

THE UNITY OF FAITH

A Bible study on the doctrine of Church
Fellowship

By Ps. Staffan Bergman

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:

It is a great privilege to be able to offer this English translation of Ps Bergman's Bible study address to a new audience. I have, as best as possible, worked to offer what I think is one of the more compelling presentations of the doctrine of Church fellowship. During the course of translating this small booklet, I have been both challenged and blessed. It is my humble hope that the readers of this First Edition will likewise discover the depth of God's love and care for His church which Ps. Bergman so diligently wished to convey. The footnotes are mine, and I have refrained from making them too numerous, a preference being given to explanatory notes that help the reader understand the Swedish context in which Ps. Bergman was giving his address. My own comments are initialled and I have had to somewhat paraphrase Swedish idioms and phrases in some places, though I have attempted to minimise this approach. The citations from the Book of Concord are from the Triglotta Edition.

Special thanks go to the Lutherska Konkordiekyrkan in Sweden, of which Ps. Bergman was pastor, who have been a light and guide for me for many fine years.

Ps. Troy L. Harris,

Laetare, March 2020

THE UNITY OF FAITH.

By Staffan Bergman.

From a Bible study of John 17 given at the "Church Days" meeting in August 1982.

Modern Ecumenism and John 17

In our ecumenical century, few chapters in the Bible have been cited as diligently as John 17, and especially Jesus' words that "they should all be one" (v. 21). This word has been gratefully used to mix different churches and confessions into a single large cooking pot. One then invites the world to eat the soup in this casserole, for it is intimated that Jesus has said that the world will believe only when division ceases and the churches become one.

However, this is a gross misinterpretation of John 17. When Jesus speaks of being one, He is not referring to any kind of umbrella organisation at all, as for example the World Council of Churches, where the chief thing seems to be membership itself, while what one believes in doctrinally speaking is like a kind of bisque.

This type of unity is contrary to both Jesus and Scripture. Its representatives do not believe that there is any eternal, absolute truth that can be agreed upon. It is, in fact, a question of the unity of unbelief. On the other hand the unity of which Jesus speaks and prays so earnestly in His high priestly intercession in John 17 is the unity of faith, a living and divine unity based on truth and faith. That unity is not something that can be organised. It is created and sustained by the Holy Spirit who awakens faith in and obedience to the Word of God.

Unity and fellowship are the main theme of John 17. First, Jesus talks about the unity of the Son with the Father (v. 1-5), then on the unity between the apostles (v. 6-19) and finally on the unity between all believers (v. 20-26).

In this presentation we shall confine ourselves to what John 17 says about the unity and fellowship of faith and its practical application in our day.

1. The unity of faith is first and foremost an invisible communion with the only true God.

Jesus says in His prayer: "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (v. 3). According to the Bible eternal life is not an independent life. It is a life of deep fellowship with God. Through sin man has lost this life and been spiritually separated from God. This Bible calls this separation death. But Jesus has been given power to give life to sinners who are separate from God. His power has its basis in that He has come to "complete the work" which He has been commissioned to perform (v. 4). The work is His atoning sacrifice on Calvary for the sins of all men. It has been done in perfect divine unity with the Father, and thereby the Son has glorified the Father and the Father, the Son (v. 1, 5).

The term "glory" is often found in Scripture (Hebrew "kabod", Greek "doxa"). It is an expression used almost exclusively about the nature of God. It is the radiance of God. The fact that Jesus is glorified is because, like the Father, He is true God. To Him is divine honour, power and glory. In His work of atonement on earth, the saving glory of God is revealed.

Jesus has thus come and taken away our sins for us to have life, ie. communion with God, or as Jesus puts it: "knowing" the only true God. Whoever believes in Jesus and receives the remission of sins in His name has eternal life. So a spiritually dead man comes alive, a sinner is saved. And every time that happens, God is glorified. For true repentance means that God receives the glory for everything. We have nothing to offer here, nothing to show except sin and wickedness. When the Spirit calls us to Christ and life through the gospel, we can only receive it as an undeserved gift. Or in other words: By faith alone we have fellowship with the only true God.

This fellowship is a spiritual, inner life and is therefore invisible. The faith of the heart, which unites us with God, is also not visible. Jesus also says that the kingdom of God does not come in such a way that it can be seen with the eyes, but rather that it is within us (Luke 17:20-21).

