

Doctrinal Presentation Church Practice - Part 1.

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The subject which this Synodical Conference has proposed for discussion is church practice. This is well worth the effort, yes, it is most necessary that we deal directly with this subject now in our context at a Synodical Conference. Most assuredly, the first and foremost matter that a church association must strive to achieve is unanimity in doctrine, when that is not the case, or to defend it when God has granted it. Now God has demonstrated this great grace, that he has bestowed on us this greatest matter, unity in the truth, in the doctrine of God's Word, this rare grace, so that in our orthodox American Lutheran Church the pure, clear Word of God has been taught, heeded and believed now for over half a century. But as great as is our responsibility to preserve this great jewel, and we would be most fearfully accountable if we should, through our own fault, lose this jewel, yet we must still guard ourselves from thinking that if our doctrine is kept pure and clear among us, upon the lectern, in our schools, in our church periodicals and in our synodical assemblies, then we've done all we could do, and we'll have done everything required of us. We know of a congregation to which an apostle has written in this regard by the Holy Ghost: "I thank my God always for your sake for the grace of God given you in Christ JESUS, that through him you are enriched in every way, in all teaching and understanding, as the preaching of Christ has been powerful in you, so that you are lacking in no gift, and you only await the revelation of our LORD, JESUS Christ." 1 Cor. 1. But this same apostle writes to this same congregation by the same Holy Ghost: "Your boasting is not good." There were areas of practice of which it is thereby declared for all times until the last day to the entire church: "Your boasting is not good." So it can also happen today that a synod, or a sphere of synods, like the Synodical Conference, can be rich in all aspects, in all doctrine and all understanding, and have no deficiency in any spiritual gift, and that it can still come about that it must be declared of her: "Your boasting is not good."

Just in our day there is a real danger that this might be the case, even among us. Yes, it's true, even as long as the pure doctrine remains in the pulpit, in the schools, and consistently in church publications, many are satisfied with that, and if the practice deviates just a bit, it may not bother one much. Certainly one can witness against the blasphemous secret societies, against all sorts of worldly ways that have even begun to insinuate themselves into the congregation, so long as each individual is left to do as he pleases. They want these things, as they say, left to their own discretion. We should not close our eyes to the fact that the most difficult danger that now threatens us may well not be some impending doctrinal controversy. God be praised, doctrine is so pure among us, so clear, so rich and fully presented and understood that now days it would be most difficult to budge that doctrine without the one making waves thereby earning the reputation of having strayed into heresy. But it's a sign of the end times that people will become preoccupied with worldly and current affairs, in eating and drinking, in marrying and being given in marriage, man making himself a Paradise on earth and leaving the Paradise above, as one of their balladeers has published, "to angels and comedians." And if we are not awakened, warned, nimble and armed to engage this danger, the result might be that after some

time has passed, divine doctrine, the pure, clear truth can turn into a mantle for all kinds of evil, until that filth must finally burst forth from its cover.

Secondly, therefore, this is also a useful and necessary, simultaneous aspect of this subject, as practice is inextricably connected with doctrine. False doctrine results in false practice. A false doctrine about church and ministry results in either a mob rule of the people over the church, or priestly rule in the church. One is as demonic as the other. Yes, we have proven in the short history of our American Lutheran Church just where false doctrine of church and ministry can lead, and this has been experienced as such amongst us, as it must. But, on the other hand, a false, unscriptural practice eventually displays false doctrine before the world, inasmuch as a godless life of lust results in profaning doctrine. Most obviously, first false doctrine is in the world and thereafter what is founded upon her false doctrine, an actively profane life. But people love darkness more than the light, the lie more than the truth, because their works are evil, as the apostle describes the heathen. Through their lust they become corrupted in heresy. The pragmatic materialists of our day follow theoretical materialism, the gospel of fleshly religion. Since people are godless, they rejoice because someone comes and proves to them, or attempts to demonstrate, that their godlessness is more than justified. That's also how we might lose the jewel of pure doctrine, if, a universal corrupt practice insinuates itself among us.

Theses on Church Practice

Thesis I.

Church practice is the collection of arrangements and institutions, which are included in church life as such.

Thesis II.

Church practice is in part normed by God's Word and in part left to the discretion of the Christian congregation.

Thesis III.

In as much as church practice is normed by God's Word, the unique character of God's Word also establishes the unanimity of that church practice as a divine requirement for the whole church.

Thesis IV.

In as much as an obvious denial of the truth underlies a disregard for the divine norm in church practice, the intentional maintenance of a contrary practice is no less divisive to the church than stubbornly maintaining false doctrine.

Thesis V.

In as much as a church practice is left to the free discretion of the Christian congregation, unity of church practice cannot and may not be placed as a divine requirement upon the church.

Thesis VI.

In as much as the life of the church is conducted for her times as the life in the local parish, the church must take into account her contemporary local conditions and the best church interests of her members with her free practices in regards to her church practices.

Thesis VII.

In as much as the ecclesial life of a congregation and her members takes place as a life in common with other congregations and her members, the churches and their pastors (*Seelsorger*) must also take this fellowship into account by being conscientious in practice normed by God's Word.

Thesis VIII.

The commonality of the ecclesial life of congregations with each other will also be made most valued through as much unanimity in church practice as possible, even in regard to areas of church adiaphora.

Thesis IX.

The disregard for this necessary unity in practice has its bases in a disregard for doctrine, which should be the foundation of all practice, and, on the other hand, yields indifference towards doctrine as its consequence.

Thesis X.

An over emphasis on uniformity in free church practice is a dangerous aberration that leads to a disregard for doctrine and necessary unity in practice or even already stems from that, and its purpose is to mask indifference to doctrine.

Thesis XI.

Indifference towards free church practices is a deficiency that can easily lead to a corruption of church life.

Thesis I.

Church practice is the collection of arrangements and institutions, which are included in church life as such.

The Scripture distinguishes between doctrine and life, between knowing and doing. The Savior says to his disciples: “So as you know this, blessed are you if you do it.” We distinguish in the church between doctrine and life as we distinguish between faith and life in the individual Christian. Doctrine, *per se*, is not a part of the Christian or ecclesial life. Doctrine is a gift of God that God has given us in his Word, and it is perfect, does not grow, will not increase, won’t diminish. It stands immutably fast. And if heaven and earth passes away, the doctrine will still remain, and, indeed, the whole construct. Doctrine is not a seed God planted at the beginning of Christianity that would then increase and grow in Christianity’s garden, so that here and there a new doctrine would have been added or grafted in, until now finally the whole doctrinal tree would have evolved so far as we have it now, and that in the future this doctrinal development would proceed even further until the doctrine would be completed. No, doctrine is a perfect, completed gift of God, and, indeed, so surely, that it is an abomination to add anything to it and a presumption to detract anything from it. But doctrine is an aspect of Christian, church life, as the administration of the mandate, which Christ, the LORD, himself has given his church: “Go into all the world and teach all nations.” And Baptism is an aspect of the life of the church as the administration of the mandate which Christ, the LORD, has given his church: “Baptize in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

We are not here treating Christian life in general, but Christian life only insofar as it is played out in the life of the Church. The individual Christian is not the church, but where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name, there is a church, a congregation of God. The two or three together under Christ, their head, are a congregation, and what they do and arrange as such, as a congregation under Christ, their head, is their ecclesial life, or, in their individual activities and institutions, their church practice. For church practice is not exactly the same as the notion of church life, as church life is not exactly the same as the notion of Christian life. The Christian life is a more far reaching notion. A Christian does not only live as a member of the church. He also lives as a family member, as a member of the citizenry of the state, and he also lives as a Christian in these stations and leads a Christian life distinct from the life of the child of the world. A Christian housefather leads a different life as a housefather than his unbelieving neighbor who is also a housefather. A Christian housewife leads a different life as a wife than her unbelieving neighbor who is also a housewife. And in these stations there is also a practice and works are performed as well as established routines. When a father punishes his son with words or the rod, that is part of his practice, and in its painful aspect, a touchy practice that he might gladly forego. There is also danger if he departs from its just practice, *in excessu* or *in defectu*, either being excessive or too lax. A Christian citizen lives his Christian life even in the state. Even if church and state are not one and the same thing, but must be and remain divided and separate, yet a Christian citizen is still a different man as a Christian citizen than he would have been before he became a Christian, or as the thousands who are not Christians. A Christian heeds authority, comports himself by the law for the sake of conscience. An unbeliever comports

himself by the law for the sake of its threats, or because he reaps some temporal advantage by it. So, as said, the Christian life extends through every station. The Christian laborer also lives a Christian life in his labor. A Christian businessman also walks a Christian path in his business and trade. And a Christian especially walks a Christian walk and lives a Christian life where God has blessed him most abundantly, in the station which he esteems as the highest one in which he lives, that is, in the church, as a member of the church. Even as a member of the church he leads a Christian life in all piety and respectability.

But this church life includes many kinds of things that are not part of church practice, many kinds of experience, growth and prosperity, trials and joys, successes and failures, all sorts of afflictions in good and evil days; when God lets rain and sunshine alike fall upon the church; when the church and her members must encounter all sorts of adversity, deceptive temptations, and even fire and sword, chains and bands, when God permits them, from evil foes along with all the world. None of that is included in church practice. For the church as such, in her church practice, is what the church works and arranges that impacts her institutions, and what honestly preserves, defends and is necessary for them. So that involves church activities, and, indeed, those of the whole congregation, or performed through her servants. Yet, on the other hand, not everything that the members of the congregation and the servants of the church do are part of church practice. When the pastor and his family take a vacation trip, that's not part of church practice. When the congregation calls a church meeting in order to discuss what they can do about some problem in the congregation that is disturbing a major portion of the congregation, as the congregation is therefore meeting as friends who want to consider temporal interests, wanting to seek counsel, then that is not a part of church practice, and should also not be seen as if the congregation were acting there (officially) as a congregation. So a number of congregations might get together to discuss how they want to oppose a corrupt regulation of the state; if it is not a matter of conscience, but rather an adiaphoron, then it cannot be said that it's a matter of church practice, and the accusation can't be made that the congregations have mingled church and state.

