

Menschenherrschaft in der Kirche

August Pieper

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Translated by,

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[Senior Church History Paper for Prof. Fredrich, April 2, 1980]

This paper attempts to translate August Pieper's "Menschenherrschaft in der Kirche." Prof. Pieper wrote this paper to try to resolve the difference between the Missouri and Wisconsin synods on the church and ministry which had developed from the Cincinnati Case.

This entire article which came in three installments was the basis for the Synod's position on Church and Ministry as John Philipp Koehler said in his book, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*.

I translated more and gave it to Steve Ristow who is translating the second installment. Perhaps later we will also translate the third installment.

The correct teaching about church government in the sense of the dominion of man in the church was corrupted immediately after the death of the Apostle Paul. From the seven collected letters of St. Ignatius (written about A.D. 110), it is apparent that already at his time there was only arranged a threefold ministerial hierarchy: bishop, presbyter, deacon, as the allegedly divine order in the congregations of Syria, Asia Minor and the Greek lands; but also that the Episcopate already monarchially ruled over presbyter, deacon, and congregation. The bishop is identified in exaggerated ways with Christ, the presbyters are identified with the Apostles and deacons are represented as a divine upper commission, and for all three is demanded in a unhealthy way honor, submission and obedience, particularly for the bishop. He says, "If you submit yourself to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, then you appear to live not according to the authority of a man, but according to Christ Jesus, who has died for your sake, so that by faith in his death you escape from death. Thus it is necessary, as you actually act, that you do not undertake anything without the bishop; yet also be subordinate to the presbyter, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ.... However, also the deacons, as the mystery of Jesus Christ, must in every respect be totally approved. In the same way, all should honor the deacon as a command of Jesus Christ and the bishop as Jesus Christ, the true Son of the Father, and the presbyter as God's counselor and a connection with the Apostles. Apart from these there is no church, and I am convinced, that you also should think thus about this." (To the Trallians, chap. 2 & 3)

Similarly he writes to the Philadelphians (chap. 7) to the Smyrnians (chap. 8 & 12) and to the Ephesians (chap. 6). In his letter to Polycarp he even demands that the bridegroom and bride do not marry without the approval of the bishop (chap. 5) and he adds: "I will risk my soul for those who are subservient to the bishop, the presbyters and the deacons." (chap. 6) In the letter to the Smyrnians this sentence is found: "Whatever the bishop considers good that is also God-pleasing." (chap. 8)

Clement of Rome in his letter to the Corinthians (between AD 90-95), just as the Didache (composed AD 100-110), recognized only bishops and deacons (chap. 42 & 57); however, he also considers these positions as divine exaltation and submission and speaks of the episcopal honor and the episcopal seat and pronounces the episcopal office to be an appointed continuation of the apostles and a substitution of the divinely established apostleship (chap. 44). Polycarp has in his only extant letter to the Philippians only this one comment appertaining here: "Therefore, everyone has the duty of refraining from all the this (the passions of the flesh), and to submit to the presbyters and deacons, as to God and Christ," which indeed in itself, as with much from

Ignatius, could be understood correctly, if at the conclusion of his letter he did not sanction all the letters of Ignatius. Later, however, he shows that he agrees with Ignatius in his view of the office.

One gets the impression from the literature of this so-called disciple of the apostles that the idea of the papacy was on a small scale perfectly complete among them; and one must ask himself again and again, how such a turn around from the apostolic teaching of the ministry to this papistic perversion of the same was possible in so short a time among the real disciples of the apostles. And the deviation from the teaching of Scripture is not only in this point, but also in the teaching of justification among them, a simply inconceivable one. Justifying faith especially with Ignatius and Polycarp is not purely formed by love, but is formed rather throughout the entire course of the religious life, especially through the faithfulness to the bishop and the practice of fellowship with the visible church. Let us turn away from our issue to look more closely into the causes of this quick destruction of the teaching. Only an idea is expressed here that the apostolic following and also with Polycarp and also with Ignatius can have had no solid base; moreover, in spite of everything, which one already was accustomed to bring up also for their difference from the apostolic apprenticeship, namely, its unapostolic spirit; was inexplicable.

However it is obvious, how easily the whole system of the papistic hierarchy theoretically and practically had been allowed in the course of the next century to build up from the fundamental teaching itself laid down by the apostolic fathers. Ireneus' "apostolic succession" did not surpass Clements' "apostolic substitution" and from Ignatius' "Apart from bishop, presbyters and deacons, there is no church!" until Cyprians' "the church is in the bishopric" is only a very small step. With this letter only the thought is new that Peter by the reception of the power of the keys (Matt. 16:18f) has become the representative of the entire apostolic council and its successors the office the bishop each of whom is a successor of Peter in power and promise. From this egg, later, after the monarchic Episcopate had arranged itself again into land and city episcopate, metropolinate and patriarchate, the Roman Primacy with the entire Papacy; was hatched. It was hatched just as zealously from the characterlessness of the lower clergy and the laity, as from the ambition and lust for power of the Roman bishop.

The Reformation restored the correct teaching on church government - for the first time since the time of the apostles -, the correct form of the same not unfortunately. The initial need for an episcopacy of the princes developed also among the consistorial system of government of the German Established Church into a Caesaropapism, which far removed, the church from gradually growing into a free, self-ruling church, which never gave rise to the correct teaching of church government and at all times gave rise to oppression often enough progressed to a gruesome persecution of the church. Until today the entire Lutheran Established Church of Germany is the ecclesiastical servants on account of the church government, and its members and leaders have so little genuine Lutheran marrow in their bones, that they are no longer able to free themselves from the iron embrace of the state; they don't even want to be free because in this, even if it is difficult fettering, yet at the same time they see it as also an effective blast against those proponents of Modernism they see as a threatening annihilation of the church by the unchurched Socialism and by Rome. Even in a letter which appeared quite recently about the present need of the German Established Church, the accomplished Professor Doctor Hunzinger resisted against the exchanging of the State Church for the Free Church with the reason that the affiliation of the State Church would be a smaller evil than the inevitable Free Church fellowship of servitude, as he was continually warned by the Lutheran Pastors of America.