Thus an outwardly visible church affiliation is no guarantee that a person has life with God. And it is not in the power of any man to look into the

hearts of others and state with absolute certainty: "Here we have a living faith!" It is something that only God can do. Therefore it is said, "The Lord knows who are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). He alone knows which of all of those who call themselves Christians really are Christians and belong to His church.

The faith of a Christian man is like an invisible thread between him and God. But that does not mean that fellowship with God is unreal in any way, or insecure and fragile. It is very much real, alive and strong. By faith we are one with the triune God. Jesus says "I in them, and you in me" (v. 23). But this unity is spiritual and invisible. Our eyes cannot see the vertical connection.

2. The unity of faith is also an invisible fellowship between those who believe in the only true God

Everyone who has a true faith in Jesus Christ has fellowship with one another. They are one because they are all one with God. The vertical line also provides a horizontal line of fellowship: the Christian Church.

When Jesus prays "that they may all be one, and that, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, that they may be also one in us" (v. 21), we must remember that it is an evident and already existing unity that this is about, not some kind of unity that will eventually emerge. The translation the NT 1981 has of this verse is misleading. It says "they should all become one".¹ The translation is obviously influenced by the modern ecumenical dream of a single, large umbrella church in the future. But Jesus does not use the verb form with the meaning "shall become". He tells them to be – to continue to be - one. Like what is said of the apostles (v. 11), this is a matter of being preserved in the unity of faith, in the deep, spiritual, and inward unity between believers, which Jesus compares to that which prevails between the Father and the Son.

No matter what race, country or church community a believer belongs to here on earth, he is one with every other true Christian, whether he knows them or not. There is only one church because there is only one Christ who lives by faith in the hearts of all Christians. This church is itself invisible. It is, as the apostle says, "a holy temple in the Lord ... a dwelling in which

¹*Ps. Bergman is speaking of the Swedish NT 1981 translation. Similar translations are found in certain English Bibles. The context of the unity of the Godhead confirms Ps Bergman's point. (TLH)

God lives by his Spirit" (Eph. 2:21, 22). All the things seen by God - the faith of the heart, Christ, the Spirit – those things which make the Church “*Una Sancta*”, the *one Holy Church*, are spiritual realities that cannot be seen by us. The Church is not a visible, earthly kingdom, it is an article of faith: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints ..." Thus, to its very essence, the church is an invisible fellowship, a spiritual brotherhood in Christ, which cannot be confined to a particular church community or to a particular country and people. All we know is that the Church is everywhere where the Holy Spirit brings people to a living faith in Jesus Christ through the Word in its various forms.

Luther strongly asserted the invisible church. The Reformation's concept of the church is a direct result of the biblical and comforting doctrine of the justification of sinners before God through faith alone. Therefore, in the Augustana it states: "Properly speaking, the Church is the assembly of saints and true believers",² and in the Apology: "for if we should say that the church is only an outward government, like other establishments, in which there are both wicked and pious men; no one would thus learn or understand, that the kingdom of Christ is spiritual, as it really is; that in it Christ inwardly rules, strengthens, and consoles the hearts, and imparts the Holy Spirit".³ Luther's battlefront, whether against Rome and either the enthusiasts or the fanatics, also applied to the vision of the Church. These sought to make the *Una Sancta* a visible earthly kingdom, though in different ways. But for Luther the Church remained, to its very essence, an invisible greatness. Wherever there is a human being who truly believes the gospel of the Scriptures, regardless of external church affiliation, he is a member of the *Una Sancta*, the church that God alone sees.

The one true church is an indivisible unit. It cannot be divided into several churches. It is not one or more organisations but a single living organism. The Apostle calls the Church the body of Christ, in which Christians are members (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12 ff., Col. 1:24). And the body of Christ cannot be divided, consisting of jagged, bleeding, half-worn limbs, a claim sometimes made by modern ecumenism. The invisible church is whole. Either you are a member of the body of Christ, or you are not.

The faith-confessing Church consists fully of believing, holy people, who

² Augsburg Confession, Art. VIII

³ Apology, Art VII (IV), 13

have been justified, purified from sin, and have become the children of God. It says, as it says in Augustana, "is to continue forever." (Art. VII). Jesus says of this church: "The gates of Hades shall not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18). This means that the forces of evil shall never be able to gain power over it or annihilate it.