In church practice, the congregation deals with the church in church matters, in matters that belong to the life of the church as such. But everything the church does here is part of church practice. Whether it is the congregation in its entirety, or if she is dealing with, working and arranging her appointed preacher or elected officers in the context of the church, her church practice is, thus, the totality of these things, the totality of these arrangements and institutions which belong to the church's life as such. So also it is all official arrangements of the pastor, the school master, the congregational officers, the election of preachers, teachers and officers, church meetings and the conduct of the same, which impact the circumstances of the congregation as such, the reception of church members, the implementation of church discipline, announcement for communion, celebration of the LORD'S Supper, celebration of certain festival and holidays, the congregation's joining a synod, erecting church buildings, the carrying out of mission work, in general, everything that in any way is included in the command of Christ: "Go and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Several inquiries here prompted the presenter to make the following additions:

Even a person's attitude, inasmuch as it is a result of his inward disposition to a matter, inasmuch as it rests upon a decision of the will, is a carrying out of a work. Therefore if it is said: "By all means it is not through the works, but through our attitudes that God determines to work out our sanctification," then thereby this is actually being said: "God is not pleased with our works, but rather through our works." For even our attitude is a work. For that reason, attitude, by all means, makes a statement over and against a church matter, and is included in the idea of carrying it out, while, on the other hand, that inner attitude is not a matter of church practice, but rather belongs behind what the practice carries out. As the fruit from a tree, the way the subject is being treated creates and brings about the accomplishment of the deed in its definite form.

The choice of the words "arrangements and institutions" and their position in the construction of this thesis is intended also to bring such matters under this thesis which refer to not only a *πρασσειν*, an institution, but a custom, a permanent activity that may be omitted, for example, announcement for Communion. 75 people might come on Thursday and announce for holy Communion, because this confessional announcement is an institution. But then this confessional announcement is also an arrangement, something that has been introduced and remains, an institution. That belongs to practice, even if it is not observed so conscientiously by everyone. If an arrangement exists, but it is thereafter not employed by many, then this disuse of the same is a matter of practice, but its institution something else. For its institution is built upon the foundation upon which the church or the congregation in which it was instituted has established it as an enduring institution to be used and to stand. Now (it is instituted for) as long as the reasons for the arrangement continue as the enduring condition. This is the reason for the arrangement of words used in this thesis. Without material alteration of the meaning they could be reversed. It must not appear as if the arrangement were maintained merely because the arrangement is made. We do not stolidly maintain confessional announcement for Communion because we have arranged it, but we have introduced it in order to hold fast and maintain it thereafter. Since it was a good thing that we introduced it, we now preserve it resolutely among us for the same reason for which we introduced it.

Finally it was noted that church practice can also, under certain circumstances, be omitted to some extent; for that which someone works and invents can be performed through doing or refraining. The rectitude of this is in doing those things that are right and in leaving undone what's not right. Wrong doing consists of doing what is not right and neglecting to do what is right. A person can be a murderer without personally drawing the blade or shooting the gun. Yet if he murders it is a sinful deed. So in this sense one could say here of these arrangements: Everything the church does as a work in her situation as church, be it her doing or refraining from acting, is her church practice.

Whereupon the first thesis was accepted.

Thesis II.

Church practice is in part normed by God's Word and in part left to the discretion of the Christian congregation.

We read in Gal. 2.11-14: "But when Peter went up to Antioch, I opposed him to his face.

For there were complaints against him. For previously, before a few came from James, he ate with the Gentiles. But when they came, he withdrew and separated himself from them, for he feared those who were of the circumcision.” There it would be incorrect to say: “So here we have an apostle who's also strayed into heresy.” Yes, this errant Peter in Antioch may well be all too willing to be led far afield to demonstrate his propensity to heresy against the holy Scriptures, yet in the meantime Paul proceeds from: “He ate with the Gentiles.” But as much as eating is not the same as doctrine, we aren't faced here with a Peter who is erring in doctrine, but he errs through his eating. “And the other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was misled into hypocrisy with him. But when I saw they were not walking rightly, according to the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter openly, in the presence of all: So you, who are a Jew, live as a Gentile and not as a Jew, so why then do you force Gentiles to live as Jews?” There again, it's not said that Peter had misled the other Jews into false doctrine, but into an area of impious life, into hypocrisy. And Barnabas was also not misled into doctrinal heresy, but rather, “into hypocrisy with him.” So here this treats an area of life, not doctrine. Peter knew the doctrine well enough, yes, he was an infallible doctor of Christianity through the Holy Ghost. But here he falls short in life. And, indeed, this deals with an aspect of church life, an aspect of life that was of great significance to the whole church, especially of that day. It treats right behavior, the right acting and refraining for the Christian and the Christian congregation of that day, in view of some specific activities, of which not all of the members of the Christian congregation of that day had the same knowledge; in view of which, indeed, every one of them could have had the right knowledge, but many were still weak. Now had Peter and Barnabas been the only ones to fall short in this aspect, then their corrupt actions could not be widespread enough to designate it a matter of church practice, as false church practice. But “the other Jews” joined him in his hypocrisy. Around Peter was a family of church members, who now, in fellowship with him and each other, put into practice a way of acting which had insinuated itself and was now church life as such, and had impact as such, for example, on the celebration of Communion which was included in the agape or love feast. Should the manner which Peter and an influential segment of the congregation here employed become the common practice, then congregational life in Antioch would become won over by a different, and indeed, a false character. And Paul nipped this in the bud “before everyone publicly,” as a matter that should concern them all. He says, “that they were not walking according to the truth of the Gospel.” According to the divine Gospel, that is judged according to the preaching of Christ and his apostles, their practice was false. In this matter they had not acted in their church practice according to the norm of the divine Word.

Now many sorts of arrangements and institutions are normed through God's Word that belong to church life as such. One of them is the practice of Communion as such, in as much as the celebration of Communion is part of what is essential to it. For here we have the express command of Christ, “THIS DO.” He doesn't say here, “This believe,” but rather: “THIS DO.” It is understood that we must believe his Words, else he would not also be the Savior who says, “I am the Truth.” But the command he here declares in the institution of the Sacrament, his command to the congregation he has before him, and to the entire church says: “Do this – that which is being done among you now, do this also in the future.” And with this he's telling them this, from then on to the end of time, in that he sets this in the context of his saying he would not again drink from the fruit of the wine until he would be in the kingdom of his glory. The practice of Communion is also normed by other passages of Scripture so that we can and must know

from God's Word what we must do in that regard and what we must avoid. The apostle says: "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of this bread and drink of this cup." 1 Cor. 11.28. This tells us, as a congregation, and us as preachers, that we only permit distribution of the Sacrament and allow its distribution to those who are able to examine themselves, and so far as we are able to ascertain, who also want to examine and actually do examine themselves, and so come and "eat of this bread and drink of this cup."

Further, it is written in Scripture that the Sacrament of the Altar is a confession, a corporate proclamation of the death of Christ, 1 Cor. 11.26, and that those who eat there become partakers of the altar, 1 Cor. 10.16-21. In this, for all times, is established the norm for our practice of Holy Communion, that all who are not fully and completely united with us in the confession of Christ and his truth must also not participate in our reception of holy Communion. So our practice of holy Communion, in as much as it is normed by God's Word, is not something we are free to practice as we wish. That means we have absolutely no permission to set aside what Christ, the LORD, what God has prescribed in his Word in regard to our practice of holy Communion. We may well hear: "You're being presumptuous! Who has given you preachers the right to deny the sacrament to any one at all? It's not your sacrament, it's Christ's sacrament, and you're acting as though it were your sacrament. The Savior says: 'Take and eat,' and you are saying to this person or that: 'No, you should not take and not eat!'" But this argument has no substance. For it actually makes exactly the opposite point than it's supposedly proving. Exactly because holy Communion is not ours, but the Savior's sacrament, and because he's given his instructions for the administration of his sacrament, and has stated his will for it, since his sacrament must be distributed, we do not have discretion as to how we want to administer it, but rather we'll administer the sacrament of our LORD Christ according to his instructions and not according to our bright ideas, nor according to the demands of any ignorant or impious person. It is Christ's sacrament, his table, his altar, his body and blood, his meal. Therefore it must also be administered as he wants it administered, according to his prescription.

Likewise, our practice of holy Baptism is normed by God's Word. The Savior says: "Go and teach all nations, or make them disciples, as you baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and teach them to retain all that I have commanded you." We must make disciples of all nations, and for that Baptism is to be the means. Through it he would have his grace distributed upon all people. There he's established no borders, not even just for all people over the age of twenty-one, but he embraces in his command all who are part of the nations. As in a census, all are counted, young boys and girls and babies in the cradle, because they are part of the nation, so the command to baptize doesn't just apply to adults, but to all who belong to the nation. Therefore we also practice infant Baptism according to our Savior's order and command, according to the legitimate divine norm. – Further, he's said: "Baptize them, apply water to them." He's not said how the water is to be applied. The way and manner by which the water is applied is not normed, but it is commanded that water be applied. – And that should take place "in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," and not in the name of God, virtue and immortality. – We must also bear in mind in this that those who are baptized will also be instructed. Whether this happens beforehand if that's possible, or it follows when Baptism takes place before, but it must be remembered that the baptized, or those who have been baptized are instructed or will be instructed. For he says just this in this context: "and teach them to retain all that I have commanded you." Therefore so far as our practice of Baptism

is right, we bear this in mind in our Baptism of infants, that instruction follows Baptism, not as the Jesuits who go on mission trips to heathen lands and spray the crowd left and right with water and then count them as baptized Christians. Our baptismal practice is normed through God's Word, through Christ's own mouth, in his instruction to his church for all times.

Our practice of church discipline is likewise normed in God's Word, and, indeed, even in view of handling falls into sin that only one person knows about, or even just a few. In this we have the standard written in Matthew 18, according to which we must act. We act legitimately when we follow through on this persistently, so that fraternal admonition and rebuke is regularly exercised in our Church, for we have here an express command of Christ: "If your brother sins, go and rebuke him, between him and you alone." It is not left up to us if we want to swallow our words or sidestep what a neighbor has done to us, because we'd rather not initiate a rebuke to avoid conflict. Rather we have here the divine norm: "Go and rebuke him," and even if you should be ever so meek, or if you might be afraid to do it, and all the hassle makes you feel upset and strange – all that, according to which you might be able to use your discretion as to whether or not you want to do it, must all be silenced here. For this here concerns something that's not left to your discretion, but rather your conduct and the practice of the church and congregation is firmly established in God's Word. When that's the case, it is right and nothing else must be permitted. And if something else is done, even out of the best of intentions, yet it's false and corrupt. – So our practice of church discipline is legitimate when we won't allow such sins, that are required to have been committed in the sight of four eyes, or two or three witnesses, to be brought to the congregation at large. For Christ, the LORD, has forbidden it and, to the contrary, has commanded and established for all times, that such sins must be treated as he has prescribed in Mt. 18. – But then there are sins that may be engaged, rebuked, and judged in the meeting of the congregation, and with them no one must be allowed to say: "You must first discuss this in the presence of two witnesses, must first carry out the first step and then the second step in the presence of witnesses, and then you may first bring it to the congregation." For that is called applying a norm to a situation for which it doesn't apply, measuring something with the wrong kind of ruler. For Mt. 18, so far as it applies the first and second steps, does not apply to sins already known by everyone. Then it must be left to one's free discretion whether or not a good friend should first be sent to the sinful brother. The norm for those preliminary steps doesn't extend to this situation but this Word applies: "Rebuke the sinner in the presence of all, so others will also fear," and: "Expel from your midst the evil doer." Whoever is manifest and known to be evil must be publicly rebuked, and if he remains in his evil, expelled. – That is how we have our practice of church discipline clearly and definitively normed in God's Word in either case.