This led idealistic and unrealistic situations to be represented, when we Lutherans in America and also especially we in the Synodical Conference wanted to prove, that we were free from all dominion of men in the Church. We have perhaps without exception a congregational and synodical system of government, which by strict realization of each Christian and each servant of the church should furnish full freedom from the dominion of men; however it allows in facts no system of church government to be established, which absolutely excludes the dominion of men. The form alone does nothing: it depends on the spirit, in which it will be administered. Also a hierarchical form of government in itself may finally be administered by a brotherly spirit: in such a way that all the rights of the brothers remain fully protected; and a domineering spirit will even among a brotherly system find occasion for domination and oppression of the rights of the brothers.

As far as our congregational system of government is concerned, so our congregational regulations are altogether strongly in harmony with the key note: "One is our Master, Christ; you however are all brothers," Matthew 23:8. The least important person has as much right as the powerful person and the rich person has no more rights than the poor person. Since in spite of every development, equality in practice is often another thing than in theory, so that here or there a rich person, an employer, a lawyer or else an already famous speaker or a politician or also a clique, or the board of directors or the pastor in fact controls the congregation and the rights of the individuals are encroached upon either openly or secretly -- that can certainly happen and fortunately does happen only infrequently. Against this no system of government can resist, rather only the Christian position of organization and the strength of the Christian character for others in the growth of the congregation. The system of government guarantees no more than the possibility of freedom; its reality and materialization will be guaranteed only by the Christian maturity and growth of the individuals. So our congregational constitutions guarantee to the pastors, teachers and other officials the necessary support, the appropriate honor and the indispensable official freedom; which however does not prevent that here and there once in a while a congregation bitterly wrongs its pastor sometimes with the help of his "dear" brothers in the ministry - tyrannizes him or even expels him from his office and his food. Those are certainly very unusual exceptions, and in such extraordinary cases the guilt does not entirely lie with the congregation alone; but rather for the most, part also with the respective pastor. This with a widely repeated form of congregational tyranny, under which we have to suffer, is on the one hand the real unsatisfactory care of pastors and teachers, on the other hand it is the demand for conducting school also in such cases, where the remedy for the congregation would quite probably bring about the position of a school teacher. With this it is also not to be forgotten, that we pastors in such circumstances ourselves bear much guilt whether as individuals or as a group. In most of such cases we have permitted the proper education of the congregation to be missing.

Worse and greater is the danger, that we pastors tyrannize the congregations, much greater, than that the congregations will enslave us. Dominion of men in the church will, as all sins, be born from the evil inclination and from the occasion of exercising (authority). There is still very much truth in the proverb: "There is no little priest so small, that there isn't a little pope in him." The desire to be pope is then the original sin and the chief sin of mankind. (It itself is named by the disciples often): "There arose, also a quarrel among them, who should be considered greatest among them." Luke 22:24; Matthew 18:1. We stand for the most part on form, in every case we stand on the Christian understanding about the bulk of the congregational structure, we are officially spiritual leader, teacher, overseer of the congregation; we order and we prohibit in the name of the Lord, we demand faith and obedience, where we bring God's Word. That transfers itself perhaps too easily to commands, of which we have nothing to say. We gradually accustom ourselves so easily to sitting in the first place and we accustom ourselves to ruling. We demand honor so readily for our person and for recognition of our superiority in general. And it is even very easy for a virtuous pastor, in a Christian congregation to play the master and to rule hearts, without feeling the reins. For not in the raw form of the external demands, commands and beat for supremacy does the Papacy make itself most concerned - that comes soon - but rather in the form of the apparent benevolent paternalism, which understands its self-seeking desires through the form of brotherliness and the gracious condescension to quickly make moral commandments for the people, - who knows how to give himself the prestige of such eminence and excellence, that it appears as rudeness as coarseness, as wickedness, not to joyously grant or to completely oppose the self understandable, legitimate and unselfish desires of the pastor. This form of the dominion of men is therefore so easy, because most men, also in the church, are born servants, dependent characters, and subservient spirits, whose becoming ruler is a natural need for servants and for flatters, if there is anything at all for them, from it. There is beside the pure so much impure reverence of the pastor, especially among the female sex, of which many, from an unconscious mixing of Christian respect for the office and natural interest for the man in the gown, they practice with the pastor fully and readily a formal "Christian" hero-worship, inside or outside of the Ladies Aid, make themselves the body guard of the pastor, in order to satisfy his personal needs and desires by all kinds of salutes, services and gifts. It often enough happens that the governing body considers itself and plays off itself over against the pastor as the champion of the rights of the congregation; however more often the leaders are inclined to unite themselves solidly with the pastor, to

become his personal train-bearer, in order to bask themselves in his brightness and to preserve and to elevate their position in the congregation. One hand washes the other. There would be no tyrants in the world, if there were not so many slaves; there would be no papacy without so many papal servants; there would be no dominion of men in the church, if many Christians would not let themselves so easily be made servants of men. The Christian freedom, with which Christ freed us, with which He bound us to Himself and to His Word alone, has loosed us from every slavery of men and (to independent Christian personalities in him, to preserve, belonging to those most difficult to actual lessons of Christians.) Man is by nature both a tyrant and a servant, at the same time and yet according to circumstances one or the other. The dominion of man and the servitude of men in the church, abolishes however consequently the Christian freedom and the exclusive subjection to Christ and destroys the church as nothing else, as we see in the Papacy; therefore the Scripture warns all Christians so forcibly: “Therefore stand now in the freedom, with which Christ has freed us, and don’t let yourself again be caught in the yoke of slavery.” Gal. 5; and, “You are paid dearly for; don’t be servants of men.” I Cor. 7:23. And for us pastors this warning again and again stands there: “Not as those lording it over the people,” I Pet. 5:3; “You know, that the worldly princes rule, and the overlords have authority; it should not be thus among you, but rather thus, each one who wants to be powerful among you, he should be your servant, and whoever then wants to be the Most high ranking, he should be your slave; even as the Son of man has not come, to let himself be served, but rather that he serve and give his life as a redemption for many.” Matthew 20; John 13:20; II Cor. 1:24.

