

Session #4: Ecclesiastical Supervision

The Influence of the World on Ecclesiastical Supervision

“Circuits, districts, and synods, however they may be constituted and arranged, are church. Local congregations are also that church. The current conception of synod that many seem to have today, that it is a voluntary association—and nothing more—cannot be supported from the NT. By ignoring the NT understanding of the trans-congregational nature of the church we have weakened the bonds of fellowship, mutual concern and support, and unity in doctrine and practice which should inform and indeed define our life together as church.”
Jeffrey Kloha. “The Trans-Congregational Church in the New Testament.”

Concordia Journal 34, no. 3 (July 2008): 187.

“The most explicit reference...” to the trans-congregational use of the word church is in Acts 9:31, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace...”

Kloha 174

Again, he says that Paul's use of the word church in his description of himself as one who "persecuted the church of God" (Acts 15:9) "...cannot be a reference to a single congregation, nor to the una sancta..."

Kloha 179

1. He uses the subtle anachronism of imposing an understanding of a synod on New Testament information.

2. He ignores the first and most important information that the New Testament supplies regarding the church.

The Greek word ἐκκλησία appears 114 times in the New Testament. Most of the time, it is used to refer either to individual congregations, or to multiple congregations.

Jesus says, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18

3. While admittedly, he claims to present the evidence he finds in the New Testament, he seems unduly to ignore that which we confess to be a true exposition of the Holy Scriptures, as found in the confessions of the Lutheran Church.

“It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.”

AC VII

“Again, although the Christian church, properly speaking, is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints...”

AC VIII

By saying that the church is nothing else, than the assembly of all believers, this article excludes, for consideration as church, any manmade structure imposed on the church, voluntarily or otherwise. This seems to be a fairly clear refutation of the thesis that synod is church. But there is more.

The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, however, but it is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts. To make it recognizable, this association has outward marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the Gospel of Christ. This church alone is called the body of Christ, which Christ renews, consecrates, and governs by his Spirit...

Ap VII & VIII

...but we teach that this church actually exists, made up of true believers and righteous men scattered throughout the world. And we add its marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the sacraments.

Ap VII & VIII

2. Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world;

Membership in the Synod is held and may be acquired by congregations, ministers of religion—ordained and ministers of religion—commissioned, such as teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, directors of family life ministry, directors of parish music, deaconesses, parish assistants, and certified lay ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who confess and accept the confessional basis of Article II.

The synod claims neither the marks of the church nor the members of the church as its own. The synod is not church.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is a manmade structure consisting of congregations and rostered workers, for the purpose of supporting them in the work of the proclaiming the gospel.

Reason for the Forming of a Synodical Union

1. The example of the apostolic church. Acts 15:1–31.
2. Our Lord's will that the diversities of gifts should be for the common profit. 1 Cor. 12:4–31.

A Synodical Union

What binds us together is not the manmade structure, or worse, the survival of an institution.

What binds us together is the confession of the true faith. It is that confession, and that confession alone, that has the power to build both fellowship and unity in doctrine and practice.

Thesis

Every human institution will seek to make itself essential to its constituents

Corollary # 1

Human institutions will seek to make themselves essential by assuming an increasing number of responsibilities that had previously been accomplished by the constituents themselves.

Corollary # 2

The attempt to remain essential by assuming more responsibilities will drive administrative expenditures of human institutions to increase to the point that they impede the mission.

Corollary # 3

The accretion of duties and the drive for self-preservation will cause the authoritative documents of every human institution to grow in length and degree of detail to the point that they impede the mission.

Corollary # 4

Early in their existence, human institutions will be focused on their stated mission, but a larger percentage of the duration of their existence will be focused on the survival of the institution.

Corollary # 5

The drive for survival will cause every human institution to compromise its original confession.

Corollary # 6

Within the need of each human institution to make itself essential to its constituents lay the seeds of its destruction.

The price of a synod is eternal vigilance.