It is a part of church practice that we call preachers and employ and preserve the preaching office in the midst of the congregation. There are so called Churches that do not have this, for example, the Quakers and others, who boast about their universal priesthood in a ruinous manner, saying: "We are all priests, and everyone should speak, as the Holy Ghost gives him utterance." Then they wait if someone would receive the Spirit, so they also might receive the Spirit (who is thereby with them then!); or no one catches the Spirit, and there is no sermon. Then they get up from their benches, having encountered a hidden and supposed miraculous experience they take as being most spiritual – and yet it's an utterly corrupt, self chosen, impious thing. For in keeping with his intent, Christ has made public preaching an Order, by which we should engage our disorder and arrange and carry it out, so that his intent should be arranged and

carried out according to this norm. We must call preachers and must heed these preachers as preachers, must regard them as those who will feed us with the Gospel, and who must be regarded with double honor, as they labor in the Word and the doctrine; when God receives a preacher for us, whom he has given us, we should not expect him to send a different one from heaven, and must not look around for another, and if we notice they are hard to come by, we need to remind ourselves that we must be responsible to have a preacher and teacher and see to it that they be fit for the office. This is not optional. It isn't left up to us as to whether we want to see to it that faithful, pious and gifted teachers and preachers are in the church. That is altogether incumbent by the divine norm, that Christ the LORD, himself has instituted with respect to the public proclamation of his Word for all times.

Our practice, as it is employed among us, is also normed by God's Word with respect to matrimony, the wedding banns, the marital relationship and divorce. Indeed, marriage is a secular station and, as such, is not a station of church life, but of civil life. But matrimony becomes included in our church by the congregations through the administration of her pastors and in many ways through the assembly of the greater portion of the congregation when wedding banns are announced in plain view of the congregation and in cooperation with the congregation, and so this station, which in and of itself, from its institution on, has not been a part of church life, but civil life, also enters into the life of the church, and, indeed, also through the pastor's participation in the wedding ceremony, as it often takes place, or through the Church wedding, in the life of the church as such. – But now, had God not also solidly established in his Word what is right and wrong in regard to entering marriage and divorce, defined whom one should receive in marriage and who not, and if in a congregation marriages take place and approved by the congregation that ought not take place according to God's Word, then we have an aspect of ungodly, corrupt and unscriptural practice with respect to marriage. – Further, God's Word has steadfastly established the rule of how it should proceed, that observing the Sixth Commandment doesn't violate the Fourth Commandment. So if publication of marriage banns in a congregation takes place in violation of the Fourth Commandment, and the congregation is thereby part of that through her pastor, or, even worse, approves of these banns and gives her blessing, then a false marriage is being given approval as right in this congregation, as when people are being married against their parents' will. – Further, God's Word has determined that marriage is to be entered as a life long covenant, and that what God has joined together man must not separate, unless one party would have given a reason for divorce that Jesus acknowledges as a true, sufficient reason for divorce, that is, that he would have been one flesh with someone else. So when a divorce takes place in a congregation, and this divorce is approved by the congregation, or if the pastor had even given counsel for the divorce, and what took place was not reversed, then in regards to this matter, a false practice was given legitimacy with respect to marriage. Yes, we know that in a major portion of the church false practice is being employed in this matter in every way possible, and this corrupt practice brings us the most disconcerting trouble and inexpressible heartache. What good would it do us if we refrained from mating with a sister of one's deceased wife? This is the practice in Germany where this is not only allowed but even seen as a very good thing. And further, the lax practice being employed in the American Churches and sects in regards to marriage can clear the way for such trouble among us! It can be said: "Those people can marry them, why don't you? After all, they're Christians, too!" So then, despite all the controversy that can grow out of every single one of these issues, despite all the toil and trouble that preachers expend on this to constantly keep these matters in the people's thoughts and

consciences, this still must be considered here as something divinely normed as a matter of practice and, therefore, we can't give an inch in this without surrendering God's Word. – We know from God's Word that a legitimate engagement is entering marriage before God, but where is that practiced for that reason? Anywhere in Germany? Yes, that's our complaint. People from their youth on have become accustomed to value engagement as a promise that one should certainly keep, but that can also be reneged if a person thinks he has reason to take it back. And the reason for taking it back can be about anything, while the single divinely recognized reason for breaking an engagement is that one party was one flesh with a third party. And to remain steadfast in that practice, so very, very hard to retain, it's most necessary that it be set in our conscience: God's Word norms this practice. And even if all of Germany should practice otherwise, even all of America outside the Synodical Conference, that would not make us budge an inch, for practice in this matter is divinely normed.

So also the position and dealings of a congregation of our day with respect to the Masonic Lodge is part of church life. A lodge is not a club founded upon obedience to the divine command, much less is it a club which Christians had formed with one another as a free association, but rather it is, above all, an association of those who are not of one faith and confession. Now when members of such an association call themselves brothers and speak with each other, supposedly, as brothers, it's a lie. For brothers have the same father. Sure, in a certain sense we are all brothers from Adam, but that's not what the lodge means when they use the name brother to designate its members. For they do not, of course, acknowledge all people as brothers. All the godless have one father: "You are of your father, the devil, and you act as he wishes," says the LORD. But the lodge also doesn't mean that sort of brotherhood either when it uses that name. All believers have one father: "One God and Father of us all." But in truth the lodge cannot mean that, for they admit Jews and the heathen into their association. In what other sense could these people, then, be brothers? Who is the father they have in common? It's not true, but a lie they propagate when they give the name brother to each other. They are not brothers. They abuse that beautiful word brother in order to pretend to give the impression of a unity that does not really exist among them. They do not come together in brotherly love, but in self interest, for whatever benefit each is seeking for himself. But now the Eight Commandment says: "You shall not bear false witness." They should not call themselves brothers when they're not brothers. And many of these secret societies also have, practice, carry out so called worshipful communion with each other, light with darkness, Christians with Jews, believers and unbelievers. But God's Word still says: "What fellowship has light with darkness? Does Christ agree with Belial? So depart from them and separate yourselves!" But here the pure join with the impure. Just saying that's enough to make it apparent that we must treat it as an institution that is against God's Word. The position of our Church over and against the Masonic Lodge is so normed by this condemnation by the divine Word over this terrible establishment, that we would become guilty of unbiblical, anti-scriptural practice, if we took any other position towards these societies than as God's Word informs us, and if we took any other stance towards them than God's Word prescribes. And yes, we know, that even in respect to this matter, extensive circles in the so-called Lutheran church must lament a very sad disregard for this divine norm.

Further, our burial practice is also normed in God's Word. Indeed, a person's being buried can be a civil matter, and as much as it is a civil matter, a Christian can, as a citizen, also take part in this civil event, regardless of whether good or poor church practice is employed

there. But through the precipitating circumstances, the burial can and should take on a church character among us Christians through the manner and form by which this final honor is carried out, and burial also, then, enters into church life. Then it is a confession of the church, the congregation, through her pastor, when he joins members of his congregation as they hold a burial service, as they had stood and still stand in church fellowship with the departed, who should now be committed to the earth, as with one who had been with them in the kingdom of God, in the church militant, and who now, as one of their own, has entered into the church triumphant, where they are all hastening. That is essential to a church burial, and God says in the Eighth Commandment: "You shall not bear false witness." It is an utter, great, crass lie when a congregation and pastor grant a church burial to a person who has not belonged to her, whom she cannot approve as a brother, of whom they have no permission to accept that he passed away in blessedness, and so little as a Christian can tell any other lie or a congregation should lie in any other deceptive way, she must not make herself guilty of this lie of presenting a person as something other than he actually was, treating someone in a way that can only be regarded as deceptive. But that congregation and her pastor is saying: The whole city knows he wasn't a Christian. When we go along with this, no one believes we think he had been a Lutheran Christian. Everyone knows he was one of our detractors. Now then, God's Word says: "See to it that you give no one offense." And that's an abominable offense being given to both brothers and opponents alike when a person with a godless reputation is buried with church honors, as in a church burial. The world responds by saying: "That parson will do anything for five dollars." Isn't that offensive? Truly our office, especially in this country, is not in any position to permit itself to be taken lightly and have it heaped in even more shame and disgrace! Further, the unbelievers say: It seems there's not much at stake in being a Christian and being saved, he never went to church and now they're giving him a church burial, and singing hymns in which the hope of salvation is being declared. The pastor has preached a message of peace and they have added their prayers – so he's probably saved, too. If he can be saved, why should I go to the trouble of being saved in any other way than he? The weak in the congregation will be offended if this is somehow then justified, when a person who was a manifest unbeliever, who was a notorious unbeliever, was hymned in churchly, Christian manner to the grave, preached to the grave, and prayed to the grave, even though the Scripture says here: "When the godless die, their hope is lost." So whoever either takes lightly or never questions who should be buried, or buries just anyone who has died, and when a congregation will not put an end to such a practice – for so often it is the congregation that takes it as being very wrong of a pastor if he brings scorn upon her by refusing a Christian burial – they thus have an unscriptural practice, an abandonment of the norm that God the LORD has given in his Word for every situation, even in burials we are to conduct in church.

In transition to the second half of this second thesis, it must still be pointed out that what is included in church practice, as such, is not only what is normed by God's Word, but what has apostolic precedence, for which we have examples in the ancient church. Deacons being elected in Jerusalem does not say that we now also must elect deacons everywhere in our congregations, as if the divine norm necessitates that, since God's Word doesn't demand we necessarily retain this institution. The apostolic precedence, this example from earliest Christianity in the apostolic age, is certainly important enough that we regard it and consider if what was done then would not also be beneficial for us. And if we arrange something according to apostolic precedence, then we know it's not against God's will. But now the congregation must not be obligated to

accept it as if it were given as a norm we must maintain. But much less must what was prescribed in the Old Testament for the Old Testament church be turned into what is esteemed as normative for the church today. As in the time of the Reformation, when people were not practicing according to God's Word and from God's Spirit, but rather wandered under the spirit of enthusiasm, they wanted to saddle the New Testament church with the yoke of the Old Testament. Yes, just this was truly the driving force of Carlstadt's enthusiasm, that they wanted what applied to the Old Testament and the life of the Old Testament church to be law for the New Testament church. Now that brings us to the second part of this thesis.