As far as our synodical life is now concerned so it would be quite too naive to imagine that there is within our synodical system of government, the fundamental, the independence of the individual congregation, the equality of rights of all congregations and all pastors, the purely advisory power of all synodical resolutions, the pure brotherly character of all functions and synodical offices and the synod as such, the appropriate vanity of all opposing resolutions and precautions strongly emphasized with God’s Word, so that then there could not be the dominion of man and the servitude of men, the injustice and violation by pastors, teachers and congregations. Whoever has grown-up within the synodical life for a longer time, knows that already the synodical system of government has permitted itself to be made into a vehicle of the Juggernaut, who mercilessly crushes and grinds into pieces, whatever stands in the way of him. Here only our accustomed court procedure with excommunication and controversies needs to be remembered. We take an imagined case, - which however corresponds in all vital points to actual occurring cases: A man had been excommunicated in July 1890 in an unjust way by the congregation in Z. He turned next to the neighboring pastor. He however knew the plan as a repulsive character and knew such a thing is moreover embarrassing in the civility of the synodical procedure and sent him to the visitor. The man turned to another neighboring pastor with the same result. After two months he went to the visitor. He asked first of all for an explanation from the pastor of the excommunicating congregation. He willfully delayed the affair, and it first came up for investigation after Easter of 1891. This accomplished nothing and was adjourned until the next quarterly convention. Now the excommunicated man “impatiently” turned to the president, who naturally didn’t want to be interfered with and directed the man to await the process of the appointed July convention. This came and confirmed the excommunication as righteously done. Now the excommunicated man again turned to the president. There were new discussions with the concerned visitor and the excommunicating pastor. Until the president brought it to a repeated investigation and convention in Z., it was October 1891. After the second discussion the president confirmed the decreed excommunication. Now nothing else remained for the excommunicated man, than to turn to the convening Synod in June of the next year. It was 1892. The Synod sent a commission to Z. for a repeated investigation. A member of this commission, a pastor, was a good friend of the excommunicating pastor and had at length privately heard the case from him; chiefly through his intervening the verdict came down in September of 1892, that the unjust was declared as just. What now? The man again turned to several pastors and to the president. Finally he was referred to the general president. Who said: “It is a shame that you had not come a month earlier then you could still have your case brought before the General Synod. However, I will immediately appoint an investigation. After four weeks this brought about and confirmed the legitimacy of the excommunication. Meanwhile the General Synod also had convened in May of 1893 and would first meet

again in two or perhaps three years as the final synodical court, which remained over the illegitimate excommunication. He turned according to the advice, which he had received here and there from many inquiries, to the general president of a sister synod and obtained the information, that he could not involve himself, before the excommunicated man also was done with the final court of his own synod. So he was called on to wait patiently yet two or three years and meanwhile to remain excommunicated from sacrament and from all communication with fellow-believers! Then he died, partly out of sorrow over the transpired handling of her husband, the wife of the excommunicated man had joined him in his protest against the unjust excommunication. The excommunicating pastor refused a church funeral for her and comforted her also therefore, that no other Lutheran pastor would bury her. She must be born to the grave without church honor. The children became wavering in faith because the apparent injustice of the “church” and they began to hate and to curse all pastors. Still the convention of the General Synod finally came after two or three years, and its commission again confirmed the unjust excommunication! Now as the last resort in the year 1895 or 1896 finally a joint investigation ordered by one of two general Presidents accomplished a scrupulous, composite commission, which, after precise and conscientious inspection and examination of all material and of all existing discussions, after another half year, 1897-1898, declared the excommunication as unjust and the excommunicated family was irrefutably justified before the whole church! From July 1890 until November 1896 or 1897 the man had been placed in an unjust excommunication, namely under a disgraceful tyranny of men, under a most atrocious injustice, and it had harmed him in all his property, in his domestic happiness and his peace of mind, which Christ has earned with his divine blood, and it had harmed the spiritual welfare of his children, which only God could again make good, - all that under our brotherly Synodical establishment! Whoever then believes, that the above-mentioned was a purely imaginary case, which is not possible in reality, he should inquire of the older leaders of our synod, of whom some know to tell of a case, where a man had to continue for eight years in an unjust excommunication by authority of the well-known official channels, and had to languish under the tyranny of men. Thank God that such cases happen extremely seldom; however that they can happen, proves, that also our synodical system of government offers no absolute certainty against the dominion of men.

Therefore, we are convinced, that in this and other areas our synodical establishment should be changed (to which we will still come later), so we want to point out a series of matters here, in which the dominion of men readily and unnoticed mace itself at home and in the same way affected congregations, pastors, teachers and synodical officials. We all are by nature lovers of honor and power, and we pastors and teachers, who are accustomed to preaching and teachings; also in thing which are not determined in God’s Word, easily demand the assent and subjection of others because of our real or imaginary deeper insight. Now it is also true, that in the church seen more than elsewhere in the world, the concerns, not the persons, should be master. Therefore it must be self understood, that the Word always decides that issue, which clearly sets forth the concerned issue and irrefutably establishes the issue by itself. Then at least apparently even the persons will triumph with the victorious concern; however it is not a personal victory in truth, but rather a pure victory of the concern, under which its champion only first and voluntarily has humbled himself personally. However on the one hand the vanity and stubbornness of men so easily plays a trick on us, that we also imagine ourselves to be lords over the affair; where, closely examined, our personal preference has decided the result of which is, that we stubbornly champion our decision, and all who oppose us we regard as feeble-minded or pig-headed or as totally wicked; or on the other hand: we consider one thing openly as a concern justly imposed from real inability, to comprehend it or to oppose it out of self-seeking motives. Personal sympathy and antipathy induce too easily the oppression of a just cause and the protection of an evil cause, without our being aware of the correct cause. We easily build coalitions and place agitations in the work, (to force through with the help of a multitude of persons, what does not want to be accomplished by means of the insight and knowledge of another). That is the dominion of men, which brings forth dissension and destroys fellowship.