When the prophet Elijah looked only at what was visible with his eyes in his time- the rejection of God's Word, the worship of Baal and the slaughter of the faithful by the enemies - he believed it was the end of God's Church. He felt as if it was only he alone who had not yet been slain, the last man standing. But God revealed to him that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed to Baal and had not offered him his kiss of tribute (1 Kings 19:18). This is a picture of the church that always exists, although at times it may appear to be completely annihilated.

In this spiritual, invisible and invincible church, everyone is perfectly one with one another in Christ. Everyone in the *Una Sancta* believes in their hearts one and the same: that they become blessed not because of their deeds or their merits, but solely because of the God-man Jesus Christ and his vicarious atonement. Through the same gospel, they have all been born again of the Spirit of God and received into God's family. With them there is no conscious disobedience to Christ. They cannot imagine standing against Him on any one of His words. Should they nevertheless get lost on some point, they will correct themselves as soon as the Scripture's meaning is clear to them.

We do not visibly see faith. We do not see the one true church. We do not see the Church's inner unity in Christ. Only on the last day will the *Una Sancta* break forth in visible glory: "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43). But until then it must remain an article of faith.

Is there something we can learn in this context? There certainly is- Jesus prays in v. 21 that Christians should be one "so the world may believe that you sent me." Therefore there must be something that the world can see. Although the church itself is not visible, it has visible characteristics that show where it is. All this is nicely expressed in Apology in the following words:

“The Christian church, however, consists not only in the communion of external signs, but chiefly in the internal communion of heavenly gifts in the heart; such as the Holy Spirit, faith, the fear and love of God. Nevertheless this church has external signs also, by which it is known; namely, where the pure Word of God is taught, and where the Sacraments are administered in conformity with it...”⁴

The foremost and important characteristic is the Word of God. The Church and the Word cannot be separated; where one is, there is the other. Luther puts it this way: "God's Word cannot be without God's people, on the other hand, God's people cannot be without God's Word."

3. The unity of faith manifests itself in a visible church fellowship between those who openly and unanimously confess to all what the one true God teaches in His Holy Word.

Faith always makes itself known. Jesus says "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Luke 6:45). Paul says the same thing with these words: "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved." (Rom. 10:10). The action of the Spirit of God working faith can not be silent but must speak. It must have an outlet in different ways or otherwise it dies. Christians do not put a light under the bowl, but rather let it shine for all who are in the house (Matt. 5:15).

So here faith has a visible surface. The Christian Church is not a hidden organisation that slips into the shadows and speaks secretly and obscurely about things that are understandable only to the initiates. It proclaims, testifies, and lives out its faith in words and deeds.

It is precisely through this visible and audible confession in both words and deeds that Christians can recognise each other and join together into a congregation or church, into an external fellowship of prayer and worship, diakonia⁵ and mission. Unlike God, we do not know much about another person's faith until they have opened their mouth and spoken about what they believe in. That's the only thing we have to go on when it comes to recognising a fellow Christian.

⁴ Apology, Article VII (IV), 5

⁵ Diakonia- Greek for "service".

Through the heart's faith in Christ, God recognises His children. Through the spoken confession, Christians recognise each other as God's children.

It is extremely important to carefully distinguish between these two things. The first is the domain of God, in which we must not in any way interfere. The second is our domain, which we should discern as we enter into church fellowship with other Christians. We can and must only go by what is visible and heard. Our human restrictions mean that our recognition of other Christians can be based only on the outward, on the confession they profess.

However, in all churches, including the most pure, there are hypocrites and nominal Christians, who have the confession of the mouth but not the faith of the heart. The true confession of Christ and His word can be imitated. Out of fostering and habit, one can carry a Christian confession and have a Christian lifestyle, even though the spiritual life has fallen away. But how it relates to this matter is not in our power to decide with certainty. And God explicitly forbids us to take over His responsibilities and try to separate such weeds from the wheat. This is something He himself must do on the last day (Matt. 13:24 ff.). We can see which maidens have lamps, but God alone sees which of them has oil in them (Matt. 25:1 ff.). Here, indeed, is the apostolic word: "Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God." (1 Cor. 4:5).