We read in the New Testament, speaking directly to the New Testament church, of such Old Testament Church institutions that were normed by God's Word for the Old Testament Church: "Let no one make a matter of conscience food or drink, etc." That means: "Let no one impose upon you that you, for the sake of God, would here have to retain God's command in regard to food and drink." Matters of what we should eat or drink belong to the personal life of the Christian. Then the apostle goes on to say: "Or about certain feasts, or New Moon celebrations or the Sabbath." So far as the individual Christian's observing such things is concerned, it's part of his personal, Christian life. It is part of church life insofar as the individual keeps the same in his Christian life also as a member of the church. But it is also a part of church life, as such, so of church practice, as one retains his being part of the congregation by way of the feasts. Now just there the apostle says expressly, let no one make it a matter of conscience for you, or more precisely: "Let no one judge you for that." By "judging" one is distinguishing, differentiating, that is, judging as right and wrong. The apostle is saying there: These things do not belong to the command where God's Word has firmly established what must be right, but whoever approaches you that way, as if it were a matter over which you must be judged, and wants to make it a matter of conscience for you, is laying upon you a yoke you need not bear, yes, that you must reject, when he wants to bridle you. And in Romans 14.6 the same apostle says of feast days: "Whoever observes the day observes it to the Lord, whoever does not observe it, does so to the Lord." Those things can't be said of what God has not left as matters of freedom. You can't say: "Whoever steals steals to the Lord, and whoever does not steal, also does so to the Lord." So it is clear that days, church feast days, are not among the things that God's Word has established for all times as divine norms for us – that is, for the church –, which the church must retain for all times. So our confession also states an example of this matter in the origin of the order of Sunday, when it declares in the 28th Article of the Augsburg Confession: "So as to the order of Sunday, of the celebration of Easter, of Pentecost and similar holidays and observances. For those err greatly who consider that the order of Sunday has been instituted as necessary as the Sabbath. For the holy Scripture has removed the Sabbath and teaches that all the ceremonies of the Old Testament may be foregone, by the revelation of the Gospel." And in the Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. X, it says under the Affirmations: "2. We believe, teach and confess that the church of God in every place and every time, by the same authority, has opportunity to alter such ceremonies as might be useful and edifying to the congregation of God." In the Solid Declaration, Art. X: "For here this has nothing to do with external adiaphora, which according to their nature and substance are and remain in themselves free, and in which no demanding or forbidding can be tolerated to use or to omit them." So here adiaphora, and, indeed, church adiaphora, (those of which the Formula of Concord is speaking; the so-called 'adiaphora to one's feelings' did not come until later into the polemic language of the church in the age of pietism) are described as such, "which according to

their nature are in themselves free,” etc. And, indeed, the right and the desirability in these free things, to order, to change and to improve them must never be undervalued. As little as we should thoughtlessly use this in the church, so little should we thoughtlessly surrender this right of the Christian congregation to order, to change, to improve these areas that are left free by God. The reason why this must be done will lead us into one of our later theses.

Now such things as the Sabbath, the celebration of Sunday, as such, the celebration of this holiday or that are included in these matters of church practice that are not normed in God’s Word, as well as arrangements such as Confirmation, the Ordination of Pastors, ceremonies in worship, choir robes, lighting fixtures, crucifix. But also included are those nonessential aspects in those worship practices that are, by all means, normed by God’s Word, for example the Preface in the ceremony of the Lord’s Supper, the order of individual parts, as whether the Lord’s Prayer is to be spoken before or after the consecration, of whether the sermon is to be preached in the pulpit or from the altar, if the preacher should read his text at the beginning of the sermon or after the introduction, if the general prayer of the church is spoken in some definite form, and if it is read from the lectern, or at the altar, or in the form of the Litany with the oral participation of the pastor and the congregation. In all these matters God’s Word has not given any sort of prescription whereby we must do them. And whoever lays down a law upon the Christian church, or any congregation in this, imposes himself onto the throne of God, yes, even over the throne of God. He appropriates to himself what is by rights only God’s. For only God has the right to give laws to his church. The church is not a democracy, but rather an absolute monarchy, where the King’s will is law, and nothing else. Temporal rulers can make laws, but why? Because the King of all kings, the Lord of heaven and earth has granted them this right, has lent them this portion of his majesty. But the church can make no law, since her King has not granted her this right, and it is an insurrection, a revolt against the order of the kingdom of the church, if a congregation wants to make laws over things that God’s Word has left free. We have a law, that is God’s expressed will, the will of the One who, as King in his church, is not only the most high, but is the sole law giver. So such a great distinction exists in respect to church practice between what God has normed and what God’s Word has left free.

Whereupon the 2nd thesis was accepted.

Thesis III.

In as much as church practice is normed by God’s Word, the unique character of God’s Word also establishes the unanimity of that church practice as a divine requirement for the whole church.

Our LORD and Savior says when he was taking his leave of his disciples, in his parting command to his church: “Teach them to retain all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the world.” These Words contain two things. First, that the church must, upon Christ’s command, retain all that Christ has commanded her. Where he has said, “Do this,” then doing that is the Savior’s will and command that the whole church must take as her direction. So as surely as the command, “Go and teach all nations, and baptized them,” – has

been given to the whole church, not merely to the apostles, but rather to the whole congregation, and not only to one congregation, but rather to all congregations, so now each and every thing Christ has commanded his church in regard to church practice also certainly applies to the whole church. And so whenever the apostles employ their teaching office in their letters to the congregations in regards to such things as pertain to church practice, they are acting upon this command, “teaching them to retain all things, etc.” And what St. Paul addresses in his letter to the Romans or the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians, all of the prescriptions which are contained in these letters in regards to matters of church practice apply to every congregation. The apostles were not to teach them to retain anything but what Christ commanded them. When the apostles teach, we reckon no contradiction amongst the apostles, or that one commands something that another apostle forbids, nor even that only one apostle may have commanded what another would have labeled unnecessary. Rather, when the apostles teach, they teach what Christ has commanded. And Christ himself has guaranteed that in himself, the mouth of the truth, there can be no contradiction, as he says: I am the truth. Even in regard to these passages through which church practice is normed, the Word applies: “Scripture cannot be broken.” What is commanded us in Scripture is and remains commanded, and by this command all that is opposed to the command is rejected. Whatever is forbidden in Scripture is forbidden in such a way that all that is therefore against this command must be rejected, else we'd have no norm by which anyone could initiate anything.

But secondly, in this thesis and in the passage quoted, it is saying further that unity of church practice is therewith given as a divine demand, not only for one epoch, not only for the apostolic age, but for the whole church, even the church of all times. What the apostles and what Christ, the LORD himself, has prescribed for his congregations, were not only prescribed for the church of their time but for the church of every age. This is especially clear, first of all, from the individual elements of church practice normed in God's Word.

First, we once again take up the practice of the LORD's Supper. There it says: “This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me,” and these Words are spoken to the congregation that had heard the Savior's speaking on that last evening, which he spent with them in his humility. But in that hour not only his holy apostles, not only his congregation of that time, whose shepherd must be struck down that night, who must now soon be scattered, were in the Savior's heart and thoughts, but rather he had in mind all who should believe in him through their Word. He had included them in his high Priestly prayer, and time and time again we note how his view extends out to the end of time, yes out into a blessed eternity. And even in the narrow context of the institution of the sacrament he speaks Words by which he makes this known, when he, of course, adds: “I will no longer drink with you of the fruit of the vine until I drink it in the kingdom of God.” There he looks forward to the end of time, from there on to eternity. That which he here institutes must now apply for all of time, that in the manner as on the night when he was betrayed, the fruit of the vine would be drunk, until the day dawned when it would be drunk anew in the kingdom of the heavenly Father. We have the same in the practice of Baptism. That is, he says: “Go into all the world...and teach them to retain ... and behold, I am with you always, every day, till the end of the world.” There again we have this long term view, not only for the immediate future, but through all the days of the earth until the end of days, and while these thoughts were occupying him, he instituted this order, this sacrament, and commanded his church to do so, as he commanded her, until the end of time, to baptize in the

Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost and to teach to retain all that he had commanded. There will come no time and there is no place where this norm does not, by necessity, apply in Christianity. The same applies to church discipline. What the Savior says in Matthew 18 is not spoken to Peter alone, nor is it even addressed to Peter as an apostle, but it is said to Peter as a confessing Christian, to Peter who is replying to a question that did not ask: “Who do 'you' say that I am” but “Who do 'you all' say that I am?” Peter answers here in the name of all, for all those whom he is raising up this Word, and so the Savior also turns to him and, indeed, in just this context, even as we have just previously heard in our second thesis, gives his instructions with respect to the treatment of those brothers who have sinned and whose correction is the duty of the Christian congregation, and, wherever possible, in what manner she must now carry out this duty. So certainly now, the church of every age has the keys to the kingdom of heaven, so we certainly have every right to assert that we have the keys of the kingdom of heaven in our Lutheran congregations, which the Savior has awarded, has presented his congregations, so we must also know that we have been given instructions in the use of the keys, which had been given to those who should administer them, along with the presentation of the keys. If we would say that those instructions no longer apply to us, but they applied only to the Christian congregations in the earliest times, we would thereby lose all confidence that we had the keys of the heavenly kingdom at all. For we could not have one without the other. If we are people who believe we have the keys on the basis of these Words, then we also must be congregations who must follow the instruction that has been imparted with the presentation of the keys.

This also applies to the preaching office. The preaching office must be established in the congregations, and we also have our God’s instruction for the establishment of the preaching office. He has said what sort of people should, but also, what sort of people should not be preachers. He has said that men, not women, must carry out the preaching office in the church. He has also, besides that, declared and prescribed, orderly and norming instructions for the preaching office. And that is the same preaching office we have today. The apostle speaks of the preaching office that existed in his day and at that time was a church matter, as of a single office that must continue to exist unto the end of the world. He even looks forward over time until the day of the Lord’s second coming, when he says: “Feed the flock of Christ that has been entrusted to you... so that you will receive the imperishable crown of glory when the arch- shepherd will appear.” If we have the preaching office, and we have the preaching office which surpasses everything else, the glory and praise of the preaching office, the tasks of the preaching office; then we have no other preaching office than the one that must also be carried out by the prescriptions contained in the Scriptures, which must be the norm for the preaching office as a matter proper to church life.

But that the practice normed in God’s Word must be followed universally in the churches and for all time also stems from the nature of the church, as the congregation of believers and saints. That is the church of all times. Whoever thinks of the subject of the church in any other way has a false notion of her. He is not describing the church but something else, justifying in his thoughts, perhaps, the papistic synagogue, but not the church of Christ. Now even the psalmist says in the believer: “When you comfort my heart, I run on the path of your commands.” A congregation whose heart is comforted with the Gospel, who hears the Gospel so that they receive the comfort of the Gospel in faith, such a congregation then also runs in the

way of God's commands, even as does a congregation, even in their congregational life as such, even in her church practice. This also stems from the circumstance that the head of the church in every time and place is one, that is, Christ, the one head of the church, and this head rules the whole body. All members affirm one head, and when this one head has now made known in his immutable Words what must be maintained in his church, then it would be called stepping out in opposition to the head of the body if the body did not want to direct its church life according to his express will. The Savior says: "My sheep hear my voice." So as the church of all time and in all places is a congregation of the sheep of Christ, so certainly the congregation of all times and in all places, as the collective sheep of Christ, hear his voice, even as the voice of the shepherd is clear in respect to the life of the church as such, with respect to church practice. And he also says explicitly: "They follow me."