That brings us to the area of church politics. There are people, who suffer from “ruleitis,” as has been expressed quite pertinently, namely from the desire to rule; people, who therefore believe that the church can be helped by a strong power for men, by as many statutes as possible and by many personal rulers, who are always

bent on making new rules, and would like themselves to take hold and rule over all, so that things go very orderly. We so easily forget that God rules the church, and to be sure without having many ordinances, offices, institutions or reprimands prescribed, because for the correct administration of the church no more is necessary than harmony in doctrine and in brotherly love; and because every human church administration only so much more certainly destroys the church, which neglects both these parts and puts the intelligence of men and well-meaning of men in many ordinances and reprimands in their place. We do not want the thing to happen - only by doctrine and love - to let it develop under God's direction by itself; we want certain results, which we have set up in our minds as beneficial, to bring it about to made or force it through alone or with the help of others.

It is quite apparent from this, that it must lead to the injury of others, the dominion of men, which sets itself up in God's place. What is necessary in the church, is this, that we stand absolutely fast and unmovable with the divine truth and righteousness and that we stand in love and therefore in case of necessity suffer all; it is not necessary that our human plans are carried out - it is tyranny to accomplish them with an infringement of love, even if they appear so beneficial to us. That we are here not speaking of things which concerns God's Word and the conscience is clear. However, in all other things it is enough and only beneficial to suggest a thing, to clearly explain and to properly establish, to respectfully oppose the apparent objections. The thing then that is not accomplished by itself, then is clear, that sod does not want or does not let want to have it. They want to accomplish it with human tricks, they want to accomplish it with human tricks, they want to set up what is called the dominion of men in the church. And it is nothing other, if someone in the same way hinders things, which are openly beginning to happen, by all kinds of machinations, because they did not suit his purpose.

We now come to the officialdom in the synod. This naturally offers the greatest opportunity for the establishing of the dominion of men. An office consists in the exercise of special functions and in the therefore necessary rights and powers. Don't want to be a bishop! Only no office should naturally be demanded of everyone. Each office requires abilities and skills which we should not at once credit ourselves with; each office makes work, trouble, care, which we are not by nature inclined towards; each office brings responsibility with it. Who therefore should urge this! However, each office is an honor and includes powers, authorities and advantages; therefore the words, I do not want to be a bishop are a very beautiful speech, but less often a common fact. The really serious-minded refusals; to take over an office, are exceptions, and surely the higher the office, so much less seldom the exception. Generally each finds in reality an excellent president, at least a general president in himself. What a shame that others don't see that as clearly as we ourselves do; however such is the blind and unthankful course of the world: the geniuses will be misunderstood and often not even honored after their deaths! In reality however, it happens in the world, a hundred times more than in the church, that not the one who should lead and rule an office, is therefore considered to be capable; but rather the one, who is therefore considered incapable. If it were possible, one should seek for the king's crown, for the presidential seat, for the bishop's hat, for the synodical presidency and every office in the church with a thousand candle light only the man who is unique in every sense, who therefore under no circumstances has to have power, and therefore should constrain him from the office; however immediately depose him, as soon as he lets the office decline. ***Whoever then believes, he is qualified for an office, is by that very act therefore not qualified, II Cor 2:16; 3:5; and whoever strives for an office, should therefore under no circumstances be chosen, He. 5:4.*** This all leads us however consequently to the fact that we in general had no officials and that can at least in public affairs not be good, besides God had not made use of the office of bishop and deacons for the care of the church. So practically we will have to be satisfied with officials, who are not absolutely certain of their inabilities and who possess no insurmountable antipathy to the office. We should do the same to presidents and visitors, to directors and members of administrative boards, commissions, committees and boards, who consider themselves as least, who at least are inclined toward ruling and are most difficult to interest in the office. God guards the church against officials, who like to be chosen and even want to be chosen again and again! They seek sure honor or want to rule, most certainly then they suffer from the delusion that the church surely could not get along without them without harm, because no one could run the affairs quite as well as they can. If however someone quite openly does something directly for his own election or re-election, it seems that he makes himself prominent before the election, especially before the delegates and runs from

friendliness and piousness; it seems that he sets in motion a couple of especially pious friends and confidants to agitate, or that he makes use of a place, time and special circumstances of a convention for his election; or that he even points out his entire official behavior, to make himself beloved and indispensable and so to keep him in the office, - then it is time, to take him out. He has found pleasure in ruling and wants to rule.

