contrary to His Word. And whoever really loves the brethren refuses to participate in their erring and sinning, seeking rather to deliver them from error and sin.

Moreover, the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament state explicitly that God permits false teachers to arise in order that Christians may show their obedience by avoiding them, not in order that Christians may fraternize with them (Deut. 13:3; 8:2; 1 Cor. 11:19). If Christians, against the divine prohibition, fellowship false teachers and tolerate false doctrines, they commit the sin which the Church calls "unionism," "syncretism."<sup>35</sup>

As a matter of fact, this unionism divides the Church and gives rise to heterodox churches in Christendom. Had the Christians always obeyed the divine order to avoid those teaching another doctrine

<sup>34</sup> Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 6:3 ff.; 2 John 10—11; etc.

<sup>35</sup> Baier-Walther, III, 665 ff.; *Apol.*, *Trigl.* 243, VII, VIII, 48.

(ἑτεροδιδασκαλοῦντες), neither the Papacy nor other sects could have arisen. Where there are no buyers, there is no market. Of course, unionism avers that it aims at the removal of discord among Christians. But because the unity of the Christian Church consists in having one faith and one profession, unionism actually is a caricature, indeed, a mockery of Christian unity.<sup>36</sup> Instead of healing the hurt, it makes it permanent.

In 1 Cor. 1:10 we have an exact definition of Christian unity: "Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing [ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγητε πάντες] and that there be no divisions among you." This is a demand for uniformity in speech (λέγειν) or in the profession of the Christian doctrine. Then the Apostle continues: "but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοῦ καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ γνώμῃ. Here he clearly says that Christians are to use the same words also in the same sense.<sup>37</sup> Agreement in words with disagreement in meaning is altogether contrary to the unity God calls for, and to seek such a "unity" ("we agree to disagree") is immoral, a trifling with sacred, divine things, which is unseemly for Christians.<sup>38</sup>

The Christian Church can and should have patience with the erring and seek through instruction to remove the error. But never can or should the Church grant error equal right with the truth. If it does, it renounces the truth itself. It is the very nature of truth to antagonize error. Truth which no longer excludes error, but grants it domicile, is *eo ipso* resigning as truth. Pertinently Luther remarks: "Whoever really regards his doctrine, faith, and confession as true, right, and certain cannot remain in the same stall with such as teach or adhere to false doctrine" (St. L. XVII:1180). Unionism in principle abolishes the difference between truth and error, so that only through a "happy inconsistency" can the erring retain their hold on the essential truth. For this reason unionism is a grave threat to the Christian Church. A person is fortunate indeed if, ignoring the words of

<sup>36</sup> Cp. Luther on the unity of the Christian Church as a unity of the heart through faith in God's Word (St. L. XIX:344 f.).

<sup>37</sup> Meyer on the passage: "Γνώμη nowhere in the New Testament means 'Gesinnung' [disposition], rather *sententia, iudicium* [opinion, conviction]."

<sup>38</sup> Luther, St. L. XVIII:1996: "Fabius teaches that an ambiguous word must be avoided like a reef; if we undesignedly happen to use such a word, it may be overlooked; but intentionally and purposely to choose such a word is inexcusable and deserving of the most righteous hatred of all. . . . For what else would result if the custom of speaking ambiguously and craftily in religion, in law, and in all important matters were adopted than a thoroughly confused babel, so that finally no one could understand the other?"

Scripture enjoining him to avoid those who teach another Gospel, he yet retains his faith in the words: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

As for the talk current in our day, even among so-called conservative theologians, that "various trends," that is, variations in doctrine and profession, are intended by God, one can merely say that it is shocking that within Christendom the testimony of Scripture should thus be contradicted.

## 6

*Schism (Separatism)*

By the term "schism" we mean a division in the Church which God's Word does not enjoin, but which is begun by men for carnal reasons and therefore is sinful, e. g., a separation because of differences in church customs, church terms, order of worship, etc. In practice it is important to distinguish between schismatics acting from spite and schismatics acting from weakness in Christian knowledge and prejudice.<sup>39</sup>

Such, however, as separate from a church body because it tenaciously clings to false doctrine are unjustly called schismatics, separatists, etc. This separation is commanded in Scripture (Rom. 16:17) and is the only means of restoring and maintaining the true unity in the Christian Church.

## 7

*The Representative Church. Church Government*

(Ecclesia repraesentativa)

Christ has commissioned neither some one person (Pope, princes, governors, presidents, etc.), nor a college of persons (bishops, pastors, board of directors, consistories, parliaments, conferences, synods,

<sup>39</sup> J. Meisner: "Some schismatics are malicious, namely, such as knowingly and willfully, contrary to their conscience, from malice disturb the Church and divide it into two parties disagreeing with each other; others are not malicious, viz., such as do this from weakness, ignorance, and a preconceived opinion which they hold to be very true. The former are not of the Church, because such a malicious schism is a very great sin, extinguishing the faith. . . . The latter are no doubt of the Church, because such disturbance, springing and done from ignorance, does not immediately drive away faith; this happens only when a malicious defense is added to it." *Disput. de eccl. a. 1651 habita*, th. 3, qu. 4; in Baier-Walther, III, 664.