We also have this here to establish how practice is Scripturally mandated: By his sheep hearing their Shepherd's voice. "Teach them to retain, etc." He does not say: force them to retain, but rather: Teach them to retain. That is the task of those who want to improve divinely appointed church practice where it's deficient. And indeed the preachers, all who are given this command, "Teach!", carry out this task and teach the congregation, the people who have been or will be made disciples, as by God himself, for his sake, so that God's command is carried out: Teach them to retain all that I have commanded you. Not that the Christian is to be taught what Christ has not commanded as if that were retaining Christ's command, but rather that the voice of the Shepherd must ring in their ears and into their hearts and thus bring it into them, that they now retain all that Christ has commanded his church in their personal lives, in their family lives, in their church lives, so far as it applies in the narrow circles and even in their church lives as such, that is, in their church practice.

Whereupon the third thesis was accepted.

Thesis IV.

In as much as an obvious denial of the truth underlies a disregard for the divine norm in church practice, the intentional maintenance of a contrary practice is no less divisive to the church than stubbornly maintaining false doctrine.

The previous thesis has placed a special emphasis on the fact that practice normed by God's Word can only be one, that, in regards to the same, two sorts of contradictory practices relating to the same matter can't be legitimate. There is never a time or a place when it is right, yes, when it would be commanded to neglect the pursuit of the church practice commanded by God. There is no congregation that would not be bound by the Words: "Cast out from you the wicked person." There is no congregation, to which the Words would not apply: "If he will not listen to the congregation, then regard him as a heathen man and a tax collector." Therefore there is no congregation that can say: We live in such a situation, that these works do not apply, so the congregation might now assure herself, even as she fails to carry out church discipline in her midst. But rather the situation can arise and does arise, that in a congregation there are so few

who have the right knowledge of the divine norm, or a true desire to carry out the same, that even the few who do cannot bring it about, so that, perhaps, the pastor stands alone, and he is not the congregation, and not even the Word that first and foremost applies to the congregation, can bring about its rightful application and implementation. But now this must be his goal, whenever possible, every day to draw a little closer to that goal, to work at every opportunity to take one step after another, so that now just one, and then a few more elected officers, until more and more come to a right understanding and are motivated by a genuine desire to act now according to that understanding. Here the congregation must be brought along, and if the congregation refuses to progress, ei, she's holding fast to an unscriptural, corrupt practice that has come to be commonplace in her midst. The same goes for a synod or a circle of synods. When it is said to us: The situation in our Eastern Synod is so different than in your Western Synod, so we will have to be satisfied with having the true doctrine, even if we do not follow it up with such a strict practice, since we can't be so strict as you are because our situation is so different and you just don't understand – that way of speaking is utterly corrupt. They must in no way be satisfied with having right doctrine. They must never let themselves be at all satisfied so long as they do not also have faithful practice. So long as they are deficient in any aspect of their practice, they must be disappointed and frustrated with themselves in that matter and to that degree, and also confess of themselves that they are deficient and falling short and that they must also strive to bring it about. It's a very dangerous thing to ask for patient with corrupt practice. Corrupt practice must not be tolerated, but militated against, and fought against by every avenue the whole way, wherever possible. There will never be a time when the battle against corrupt practice may cease. Corrupt practice tries, like false doctrine, to always meekly seek toleration, but it never plans to stop there. What it next seeks is a right, even if it is a right that defers to other things. That results in it seeking equal rights, and thereby, finally, it claims sole right. That is the path false doctrine and practice is accustomed to traverse, and just when it has sole rights, the false practice sanctioned, so also, then, the false doctrine. Then again, the faithful, divinely prescribed practice, even as pure doctrine, only receives its rightful standing when it's given sole right, that is, when we immediately must do what is normed in God's Word. As doctrine is only the doctrine of God's Word in so far as it proceeds as pure doctrine, so it only serves to be acknowledged as pure doctrine so much as it is doctrine that is set in practice as God's Word.

But now another objection might be raised: Someone might say: Your demand goes too far if you require that those with whom you want to stand as brothers in faith in church fellowship must also stand in the right practice. You go too far when you, while you have the right to treat false doctrine as dividing the church, also treat false practice as divisive in the church, which is contrary to Scripture. It is correct that the doctrine must be pure, and, indeed, pure as gold, but the Christian's personal life is, yes, imperfect, as it will also remain imperfect in church life, in the life of the church and her members. Therefore you are overreaching when you also set up practice as a test of the obedience of the church, of the brotherhood of faith. We reply to this: If we could reconcile what you're saying with God's Word, we'd gladly do it! Yes, even more: On the day you show us and prove this from Scripture, that we are going too far when we also treat every persistent, rigidly held practice contrary to Scripture as dividing the church, for we must defend ourselves that it's a sin to deny church fellowship on these grounds; if you could do that we'd immediately confess: We have sinned, gravely sinned, this whole year through, since we have denied you fraternal fellowship, church recognition.

But they won't rise to the challenge of proving this to us. Rather we will remain with

this, that persistently holding fast to a false practice is divisive to the church. For our Savior says: “Whoever confesses me before men, him will I also confess before my heavenly Father, but whoever denies me before men, him will I also deny before my heavenly Father.” Each false doctrine is a denial of the truth, so the apostle says in Romans 16.17: “I admonish you, brothers, take notice of those who cause division and offenses against the doctrine you have learned, and depart from them.” So false doctrine is church dividing. We must not support false Churches, not acknowledge them, but avoid them. But denial of the truth can also take place in other ways than with words, but can also take place by deeds. In the ancient church were especially the so-called “*confessores*,” confessors, not those who had spoken forth their confession of faith with words and were therefore called confessors, but rather those who had made it known through their deeds under persecution, that for the sake of their faith they were imprisoned, exiled, suffered all sorts of martyrdoms, but remained steadfast. Indeed, it seemed that Christians thought: Oh, if I do not curse Christ, – for it was a standing order that when Christians were processed publicly, that they must say: Christ be cursed – If I do not thereby deny my faith with words, I have not denied it. But they had many other easy, public ways to deny it. They could just sprinkle a pinch of incense in the little flame on any street corner where a shrine to an idol stood, and do that as witness to their denial, that was enough. By that they safely placed themselves a good distance from any persecution without saying a word. But whoever had sprinkled that pinch of incense had denied Christ just as much as if he would have cursed him, and had thus denounced Christ. For one cannot serve both God and the devil, and what is offered to an idol is offered to the devil. Such a person had thus departed from Christ and truly denounced him, just as any one else who had publicly cursed and blasphemed the Gospel, and he would also be treated by true Christians as such. That is what those people are saying who persistently employ practice contrary to Scripture, which just as much strays from the divine truth as those who verbally speak a word about that practice that contradicts Scripture and thus lead people into false doctrine, even if, along with all that, they want to be acknowledged as Christians, and, indeed, orthodox Christians. For what is he saying by all this but: What I’m doing is right. And when it is said to him: But God’s Word says this – Then he will either have to say, in order to not place himself in opposition to it: You are misinterpreting that. That can’t be the doctrine of God’s Word. That’s not the norm according to which we must act. What you are raising here is not true. So he denies something God has said, says ‘no’ to what God has ‘yes,’ or said ‘yes’ to what God has forbidden. That’s false doctrine. Or he’d have to say: Now it may say that in the Scripture, but it doesn’t apply to me. I don’t go along with that. I can’t apply that to myself. I won’t judge myself by that. So then he’s manifestly disobedient to the Word of Scripture and, again, denies that this Word of Scripture is binding on his conscience even in his practice. So either way, as soon as he is made aware of this in his practice, he clings firmly to his practice and denies the authority of God’s Word, the rule and norm. It’s impossible for such a person to stand with us upon the same foundation of doctrine, even were he to assert ten times he does, or if he insists and extends a thousand examples of agreement with God’s Word in his Constitution. The faithful confession only also consists as legitimate when it really comes from the lips as the confession of the heart, not just where the sound or the published composition of the confession is presented. Else it is no confession, but deception and hypocrisy. Now only when the confession of the mouth is also the conviction of the heart is that confession a real confession. So the persistent retention of practice contrary to Scripture is either a renunciation of the confession, or evidence that the confession had never been a real confession.

Whatever sort of practice a congregation or synod has, is encountered not only by what she says, but rather also through what she puts into practice. A congregation that constantly bears witness against the Masonic Lodge, but then defends receiving Lodge members in her midst, cannot still say: How can you assert that the state of our practice is such that you must confront us and if it doesn't change, you'll expel us? But that is the danger in which just we, who have pure doctrine, stand, that we, even when we also, with respect to our practice, present the pure doctrine, but then leave it at that. The doctrine of our practice is, indeed, an aspect of doctrine. When we preach in this matter: "Depart from them and be apart, do not defile yourself with the abomination of the lodge, but depart from them, then as many of you as are members must depart from them and give up your membership" – that's the right doctrine. But we must not imagine that we're done with it if we have the pure doctrine on this matter. We must be heeded by everyone and it must stand as approved by them all. No one is allowed to say to us: You're not allowed to preach that. It may happen that an inexperienced pastor might receive the advice from some corner: "You are not permitted to preach about the lodge here, it only causes trouble." Then the pastor may think: "That won't stop me. I will defer doing so for some time, but I will preach about it." But now when he has preached about and against the abominations of the lodge, and it has been received with approval, he must not imagine that now he's done his whole duty. Now the doctrine has been established as right, now his conscience is salved. But he's greatly deceiving himself. Perhaps they are letting him go on and preach but thinking: "Just preach it. It won't change us in the least." And if he lets it be confined that way, he cannot say that now the doctrine is established as right, much less, as he has not made them agreeable with the practice demanded by the doctrine. With all he's done, the congregation, in view of her practice, may still be thoroughly corrupt. And how do things stand in the General Council? What all have they not set down on paper concerning those four points! They certainly have kept themselves far from being too clear in the presentation of their theses. With respect to this matter it is certainly not the case that officially the Council is even putting forth only one clear doctrine. The whole history of the four points proves that at every stage of the development of this controversy, they have always been careful not to speak too clearly. When they finally had a formulation of what most of them were thinking, they would go on to see if the four points were sufficient, and then certain people would express a concern so the formulation might be changed and they could also accept them. It is also, in the first place, not true that it had been said clearly and definitively in the Council, how practice in this matter must be retained. And, in the second place, it is not true that one must put into practice that which is right, that, for example, throughout the whole Council people would be brought under church discipline if they attended the lodge. You must not be deceived by their rhetoric, which never withstands the test of history. In summary: When we have to make a judgment about the condition of the practice in a church fellowship, then we not only want to listen to what they teach, but rather see what they do. And when we see corrupt things being done, and see them done repeatedly, even amidst all the doctrine and admonitions applied, then we say: You hold fast to false practice, to ungodly ways. First get rid of those deceptive practices, then we'll join together with you, if you also then remain faithful in doctrine.