The directive for all church elections is besides I Tim. 3 and Titus 1, Acts 6:3: "Look for seven men among yourselves, who have a good report and are full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint for your necessity." Whoever doesn't have a good report, to whom someone could speak rightly of this or that immoral thing; who as a man of doubtful business practices as unscrupulous in his profession is well known in the world; whoever as pastor or teacher is wanton in his office and notoriously frivolous in his parish practice, who also belongs in no synodical office, although he may have special talents, as much as he wants. Such people in the church to the point, in which they place offices, is called a premium of moral deficiency or setting up professional unfaithfulness, unfaithfulness, cause appearance and destroy the Christian spirit in the church. Only people of thoroughly good report inside and outside of the church, whose moral blamelessness has forced even the world to acknowledge it, whose official honesty is acknowledge in Christendom with joy, belong in the offices of the church. Yes, we should always seek out for the office the moral and professional models among the pastors and laity, who could serve as an example for all and could say to others in all circumstances: Follow me and as be I am: -They must obviously have the Holy Ghost, besides every Christian was, from this point on not to be good at an office, but rather to be full of the Holy Ghost of a special measure of the Holy Ghost, of spiritual gifts and works, of Christian knowledge, of faith, of the fear of God, of humility of love and of the zeal for God's house, of Christian charity and of salvation, in short he has to be full of the right, sensible and profound Christian godliness, which is useful for all things. Acts 6 is concerned with the deacons who officially only had to deal with external affairs. And yet for this relatively unimportant service the apostles demanded men with a full measure of the Spirit. Our synodical offices are all the same kind and therefore also come under this command. Indeed, we should, as with the nomination of these offices which the Word directly urges, so also with these look more at the Christian conviction than at the natural ability, for without it the latter brings about only destruction for the church; history amply proves while it itself has the promise that it should be given all necessary wisdom for the execution of its offices from above, because it asks for wisdom and strength, James 1:5. It is a painful, universally broadening delusion, that a special natural training, learning, wisdom, discretion and energy is especially needed for externally ruling the church. That would then only be true, if the church were an external, worldly kingdom whose ruling is left to the ingenuity of men; however, that is not the case; it is a spiritual kingdom existing in the authority of Christ over the hearts through His Gospel, in which he alone provides for and wants to provide for all rules and ruling. The best ruling of the church by men is that which rules least; and the least possible ruling does not understand the natural wisdom and energies, but rather the simple, pious, tender God-fearing heart, which is careful with every precaution of men for that which would like to spoil something for the Lord Christ and do an injustice to their brothers. That is also the wisdom, which in Acts 6 is demanded as three qualities of servants of the church. This does not consist in great natural knowledge and intellectual capabilities, nor in parliamentary skill and decided, human ruling abilities; but rather in this, that a person knows from the experience of his own heart, knows by the Holy Ghost, -what the gospel is and that the gospel alone can and also does do everything in the church, because the wisdom of man, and the deeds of man next to the Gospel only boils everything away and destroys the church; - that which refrains as much as possible from humanly intelligent reprimanding, holds itself back as much as possible takes cares of the brother as much as possible, permits Christ alone to rule as much as possible in His Word, in short only he who correctly understands and knows how to use not the ruling but the (ability not to rule). That is the demanded, spiritual wisdom for the authority of the church. Also it is a piece of true piety, of clear, sensible Godliness. We only truly and carefully choose people for the synod offices, who have a good report, who are full of the Holy Ghost and His wisdom, then we have a very praise-worthy synodical system of government. We must not expect perfection.

However such men should do nothing, in order to come into an office, but rather they should probably restrain themselves even yet when someone therefore brings and forces them in a Christian way. Whoever

would force himself into an office is not such a man. On the other hand don't let a person also win by human machinations, manipulations and agitation; they should want to request as a gift of God to be chosen in an open, simple brotherly deliberation. Every machination, also with the election, is the dominion of men which leads to tyranny in some form and destroys the church.

MENSCHENSCHAFT IN DER KIRCHE (continued)

translated by
Stephen K. Ristow
 Church history 4/28/80

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

What you are about to read has been submitted only to receive a grade. I am not too happy with this translation; and if its going to be of any use to anyone in the future, its going to have to be revised. Such a revision will follow with the material I still owe.

Also, I have begun translating “in medias rei.” There are four pages of manuscript previous to mine which will be worked out by Dan Meyers (Dorf). These, too, will be handed in with my final draft.

MENSCHENHERRSCHAFT IN DER KIRCHE (continued)

Another point is this: If anything should come before the Synod, it must, in an orderly way, go through the hands of the president. Not everything which this or that person has in mind belongs before the public assembly; not everything is in place at any time. The president is primarily the one who keeps order in the public assembly; hence, he holds his title of chairman; only in the second place is he the representative of the Synod when it isn't meeting. There is a disregard of the presidency and an attempt toward “dominion of men” if someone, intentionally avoiding the president, brings before the Synod an irrelevant matter or even a relevant matter at the wrong time. Only harm will result from that. Or the other hand, this fine regulation offers the presidency just the opportunity to extend his power. The president himself can postpone any matter displeasing to him, or he can ultimately keep it entirely away from the assembly. Many synods have even made the regulation that everything which should be brought before the synod must be submitted to the president in writing a considerable length of time beforehand. It's obvious that this regulation—which, by itself, might be very wise—gives the president the opportunity to put things on ice which aren't suitable to him. And how easily can this or that petitioner become deprived of rights and be rendered powerless in that way!

The president is the leader of the assembly, and for that reason he should be concerned that everyone who wants to speak be given a chance to speak as long as everyone has the same right as the others (“sich das mit den gleichen Rechten alley andern vertraegt”). But as he simply has to decide, as a human being he is inclined to consider who should or shouldn't speak; he can overlook this or that person, not see him, not hear him. That is tyranny if it is done consciously!

As chairman, the president should not speak to a matter which he has submitted. If he wants to do it, he should relinquish the “chair” to another. But even if, in the strict sense, he refrains from speaking proper, by the manner he submits the matter, indeed, through the mere form of questioning, he can decide the issue in a matter.

Yet perhaps the governing power of a president is greater when he has to act as representative of the Synod when it doesn't meet. For example, there's the right to propose candidates for vacant congregations. If it became so regarded and manipulated that the congregations would be bound to the suggestions of the president, or if it became misused for the promotion of a personal friend and the demotion of a personal enemy, then “dominion of men” would come from it. The patronage which a president possesses can easily lead to the arrangement of a machine, a party in power, totally without his intention.

In every large synod there are always people who covet a position or desire to be “moved up.” The president is the man whom one makes use of, on whose good will one feels himself dependent, whom one must do all he can to oblige, to whom one thinks he is obliged to be thankful for his promotion, on whom one makes

himself so dependent, with whom, then, one forms a party in Synodical affairs; while such people who do not necessarily have the president in this sense stand in opposition to him in person far more naturally and more freely in Synodical matters or entirely at odds ('gar antipathisch') in personal desires. So it easily approaches party divisions in the Synod and, from that time on, it nearly approaches personal or party disputes in which it is chiefly the mere question of party rule—the rule of one over the other—as in politics. That an entire legion of evil spirits be confined with it, the party passion remains hidden.

Furthermore, the president is the man whom one makes use of as the favorite in disputes, even though one could certainly just as well use a Visitor or a neighboring pastor. If he becomes called to do so, he can go to the investigation and arbitration himself, or he can send another one there, or even a committee. In any case, his influence is great, and he is to be seriously concerned if he misuses it to favor a friend and hamstring an enemy. Often enough people who are at variance with their pastor submit the matter to him (the president) in writing and ask for his opinion without having previously treated it properly in the congregation. How easy it is for him to offer advice to the congregation behind the back of the pastor in question and allow judgments which harm the pastor. Even Visitors and neighboring pastors, professors themselves, fall into the same temptation. That's equal to becoming a busybody in other men's matters and producing factionalism ("aber in ein fremd Amt greisen and Rottiererei treiben")--even if it happens with the best of intention. Such are to be rejected and stopped that they do what they are obliged to do, namely to observe Matthew 18.

Yet, instead of entering into another individual matter, we might here mention a presidential function which, in the present course of discussion, is more important than that which has been mentioned up til now. We mean the so-called RIGHT TO SUSPEND ("Suspensionsrecht") which the president possesses, about which it's been written once before in this publication (Quartalschrift, Vol. 3, April 1906, p. 65ff). We consider the term important enough to treat it here once again somewhat thoroughly, that is, from all points of view with full perception of all concrete examples which have come forth.

A universal clarity does not even exist in which it properly stands. Previously it has been retained that the president deals with a suspension from synodical association as representative of the Synod when it isn't in session. Therefore, theoretically, his dealing with all parties concerned is strictly to be viewed as though the Synod itself had dealt with it until it decides otherwise; unless he, in the decree of suspension, would have gone beyond the full power of authority and instructions of the Synod. In the latter instance the suspension is altogether invalid, in the former, the Synod virtually has handled it—but only "for the time being ('vorlaeufig')."

What, then, really is the presidential suspension? One certainly can place into the term many meanings which it doesn't have in linguistic usage, and, at one or another instant he can cut out what it historically once dealt with, and then he can argue at length exactly what the concept signifies. But if anyone wants to avoid needless strife and unclarity, he should not argue about a word. Its' a question of presidential action which, in our close Lutheran circles, for a considerable length of time, have designated with the term "suspension." What is it if, in the "Lutheraner" or "Gemeindeblatt"-- in an official newspaper of one of our Lutheran synods, we read, "President N. N. has suspended Pastor X. X., or the congregation in Y. Z, from Synodical participation?" The point on which a correct understanding here depends is this -- **WHETHER OR NOT THE PRESIDENTIAL SUSPENSION, ACCORDING TO ITS ESSENTIAL IDEA, ALWAYS INVOLVES (FOR THE TIME BEING) A SUSPENSION OF FELLOWSHIP ("Glaubensbruderschaft") WITH THE ONE WHO WAS SUSPENDED;** whether, under certain circumstances, it could be merely a removal from outward membership with the Synod, without wanting and being obliged to suspend fellowship at the same time. On this certainly hinges the practical question whether or not the other members—respectively, other Synods, yes, all Christians on earth—should deny fellowship to the one under suspension. Now it's certainly conceivable not only for someone to separate himself peacefully, amicably from a synod in order to join or not to join another synod; but its also conceivable for a president once to make a public report that this or that pastor (congregation) has withdrawn from association with the Synod. However, no thinking man would call that a **SUSPENSION**. It can further become necessary for the president to have to remove an incompetent or unfaithful official from his post; but that is a removal from a special function within the synodical community,

not from the synod itself. The person in question can certainly remain a member of synod in spite of it. But by no means does the mere removal of synodical association because of individual adiaphora involve any fault whatsoever. So the one who separated himself from one synod could immediately join himself to another synod and be received by this one, and no Christian could deny him fellowship because of his separation.

Do we call such cases of separation (in an active or passive sense) suspension? No! With us suspension is historically and actually something else entirely. Essentially it is the public announcement that Pastor N. N. or X. X. Congregation HAS SUSPENDED FELLOWSHIP WITH US. That all synodical members, all sister synods, all Christians on earth should know, with it they no longer treat him (it) as fellow-believer, but deny fellowship to him (it) until he (it) repents. This is the way it is with us historically. “The constitutions of other orthodox evangelical Lutheran Synods are silent concerning this matter, yet in practice the same manner is followed” as in the Missouri Synod. “The Constitution of the honorable Missouri Synod says concerning it in Chapter 6, Article 13: ‘ If, between Synodical meetings, MANIFEST OFFENSES BE GIVEN by individual ministers—be they voting or advisory members—WITH REGARD TO DOCTRINE OR CONDUCT, AND, UPON REBUKE OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE OTHER DISTRICT OFFICIALS, IF THEY DO NOT BECOME KNOWN AND ACKNOWLEDGED TO BE PENITENT AND HAVE NOT PROMISED TO IMPROVE¹ the president is thus empowered to suspend their membership from the Synodical body for the time being until the next session, and also to publish this procedure’ (Quartalschrift, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 75f). According to this regulation of the Missouri Synod—which is also held by us—the presidential suspension is to be decreed only because of “manifest offenses in regard to doctrine and conduct” which will not be repented of. Accordingly, if a presidential suspension becomes published in a Missouri publication, thus, of course, it is a public announcement that the one under suspension has been removed from FELLOWSHIP (“Glaubensbruderschaft”) owing to impenitence concerning a manifest offense in doctrine or conduct with the Missouri Synod (and naturally also with all fellow-believers of the Missouri Synod, with all Christians on earth); and it’s a public request to all Christians on earth to deny fellowship to the one in question until he has repented and has entered again into the fellowship of believers. According to its Constitution, the Missouri Synod does not recognize another suspension. That is their concept of suspension. Do we have a different one in the Wisconsin or Minnesota or Michigan or Nebraska Synod? “Without a doubt all Synods follow “in praxi” this regulation set down by the honorable Missouri Synod even though they themselves have not yet established it in writing” (Quartalschrift, loc. cit.). Indeed, we also know of no other suspension. And if “suspended” were to be used in the Missouri Synod or by us even once in another sense, it would be a misuse of the word which could only cause confusion. In the Synodical Conference, under “suspension for the time being”, we understand REMOVAL OF FELLOWSHIP (“Glaubensbruderschaft”)--nothing else. If one of our presidents pronounces a suspension, thus each time he declares with it that the suspended one has broken fellowship; and he openly declares with it that the whole Wisconsin Synod—man for man—and the Minnesota and Nebraska and Michigan Synods and the Missouri Synod and all other orthodox church bodies and all Christians on earth deny fellowship to the one under suspension. The suspension not only removes “the person’s membership from the synodical body for the time being until the next session,” but it is their idea, according to a declaration, that FELLOWSHIP, and, with the same, also membership with the synodical body has been discontinued. Thus it’s very proper that a presidential suspension be a public declaration “that the one under suspension, because of his transgression, is no longer worthy to be a member of the Synod, that the suspension places him ‘in an evil light’ that the good name of one under suspension as an upright or orthodox Christian or pastor is done with for the time being.” (ibid. p. 78.79) -- If that’s true, then how would a president decree a suspension where no impenitence over false doctrine or offensive conduct is under consideration; or how could one call it a suspension where it concerns only a separation from the human matter of synod, a dismissal from a purely external synodical right! That would be a dreadful slander, an abominable sin against the eighth commandment and an intolerable violation. Therefore we ourselves presently hold that, according to the concept, there