Now certainly an accusation may be heard: You seem to have led us in your thesis into the way of the Donatists. You want to make life in the church, and, indeed, life in the congregation, yes, perfection in life, to be the true mark of the church. We reply to this: We are not approaching the fountains of the Donatists in our thesis, for it does not state: "in as much as

departure from the divine norm in church practice reveals that church life remains deficient” – but rather says: “In as much as an obvious denial of the truth underlies a disregard for the divine norm in church practice.” We know well enough that in life, yes even in practice, in the conduct of church life as such, not only in other church fellowships, but rather even among us, deficiencies remain, not everything is perfect, yes, we also can't bring them to perfection. And we would deny ourselves the boast of being the true church, the true visible church of God on earth, if we wanted to make perfection of church life, perfection of church practice the *nota*, the marks, of the true visible church. But on the other hand, we can assert that we do not disregard the divine norm of church practice, but rather time after time the attentiveness of the preacher and hearer is directed to it and also repeatedly performed, so that certainly what God has said and established in regard to our church practice is not allowed to be displaced or ignored. And further: When church practice suffers disregard even once, then, when this sin occurs, it is again regretted, so that persistent holding fast to an unscriptural practice is not the result. This is the present situation in our Synodical Conference. It has been report to us that there are places of concern where practice is truly deficient, yes, in a present and ongoing state of ruin. What have we done about it? Immediately steps were taken that when that was actually the case, a path was made, and, indeed, it was not placed on the back burner, but rather it was taken very seriously and in all due haste, so it would be forthrightly corrected.

But someone might also bring to mind the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession. It states in our own Confession: “For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be unanimously preached according to its pure understanding and the sacraments be administered commensurate with the divine Word. And it is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church, that ceremonies instituted by men be universally retained in the same form, as Paul says in Eph. 4: One body, one Spirit, as you were called to one hope of your calling, one LORD, one faith, one Baptism.” Aren't we going beyond this article of our confession with our demand, for example, to the General Council, in which we establish by this article that even her practice must conform to the doctrine? Answer: No. Even in this demand we stand completely and fully upon this foundation of our Lutheran Confession. For the confession does not say: “It is sufficient. . . that the Gospel be preached in its totality,” but rather: “that the Gospel be preached unanimously according to its pure understanding.” Preaching the Gospel according to its pure understanding does not mean holding dogmatic lectures and then leaving it to every individual whether or not he'll accept it, as a rationalist, like De Wette, for example, thinks he should present Lutheran dogma. The Savior also does not say to his disciples: That would also have been legitimate. That's what we also should do, presenting the doctrine that Christ, the LORD has given his church. But he says in his commission to the church: Teach them to retain all that I have commanded you. When you teach, you must not merely present the dogma, the articles of doctrine, as I've given them to you and as I want them given to you. Rather what you present you must state as binding on the consciences of all men and especially all believers, as the divine truth according to which each is to judge and retain in his faith and life, so that whoever does not want to believe what you preach will be damned, and whoever does not retain and follow what you preach traverses the path of destruction, until he can say that he retains for himself the Words of the preaching he has heard. So the Gospel preached according to its pure understanding does not mean merely presenting pure doctrine so far as it is teaching, but rather presenting it as the doctrine of divine truth to which all human consciences are bound, apart and next to which there is no other truth, and through which everything is rejected that does not

agree with this doctrine. By this the Council must be judged as to whether the Gospel is preached among them unanimously according to its pure understanding. Where the Gospel is preached according to its pure understanding, it suffers no other doctrine to be beside it. In this respect the Gospel is most intolerant. In the world, yes, there the weeds and the wheat must remain next to each other and thoroughly mingled with each other. But in the church the Gospel alone must apply, and God's Word must not be the primary, but rather the sole standing norm giver, that must immediately bind the conscience. And how can those who thus preach the Gospel according to its pure understanding also want to give a hint of appearing, or even be only in the position of giving the impression that he held another norm, another doctrine, valued as the same as the pure doctrine of the Word and the Confessions? And this appearance is given in the General Council, and as it is said of them, who knows how often, that time and time again they proceed to be guilty of entering into ungodly, deceptive pulpit fellowship with the heterodox. This also applies, for this also is included in the legitimate, true unity of the church, that the Sacraments be administered according to the divine Word and commensurate with it. But that doesn't happen when it is administered to those with whom you are not of one faith and confession, as surely as the fellowship of the altar must not only be that in our Confession, but it also must be that according to God's Word.

Further, in no way does the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession say: For it is ... not necessary that even so far as a practice normed in God's Word is concerned that it also be practiced in the right way. The distinction being made is not between doctrine and practice, but rather between that which God's Word institutes and establishes, and that which men say and institute. For the article goes on: "And it is not necessary for the true unity of the church, that ceremonies instituted by men be retained universally in the same form." So then Luther also writes: "But we are speaking of the external Word orally preached through men, as from you and me. For Christ has left such things for us as an external sign by which one must recognize his church or his holy, Christian people in the world. We are even speaking of such an oral word that is seriously believed and publicly confessed before the world, as he says in Mt. 10 and Mark 8: 'Whoever confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father and his angels.' For there are many who know it well secretly, but don't want to confess. Many have it, but do not believe on it or act upon it . . . Now when you should hear or see such preaching, believing, confession and acting upon it, then entertain no doubt, that must certainly be a true *Ecclesia sancta catholica*." And further: "Whoever regards his doctrine, faith and confession as true, faithful and certain, cannot stand in the same stall with others who put forth false doctrine or join them... He is either secretly in bed with the enemy, or is a doubter and one who tests the winds and wants to see the outcome as to whether Christ or the devil will win, or he is completely untrustworthy and does not deserve to be called a student, not to even mention a teacher." (Luther's Works XVII, 1477.) So such a person must not come and say: The Gospel will be taught according to its pure understanding by me! Luther says he must not be called a teacher.

Further, they say: But you must not lose sight of love. Love must move you to foster a fraternal attitude, even if the practice is not rightly established. If the chief matter, the pure doctrine is there, then love must cover a multitude of sins. We reply: Certainly love must cover a multitude of sins, but it must not multiply those sins, and, to the contrary, love never gives permission to sin. One may not even indulge the weak, such that he becomes guilty of sin, for example, the sin of denial. When a person is expiring we're not allowed to make our love into a

comfy cushion since we are afraid and want to avoid their pain and agony, but we must let love prevail as it must towards the sick. If the ill are lied to about their condition, that couldn't be true love. He should not be deceived or treated as though there were nothing wrong with him, or not much, as if his illness were not even dangerous, but he must be helped to receive treatment. He's told he's sick and commended to a physician, who will and can also heal him. He's administered medicine that is, perhaps, bitter for him at the time, but that we know he must take, if he is to recover. That's the legitimate love given to the ill. If he were healthy, we'd have to be crazy to make him take those pills. So also here if it isn't evil when we want to apply legitimate love and to receive the sick unto his cure in God's Word, then this work will reveal itself at least a little here and there. Our witness against the General Synod and the General Counsel hasn't been without fruit. Congregations can be cited to whom this witness has proven to be a witness of the truth accompanied by divine power. And in our own midst we have applied this same means, which God has given to this end, and we have let love work and are ready and eager to lend a helping hand wherever this illness is brought to light. We may have good confidence that it will also be a labor that is not in vain in the LORD. That is the legitimate love that will be practiced among us, and that God blesses, while, on the other hand, false love can make no claim on God's blessing, since it is of the flesh and of the devil, and is blessed by flesh and the devil. If we remain with that which we retain according to God's Word, in his speaking in doctrine and practice, then we are his true disciples and we will know the truth, then we will always grow in knowledge, and the truth will set us free.

We also have precedence for this in the apostle Paul and the other apostles. In the congregation in Corinth the condition of their practice was most deplorable. Ei! Things were taking place that you would think that whole congregation would have risen up against as a single man to remove their mark of shame the devil had placed upon them. But look there, Paul must first place this mark on them! And further, with respect to praiseworthy order in public worship in the same congregation, conditions were so miserable that the most extreme excesses were taking place. But what do we hear? St. Paul points his warning finger as soon as he hears of it and says: Your boasting is not good. Guard yourselves and don't think that it can go on as it has. A little leaven leavens the whole loaf. You are now rich in every way, but if you remain on this road you will be impoverished and lose everything. And then he is not satisfied to just say that once, and he does not leave it up to them if they will act accordingly, but rather he keeps an eye on them if they give way. And you see there that the purpose that the apostle had as his goal in his warning and rebuking was accomplished. He experienced the joy of seeing that the Corinthian congregation curtailed what they had allowed to go on before they had been made aware of it, before they had been advised, admonished and rebuked. And he also let the congregation experience how he valued that, in that he also again expressly brings up this matter in his second letter. Even so, when he saw Peter and a portion of the congregation in Antioch fall short, he did not then consult flesh and blood and did not think: What will they say if I stand up against Peter! There will come a time when they will sit in Tuebingen and, just from they're hearing this, they will forge weapons against the truth of the Gospel. There they will construe a Petrine tradition and a Pauline tradition as the means of those historical critics' shredding the beloved Bible into little pieces. Rather, he walked up to Peter in plain sight and rebuked him and rebuked the others, and did what he could to avert their harm, and quietly left it to God to make of it what he might.

Whereupon the fourth thesis was accepted.

Thesis V.

In as much as a church practice is left to the free discretion of the Christian congregation, unity of church practice cannot and may not be placed as a divine requirement upon the church.