¹ Our Emphasis.

certainly is no proper suspension—and there cannot be—which would merely remove the external matter of synodical association without proclaiming the removal of fellowship at the same time.

The suspension is not merely an indictment on breach of fellowship announced to the whole Church for the time being, the right or wrong of which should first be confirmed through examination of the incident during the next synodical assembly. To be sure, it is an indictment by means of the public announcement, but it's not only that. It's much more. It not only proposes the dismissal from synodical—and brotherly—association, but it states it explicitly—that is, according to the full power of authority given by the synod and by their express order, in the name of the synod—only that the synod will review the matter once more, and therefore has restricted the value of the dismissal which has taken place until their next session. Through the synod officials (that is the idea) the synod itself has thus decreed the exclusion from synod to the one under suspension until the next session of synod. We purposely say “through the synod officials” and not “through the president,” because that's the main point to emphasize -- that the suspension cannot be decreed through one individual person. The president might pronounce the suspension alone or sign the publication if, by it, it is certain that he has not acted on his own in the matter, but together with others. But he cannot act alone in the dealings which must necessarily precede the publication -- namely, in the finding of facts, in the needed admonition, and in the judgment. That would be against Matthew 18:16 and I Tim. 5:9. Thus, according to the concept, the suspension is not the action of one person—the president—but, at least, of two or three. It would be a plainly inconceivable papal arrogance if a president wanted to suspend a pastor or a congregation totally from his own estimation on his sole judgment. But the decree by a small number of synod members in the place of the assembled synod itself, and the “for the time being;” is totally non-essential as to the power and validity of the same, provided that, on the whole, it has been justly decreed. It's a wise precaution -- any measure that the synod reserves itself the right to undergo a revision, of the suspension dealing of its officials once more through a committee (again, by a small number) or in the plenary session itself in order to possibly prevent error and injustice; but it takes nothing away from the power and validity of the presidential suspension if it is really just, yet it appends something to it in case it is really unjust moreover the revision can serve to bring the justice or injustice, the validity or invalidity of a suspension practically into a better light—for human insight to a greater and more absolute evidence. It does not lend permanence by itself, perhaps only the temporary bower of the presidential suspension.

The presidential suspension—if it is really just (“really,” that means for all synodical members, all synods, all Christians on earth and for all heaven) also valid and effective for all time—is exactly the same as excommunication which has been decreed by a congregation until the one in question repents. Briefly put, **ACCORDING TO ITS ESSENTIAL IDEA, IT (suspension) IS EXCOMUNICATION WHICH MEANS, if one wants to express it concretely, EXCLUSION FROM THE CHURCH BECAUSE OF MANIFEST IMPENTTENCE OVER CLEAR SINS OR BECAUSE OF STUBBORNLY HOLDING FAST TO FALSE DOCTRINE.**

After we have become clear about the proper essence and power of the suspension, everything else will take care of itself. Chiefly this, that no president may allow himself to fall in to suspend a synodical member purely because of opposition to a clearly human synodical ordinance. For example, the Synod resolves to collect from all congregations through a special collection for a specific purpose. A pastor, together with his congregation, stubbornly opposes it, and no speeches and admonitions by the Visitor, president and other synodical members, help. In itself that is not yet basis enough to strike this congregation with its pastor from the synodical list—much less, to decree suspension. To the former, belongs still more; as to the latter, it requires **MANIFEST OFFENSES IN DOCTRINE OR LIFE.** But opposition in itself is not yet that, since there still isn't any opposition against the clear Law or Gospel of God. Or: There is a congregation which, despite all requests and admonitions, never sends a delegate to the synodical convention. That (congregation) one could strike from the list, but, by no means, suspend, because it has not yet demonstrably committed any sin by it. Briefly put, opposition against clearly human synodical ordinances, resolutions, against clearly human brotherly or presidential presentations (“Vorstellungen”) does not place the sword of suspension in the presidents hand. If he

decrees one such (suspension) because of such matters, he has forfeited his office. The Church has no use for popes and should not tolerate them. One is your Master—Christ; but you are all brothers.

It is to be held fast throughout that, in application, the suspension might only come in matters which also lead to excommunication (among them, we here also deal with the exclusion because of false doctrine). Our old Church teachers generally made the distinction: not little sins, but coarse (“grobe”), great (“grosse”), serious (“gravia”), enormous (“enormia”), atrocious (“atrocia”) sins are subject to Church discipline, and, if held fast to, they draw themselves toward excommunication. But that is more a practical directive than a theoretically correct distinction. In practice Church discipline can intervene, for the most part, only with coarse sins; because, for the most part, only such sins as are worthy of excommunication become universally recognized, and, in this sense alone are manifest that is, recognized by all. Matthew 18 makes no distinction between sins which are subject to Church discipline. (What does it really mean: little sin, big sin?) Every sin can lead to excommunication (every sin) which has been committed “against you” -- here that means not what has been done in absolute secrecy, but, in some sense, what has been done against one another. That’s the main thing with excommunication, as also with suspension—that it is a clear sin, that is, a manifest sin, a deed whose sinfulness is not questionable, but totally stands fast. Theoretically, it is thus that brotherly admonition and eventually excommunication should enter in where some actual sin or another by a brother confronts us (sins of thought do not confront us as such) regardless of whether it seems little or big to us. In practice, it is totally something else. Objectively, the sinfulness of each sin stands fast; subjectively, the verdict concerning the sinfulness of this or that action will sway more or less by distinctions according to the degree of knowledge. There is a great number of deeds whose sinfulness does not become clearly recognized by all Christian. For that reason these could not be subject to Church discipline. It restricts itself to such sins whose sinfulness is manifest, that is, becomes universally known and recognized—as Paul says: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, etc.” (Gal. 6:19-21) Its “obviousness” (“Offenbarsein”) makes it impossible for faith to exist with it, whereas faith may exist in the deed with unknown sins. If one decrees excommunication over sins which are not manifest, that is, not universally recognized sins, one could fall into the danger of excommunicating someone who still stands in faith -- which is not possible where one restricts himself with the ban to manifest sins.

The presidential suspension must also restrict itself to such sins. One can’t excommunicate anyone in a congregation because he doesn’t send his children to parochial school or he finds many things wrong with parochial school. Even less can the president suspend a congregation which doesn’t hold a parochial school in spite of the fact that it could well do it; or a pastor who doesn’t himself consider a parochial school in spite of the fact that he could have one. These are not manifest sins. Thus he may not allow himself to decree a suspension over a pastor because of the mere fact that he sends his child to the public school. That is still not a manifest sin. It won’t do for the president to bring in the suspension on pastors who go fishing or hunting, or once go to the theater or a concert or into a saloon, or who play cards once, or who own a life insurance policy or a share of mining stock or even sold it for a time, and do not allow themselves to be punished for it. Let no one understand us in this way as though we want to advocate such things here. We are using them for examples in order to make it perfectly clear that, in many instances one should well make use of brotherly admonition, warning, presentations (“Vorstellungen”) and prayer; however, no process of Church discipline may begin in matters which are not manifest sins or which allow themselves to be proven as such without trickery before all mature and earnest Christians. Where the sin isn’t always manifest, clear, obvious (“in die Augen springend”); where the sin must be construed, only in a long roundabout way with much skill; or where it’s a question of deeds which yet permit another meaning, the sinfulness of the action thus yet stands in question.; there is the inauguration of Church discipline, thus also of the presidential suspension, the pure papistry which no one may allow himself to fall into.

The Constitution of the Missouri Synod justly restricts the suspension to “manifest offenses with respect to doctrine or conduct.” What is, then, a manifest offense? First of all, all false doctrine (Rom. 16:17). That we don’t need to discuss any further. Secondly, every manifest, clear SIN, an action. which is, in itself, sinful. Sin comes from evil, is, in itself, evil, and produces only evil. It can do nothing else than work evil on the sinner

himself or on another. (Rev. 2:14). That also needs no further proof by us. **BUT BEYOND FALSE DOCTRINE AND SIN--MATTERS WHICH IN THEMSELVES ARE OFFENSES -- ONE DARE NOT GO.** (“Aber hinter den falschen Lehre and der Suende hoeren die Dinge, die in sich selbst Aergernisse sind, auch auf.”) An action—just, free in itself—can certainly also become an offense to others; best not by itself, but only through the weakness of this other person. It is not an offense in itself, and, according to its essence, it can also not even change into one. Therefore sin and offense are identical according to their substance—only the latter shows the sin according to its moral working on men, the former shows it according to its essence. And “manifest” offenses are such which are offenses according to UNIVERSAL Christian judgment, concerning which offensiveness, no difference in meaning exists among Christians.

Now manifest sins or offenses do not necessarily lead to excommunication or suspension. To be sure they are, in and by themselves, ban-worthy—according to the Law. God has already covered them all with excommunication and curse. The wages of sin is death. The soul who sins is the one who will die. Thus excommunication has already been decreed over every sin and every sinner. And it should also remain decreed over every sin in the Kingdom of God. The Church should tolerate no offenses in its midst, but should do away with them immediately. How? Not through immediate exclusion of the sinner. Then there soon would no longer be any Christian remaining. No, since our Lord Jesus Christ atoned for the guilt of sin and obtained grace for all sinners and took on himself the curse of the Law, the sin (that of offense) is to be done away with through repentance and confession. The sinner is to retract it—before God, in his heart; before men, through outward word and deed, through confession. Then it has been done away with, as far as it can be done away with by man. And, so that it becomes done away with by it, the Lord has prescribed brotherly admonition. Where it brings about repentance, the confession of sin, no ban, no exclusion, no suspension may follow (except, under certain circumstances, a publication of repentance). Excommunication or suspension can only enter in where repentance is to be obtained through no admonition; where the sinner—despite all admonition—remains impenitent. Then excommunication or suspension must follow, Why? Because the impenitence does two things. First of all, it shows that the sinner stands in Satan’s kingdom and is no longer a member, but an enemy, of the Church. Secondly, it holds the sin us such, upright and carries on the offense for all Christendom and the entire world. That the Church may not sanction and tolerate. It must free itself (“losmachen”) from the sin and the offense, sweep out the old leaven, and put out from itself the one who is evil. It must still make use of a last resort in order to move the impenitent one to turn back. That should take place through the ban, through the removal of brotherly association—respectively, through the suspension. Thus the suspension can only enter in and should only enter in where, first of all, a manifests in or a manifest offense in doctrine or conduct is present; and secondly, impenitence of the sin is added. If the first part is not present, there can be no suspension. If the first alone is present, the second, not, it (suspension) also can’t enter in because that which would straighten it out has already occurred—the doing away with the offense.

If a congregation decrees a ban for any other reason, it is to be excommunicated if it doesn’t repent because the unjust ban belongs to the coarsest and most manifest sins and offenses. It is tyranny and soul-destroying (Matt. 23:13, Jn. 16:2.3). And if a president suspends for any other reason and does not repent of it, he is to be suspended not only from his office, but also from synodical—and association of believers until he repents.