Col. 2.16 also says of the aspects of church practice, as of those that belong moreover to church life, without being normed in God's Word as to whether it must be this way and no other: "Now let no one make this a matter of conscience for you." That is true, as our confession also says, of Sundays and other feast days, and also of other church adiaphora; and what St. Paul says here, is just as much a divine order, a divine directive, as any other commandment of God, like the command: Thou shalt not steal – not commit adultery – not kill. Whoever makes a matter of conscience for the Christian out of what God has not, sins just as much as a murderer, a robber, a perjurer. One is just as really and truly a sin as the other. When one surveys what sins might well be most weighty, it is those when a person impudently plucks for himself that which God has retained for himself alone, that is, binding people's consciences. So as far as church practice is entrusted to the free discretion of the Christian congregation, that she, as the housemother in her household, can establish orders and, yes, introduce these things according to her circumstances and conditions as is most beneficial for her, no should come and say: You have no right to do that. You must retain here what Synod has decided. You must follow after what has been valued as best in the church of the Reformation. You must retain here what was in the good old Lutheran Church Orders (as Buffalo has taught). You must here follow after what the synod and most especially what the pastors have decided (as is practiced in Buffalo and other American synods). Rather here you must really and totally remain standing most resolutely with what God has said through his apostle: Let no one make binding on your conscience when treating those things where you may use and employ your Christian freedom, which your LORD and king has granted you. In this no unity may be required even inside the corporate body itself. In that it cannot be said, once it's been instituted it must now remain. The Confession says expressly that in such matters Christian congregations have the right and authority to alter them. We read specifically in the 10th Article of the Formula of Concord: "We believe, teach and confess that the congregation of God in every time and every place has the same opportunity with every good right and authority to alter the same, but not frivolously or in offending orderly or fitting advice, by omitting or adding to them as is considered most useful, beneficial and best for the good order, Christian discipline and purity, the evangelical benefit and edification of the church at that time." So a congregation cannot also regard as binding upon the consciences of her members what she herself has instituted. That everyone who has sinned must do penance is certain. For God, the LORD, has stated that steadfastly in his Word, loud and clear, for all times. Christ, the LORD of the Church has also stated that this repentance also be proclaimed and that offense that is given must be removed, as a requirement for all times. But now when a congregation might introduce and order that penance must be performed in some certain form – perhaps that to give notice to those whom he had offended that the sinner is contrite and seeks forgiveness, it must be announced from the pulpit while the sinner steps forward to the altar in the presence of the

assembled congregation – so the Congregation cannot equate this with the sentence: If you brother sins against you, etc., necessitating this upon his conscience, to retain this order to the extent of its being required by Scripture, and she can't also treat a person who does not retain this order as one who has sinned against a command of God, and for that apply church discipline to him, even if he chooses not to follow it. That can't be. Here the border must always be clear and sharply divided between these two things, the one side being what God has commanded and the other being what the congregation has arranged.

But obviously a Christian Congregation must not then be allowed to turn this truth into a cover for evil, so that now every human order be removed from everyone's sight as license and the congregation allows a lack of discipline to impose itself in these areas of freedom. The congregation has a right in those matters that Christ has left free, to order and to alter. But that is given her free discretion, not as reckless, random, limitless license. The congregation must also give account for what she does in these free areas, just as an accounting must be given for every word, not just those preached from the pulpit. By that they can see full well how to make right use of these things. That's why the Confession also says: “that the congregations of every time and place has authority, according to her situation, to change such ceremonies, as may be most useful and edifying to the congregations of God.” But when the congregation now regards that which she has ordered as the most useful and edifying at that time, she must once again guard herself, since this is the most useful and edifying, from treating it as being there as if divinely established. Even if it is ever so useful and edifying and nothing better can be discovered at the time, the ruler must never be put aside that it stay in the place of things left free, and not one of the prescribed matters established by God.

Now whoever forgets that already stands in great danger of fearfully disturbing the church. For as certainly as it disrupts the church if what God has taught is not taught and believed, what God has ordained is removed from sight, just as certainly she is disrupted when what God has ordained is embellished with what man himself has ordained and then he pretends God has also ordained it. Then the flesh wins, then Satan, the father of lies, wins the glory, who, already in Paradise, has added his “ifs ands and buts” to what God said, and finished the deal when our first mother allowed what God had said and what Satan said right next to it to be regarded as equals. Then it didn't take long for what the devil said to become everything and what God had said to be regarded no more.

The following reply was made to a question: In cases when sometimes great controversies deeply disturb a congregation, when it comes to treating orders that were introduced long ago, the safest and finest way to approach the desired goal is if the principle is held fast: We are dealing here with a human ordinance, but an ordinance that the congregation has introduced because she considers it as beneficial. So then, the task of the pastor (*Seelsorger*) and the congregation will be to those who may not want to retain it, to make clear: This is a beneficial order for you and the whole congregation, so that is reason enough to retain it – making it clear to him so that he sees for what reason every individual part of it is done and has been done up 'till now. Then this may occasion that such a person will be manifest as an unbelieving, godless man, for whom the rights of the common membership mean nothing, who would rather depart from the congregation, than even let himself act in a brotherly way towards them. But now if he actually proves to the congregation that in this case the order is not

beneficial, since things and circumstances present themselves that were not present in other cases – then the congregation might be more likely to say: That man has a point. We should have in this case really departed from the order since in this case it is not beneficial. It might also be that the congregation may see in this situation that the usual order, that previously had really been of benefit, no longer serves her goals as it had before, and for that reason discontinues the same.

Hence also the free synodical arrangements and measures are a part of this. Synod itself is one of these free matters, not a divine institution, but a human invention. When such an association of congregations makes arrangements and adapts measures that, again, are not commanded by God much less being forbidden by God, so, on the one hand, the Synod will not want to force these orders on the individual congregations to regard them as binding to their conscience to encourage them to implement what's been adapted; but she also, on the other hand, may not allow anyone to treat and sweep aside such free arrangements and measures as sinful. Whoever makes sinful what God has left free sins just as much as one who makes it a duty of conscience. And whoever lets one or the other of these sins be acknowledged, or valued as justifiable, sins in either case.

What has been said here also applies in a certain sense to the so called status of Confession. What comes to mind here before anything else is that an adiaphoron in certain circumstances that arise is taken out of the area of free use, even when in itself it remains an adiaphoron and does not cease to be in itself an adiaphoron. Situations even come up, that we may not be allowed to freely use a free adiaphoron for the sake of conscience. The Confession says: “When such things are presented under the title and guise of external adiaphora, which, even if they are being painted in a different color nevertheless are fundamentally contrary to God's Word, that these same things are not to be regarded as free adiaphora, but rather as what must be avoided as forbidden by God.” These are things that are not adiaphora, but rather are only being passed off as adiaphora. Then the Confession goes on to say: “According to this, we believe, teach and confess that the congregation of God of every time and place has the same opportunity with every good right and authority to alter the same but not frivolously or in offending orderly or fitting advice, by omitting or adding to them as is considered most useful, beneficial and best for the good order, Christian discipline and purity, the evangelical benefit and edification of the church at that time.” *Form. Conc. Sol. Decl.* p. 698f. But then the Confession also speaks about such adiaphora, of which it says: Here this is no longer dealing in any way with an adiaphoron, “which according to its nature and being in itself is and remains free, and by whose nature may suffer no command or prohibition to use or to refrain from using the same, but the chief issue at stake is the high article of our Christian faith, as the apostles bears witness, when the truth of the Gospel is at stake.”

Circumcision was an adiaphoron. But a time had come when one had to watch carefully how this adiaphoron was used. Paul himself had to discern the time and situation as he circumcised Timothy but not Titus. So then the Lutheran church has acknowledged certain things that way, in view of the fact that in and of themselves God had not commanded nor forbidden anything. Christ had not stated in his Words of Institution for the LORD's Supper what form the bread must take that is distributed in the Sacrament, nor if the wine that is given and drunk in the LORD's Supper must be red or white. But now as the Zwinglians, the enthusiastic

spirits, had made a law out of what Christ had left free, and said it must be such and so, as proper to the nature of the sacrament – there our Lutheran fathers took a firm stance as to the form that they must take in this sacrament amongst them, and had not looked upon these things any longer as free and indifferent, and whether or not they could give in to the enthusiasts in this matter. For whenever a certain ceremony is used and the impression is thereby given that error is the truth, then the usage, that in itself is an adiaphoron, is no longer a matter of indifference. So when the use of the small hosts has become a sign of the differentiation between the Reformed and the Lutherans, then a Christian congregation must well guard herself so that she does not deny what she is, that she does not give the appearance as if she were also fundamentally a Reformed Church. The breaking of the bread with its distribution has become so clearly a mark of the Reformed Church that where the union has been introduced and Reformed ways came to dominate, the small hosts disappeared and common bread was introduced. One might live with that to please the Reformed, had that church, incorporated against God's will, not published this sign as her emblem. The use of the small hosts on the one side and the breaking of the bread during the distribution of the sacrament on the other side have become signs that distinguish them from each other as Churches. Where that applies, there we must thereby confess, and when departure from that path in itself denotes a denial, we must not imagine that in this we might be allowed to do this or not, whatever we desire. The form of the bread and the mixture of the wine is and remains an adiaphoron; but the use of a certain form of the bread or the use of mixed or unmixed wines has not remained everywhere a free adiaphoron. Yet it cannot be said that now the individual host has become a matter of confession for the whole Lutheran Church. There can be Lutheran congregations, and are such, where bakery bread can be peaceably used, without thereby becoming in any way guilty of denial. Yes, there might be a congregation and in this land may be congregations, in whose midst bakery or homemade bread might be used in order to distinguish herself from Reformed congregations that use waffles they break and distribute to each other.

Whereupon thesis V was accepted.

Thesis VI.

In as much as the life of the church is conducted for her times as the life in the local parish, the church must take into account her contemporary local conditions and the best church interests of her members with her free practices in regards to her church practices.

Our Lord Christ primarily acknowledges the local congregation: “Tell it to the church!” thereby addressing and having in mind the local congregation. There he's not intending that the Buffalo Synod must send delegates to Germany in order to complain about another synod, but rather here he has in mind the congregation that is gathered in that place, where the brother is who there has sinned and the one who has admonished him. That is the local congregation that is huddled around the Gospel, as Paul in Acts 20.17 speaks to the elders of the churches in Ephesus and says of these men that had been placed by the Holy Ghost as bishops, “to pasture the churches of God.” There it is not apostles, not evangelists, not circuit riders, but

rather the elders of the local congregations being addressed, of the congregations in Ephesus, those whom the Holy Ghost had placed to pasture them. A local congregation must also know that she is a church, that the task that the Lord has set for his churches is set for her. Not the synod first, and, since they are members of synod, so also individual congregations. That is not the path upon which the duties of those congregations, who belong to a synod, come to those congregations. But the right view of it is this, that the local congregation has received her commission from Christ her LORD, to preach the Gospel, and as she, the local congregation, has this responsibility and sees that she is not sufficient on her own to carry the same to completion as she might desire, she looks around to others who also have this responsibility and says: Come and help us! Thus the purpose of the Synod emerges, that the individual congregations, that have their commission from Christ, walk together and do together what is commanded them individually. So also a congregation must not first be concerned about what is most beneficial and necessary for her when synod has introduced certain orders, has adopted certain resolutions, but rather must pursue this conversation with herself, and it would be more legitimate for the applications to be placed from the congregations to the synod, to build institutions, to expand them and the like, than that requests come from synod to the congregations.

The local congregation is the church. She has the wealth and duties of the church, the responsibilities of the church, she has the rights of the church. She is not the maid, but rather the house mother and thus must, in her sphere, also immediately pay attention as to whether, with respect to those things that God has commanded, things are as they must be in her midst. She must not allow anyone to say to her: You must not be so strict in that, since even in that other congregation they're not so strict. That person must be told: You are the church. The Savior has given you the command which we now want to remember and according to which we now want to act, and you must respect what must be heeded and done according to Christ's prescription. But here even local customs of other places do not justify what is wrongly done elsewhere. God has not given the local congregation that is ruled by Christ, her head, her the people who do not want to bow under God's Word, as the yardstick, who might like to become preoccupied, of course, with what's happening in other congregations. The local congregation must know in what areas she is putting into practice what is ordained and instituted permanently by God, the LORD himself, where she employs that practice to the LORD and in obedience to God's Word. That's the only way she will also have legitimate joy and perseverance, when she knows: We are standing here upon God's Word. We are acting here in obedience to our king and LORD. In this we stand against the devil and his whole kingdom, and if we should have to oppose the very biggest congregation, we're still in the majority, for Christ is with us.

But now this also applies to the free practice, that since the congregation primarily is thought of as the local congregation, the local congregation must be first of all clear about what is divinely ordained and what is left to the free discretion of the congregation. The local congregation must first and foremost learn to make a clean distinction between what must be and where there is latitude. She must next steadfastly restrain herself as a congregation from making any laws for her members. She can only adopt orders, free orders, but make no laws. She oversteps her authority as soon as she turns herself into a law giving association. She is not a law giving body. She's not a political party with legislative authority. But also there is no aristocracy that applies; she should also not let herself allow a rule of the priesthood, must also not allow those who stand in the office of preaching to obligate orders as laws. And even if it were an

entire pastoral conference or a synod, yet she must still know: Here we must carefully preserve for our members, for those who belong to us, the freedom by which Christ has made us free, and let no yoke of servitude be laid upon our necks.

But further, the local congregation must not forget that freedom is not license nor is it unreasoning. Christians are not unreasoning men, but must direct their doing and not doing with understanding and wisdom, as is most in keeping with their goals. In this the circumstances of the individual local congregation must then again be met in right measure. We have a model of this in the church at Jerusalem. There were first of all teachers and hearers. That must be so. The LORD Christ has ordered that. That does not depend upon special circumstances. There the apostles were in the midst of the congregation and served as teachers. As apostles, they were not the local pastors of the congregation, but since they were now still in Jerusalem and the congregation acknowledged their high gifts, they had thankfully received the apostles as preachers and teachers with great joy. But this was a congregation that from the first days of her existence lived as an *ecclesia pressa*. Beginning with the first sermon, enmity came to the light of day in words, as in that mockery: "They are filled with sweet wine." Not long thereafter it made itself felt in deeds, imprisonment and sword were employed against her. Then they knew what they could expect from then on. This would give them trouble. There, soon they would have many impoverished people, and if we don't take preventative measures, what will become of the congregation? They had taken care from its onset that this need would be abated. Whoever owned property had collected it to be shared. It didn't take long to acknowledge how wise these preventative measures had been, that a treasury had been established from which one could immediately draw, since it was already collected. That doesn't mean that Communism had been introduced. There was never a single congregational member who was obligated to contribute his possessions, as we see with Ananias and Sapphira. But they had established a congregational, and, indeed, a very richly supplied congregational treasury. With the administration of this treasury a Χρεια, a problem quickly arose. The apostles noticed that here and there some dissatisfaction was voiced. Some were being overlooked. The administration of this treasury of love did not achieve the benefit one would have liked to see, that is, that all would be richly supplied and satisfied. The situation then had to be reconsidered. Certain functions that belonged to the one office in the church were conferred upon (*uebertragen*) certain persons, so that now this bad situation that was manifest would be relieved. It is also noteworthy with what wisdom and diligence the introduction of the diakonate would be completed just to bring to bear a corrective for their local situation. For first we read: But in those days when there were many disciples, some murmuring arose among the Greeks against the Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. There were those of Jewish and Greek extraction in the congregation and, as it happened, just the widows of the Greeks were being overlooked. Dissatisfaction and even distrust had arisen from this, since even the apostles were not Greeks and just the Greek widows seemed to be excluded. The congregation, with the apostles, had not overlooked these very conditions. For as the diakonate would now be chosen, it was Philip, a Greek, Prochorus, a Greek – in short, purely men of the party in which mistrust had taken root, in order to show them that the mistrust was not justified, but it was their serious concern to give everyone their rights as brothers. Here we see how carefully and well that congregation had taken into consideration how they in that congregation would prevail in that situation by the introduction of this free matter.

But we clearly draw from this passage a broader and more important point, that is, that even the free external arrangements of the congregation, at their basis, are added and must serve the goal that the task of the congregation be fulfilled. The apostles said, that is, after they commanded that these men be chosen: "But we will remain in prayer and the office of the Word." Acts 6.4. In order to free the apostles hands to be able to truly dedicate themselves undisturbed and unhindered in the chief part of the preaching office, this helping office of deacon was introduced. The Christian church does not have two commands, the one, "Preach the Gospel," and the second, "Make church orders." Rather she has the one command: "Preach the Gospel. Make disciples of all nations, as you baptize and teach them to retain everything I have commanded you." And where the congregation introduces church orders, she does so in the thought and in the interest of her being able to advance the fulfillment of the chief goal to which she presses, the main task she has at hand. The organizations that the congregation found must be in service to the Gospel's being regularly used in her midst, that the authority of the keys be rightly handled, that the shepherds and teachers of the congregation can rightly perform their offices, so that the task of the congregation to those outside her might be rightly and diligently fulfilled. The orders which the congregation establishes by her free discretion, and she retains in integrity, must serve her task and goal. Then it might be that an order has served this goal up to some point in time, but that then the times change, and this order no longer serves this goal at all, or is even a hindrance. With good reason it might be stated in a church order from the old days: "In the churches of this congregation sermons must be preached in the German language only." At the time this was regarded as necessary and beneficial for the welfare of the congregation so that in a few years no new sort of preaching office would arise. But times are changing. Now we have young people who no longer understand German so well. Marriages have taken place by which families have now been established where some who were using German have now become English speakers. Then, as a rule, the English part of the family sets the direction as far as language is concerned. So this growing element in the congregation can be seen, to whom also the congregation there, of course, must be commanded to preach the Gospel. There it is entirely legitimate if the congregation alters or completely strikes that paragraph in order to untie the pastor's hands. There may have been a time when the congregation, quite in keeping with her circumstances, had established for her pastor in his call the duty to teach school for so or so many days, but the time might come when that would be changed. The congregation grows, there are more children, and if the pastor, then, must devote himself to the school, it would be to the detriment of the congregation. Then it's right to remove this requirement from his call and to call a teacher who should specifically take this part of the flock. But it can also go the other way. A congregation can suffer a reverse in her member count and the number of school children. Because of that it may be that the congregation cannot retain a teacher, or that the pastor is more than able to instruct the few children himself. Then no one can say the congregation is being sinful when she again takes into account the circumstances arising and advises the teacher to seek another call. The teacher cannot then insist that he has been called here and refuse to take another call. The congregation, who has a right to divide up (*abzuzweigen*), has the same right, when conditions demand again a new order of things, to again fuse together this division and to consolidate the collective functions again into the one teacher of the congregation.

It says in the thesis: "to take into account her local conditions and the church interests of her members." The church interests of the members of a congregation must be defended in the best possible way by the local congregation, who has been given the keys to the heavenly

kingdom. Each individual congregational member must be thus cared for, as well as they all must be cared for. For example if a congregation might see that a congregational member might be better cared for in a neighboring congregation, with preaching and with school instruction for the children of the household, and that the family might there be able to more regularly come to divine service, and when this congregational member wants to join there on that basis, then the congregation must know: She is not there to immediately hold before her eyes the interests of the whole, but rather she is there because the individual members must be saved. The congregation, especially the congregation with voting rights, will not be saved as a group, but the individuals must each live his faith and be saved, and the congregation is also there so that the individuals shall be saved. And where they are better cared for, where there can be more power and feeding, aid, counsel and strengthening to be shared for a person if he joins there, the congregation has no justification for keeping him, even if she cannot bear to lose him. Congregational members are not there for the sake of the congregation, but it's the other way around. Obviously this better care that a Christian seeks for himself and his family must not be tantamount to being some gourmet who might rather hear this preacher or that one than the one he's been hearing, and thinks he will thereby have more blessing because this one is more eloquent, or learned, or more Spirit-filled. It is altogether the seed of the evangelical truth that feeds the spiritual man, and the greater gifts of a preacher, or anything like that, adds nothing to the real power of preaching. But, for example, there may be a church road that often makes it difficult for him to attend divine service, and keeps the children from regularly attending school, that could well be a reason why a housefather might be justified in joining another congregation, which church and school, indeed, may be farther away, but would be easier and safer for his family to access.

On the other hand, a congregational member must not act as though the only thing the congregation has to do is to take care of him, as if everyone else is to take a back seat to him. It might come up that two or three people in the congregation want to have the church in a location convenient for them but not for the majority. The congregation is not obligated to defer to them in this. Indeed, the congregation must care for the individual, but not the individual at the expense of others. If what he must have can be richly apportioned to him in a manner such that the others are also well cared for, fine, but he must not think it must be done in the way he's thinking or to his own advantage. Rather the congregation has to protect the church interests of her memberS to be accountable for the church interests of her memberS which means all, so much as possible, the church interests of individuals, but not only the church interests of one individual but of each individual. Now that, in many cases, will not be so easy to determine how various interests are to be weighed, when a collision of interests occurs, and those are the cases when sometimes so much turmoil is caused with the release of a congregational member to another congregation, or the selection of where to build a church, or dividing a congregation. So that doesn't happen because the principle is unclear, the principle being: The congregation exists and is here to bring the individual unto salvation. But the conditions are sometimes unclear, and it is often difficult to define a case according to its circumstances. In that there may well be several opinions and they can remain divided. There are situations where those who should discuss it can never agree, since the situation that presents itself defies a satisfactory explanation. That also comes up in marital matters. The rules are clear enough, but the case sometimes will not allow itself to be clearly determined. Then one must not allow himself to fall into error to suggest God had not rightly been thoughtful enough in this. So also here. The situation may arise that in one case that comes up for an opinion or as business, different people have different

thoughts, because they are different people who approach that case from different sides. It can also happen that, finally, no definite decision can be made, but rather it must be dismissed. But the foundational principle must remain, that Christ has redeemed individual sinners, that salvation in Christ must be appropriated by the individual, that, in addition, the means of grace have been instituted, and that the chief task of the Christian congregation is this, to establish the use of the means of grace and to retain their use, so that through the same individual souls, and thus as many souls as possible, will be saved.

Thesis VI adopted.