The confession is a confession to the Word of God. The visible unity of faith is always a unity in and around the Word. We see this clearly in the section regarding the apostles in John. 17. God's "name" - which is a synonym for God's Word - has been revealed to them, they have received the Word, they have understood that Jesus is from the Father, and they have come to faith (vv. 6-8). Later, Jesus prays for them: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (v. 17). Up to this point, Jesus Himself had personally guided and taught the apostles (v. 12). Now He would soon visibly leave them and return to the Father, and the unity of their faith would be preserved through the Word. They should be sanctified in the truth. "Sanctified" has both a positive and a negative aspect: they must be separated from evil and at the same time be separated for God, reserved for His account, for a life with and for Him.

Notice that Jesus here does not use an adjective and say that the Word is true. He uses a noun, which is the strongest way of expressing it: The word is the truth, as cast in a single piece, separated from all that is called lies. In this way, Jesus repeats what is often said in the Old Testament: "And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times" (Ps. 12:6) or "The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous." (Ps. 19:9).

The apostles are to be preserved in the world by the power of this word of truth, (v. 15). They have already experienced the world's resistance to the truth that claims to be absolute (v. 14). They have seen and learned from Jesus that the divine truth is uncompromising and always clashes with the world's concept of the truth, which is so aptly described in the Psalter with the words: "Not a word from their mouth can be trusted...with their tongues they tell lies." (Ps. 5:9). It was and is dangerous to confess the word of truth, but at the same time it is precisely through this word that one is sanctified and preserved.

The apostles received the truth and then they, led by the Holy Spirit, reliably communicated it to all Christians. Jesus prays for all "who will believe in me through their message" (v. 20). In doing so, he has also sanctioned the New Testament apostolic writings as God's infallible word.

Now it is true that everywhere in scripture Christians are very firmly exhorted and commanded to be one in the truth and confess one and the same faith and doctrine. The Apostle says: "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1:10). "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 15:5 f.). Likewise: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace...There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." (Eph. 4:1 ff.).

The visible fellowship between Christians must thus be based on a unified and consistent confession, on a "yes" to the Word of God given without

reservation. But this yes - and it must be emphasised - is not just a generalised yes to the Bible as God's word, but a yes to the content of scripture. "I believe in the Bible" may sound pious and good, but that is no real confession as long as I do not speak about *what* I believe the Bible teaches.

Christ, the Bible's "centre and star," teaches us the truth of God, of creation, of sin, of salvation, of the church, of baptism, of holy communion, and so on. The confession is our reaction to Christ's words and teaching. How have we understood His words? What do we say about His teaching? What we answer is our confession. Thus, the confession cannot consist solely of Bible quotes. It is always an interpretation of God's Word. When Jesus at one time asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15), it was their confession, their interpretation He wanted to hear. Peter's answer "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" was a great and wonderful confession, and Jesus praises him for the answer he has given. Peter's good confession is the "rock" on which Jesus promises to build His congregation (Matt. 16:18).

But the confession that is to be the basis of Christian fellowship with one another must not, as one has sometimes wishes to do, be limited to certain central and important points of study. Peter's strong confession of the Deity of Christ is at the same time a confession to everything Jesus taught and said. For it is impossible for He who is God to lie or come up with unessential trifles. The confession shall be in force for all of God's word, the whole doctrine of Christ. This is also evident from the great commission of Jesus: "Baptise them ... and teach them to keep all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). To deny or change the word of Christ at any one point is a sin, an attack on the Lord Himself.

Since confession is something that we humans say and do, it can be true or false, evil or good. It is a known but regrettable fact that the Word of God is interpreted differently and contradictory, but it is important that we remember here what Scripture itself says about this phenomenon. First, both Jesus and the apostles foretell that false teaching will come in and threaten the congregation (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29 f., 2 Tim. 4:3 f.). The devil shall not leave the church at peace. Second, the Lord presumes and expects us to recognise, from His Word, a false confession or doctrine and make us beware of it (Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17).

Contradictory opinions about Christian faith and Christian life are not due to Jesus being mystic or speaking ambiguously and with a double-meaning. The notion that the Bible is a dark and difficult to interpret book is something that most people today almost naturally seem to assume as fact. But "God is light" (1 John 1:5), and this light comes to us in the Word, which provides sufficient and clear information about the way of life. The psalmist says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and the light of my path" (Ps. 119:105). The word is "pure and enlightens the eyes" (Ps. 19:8). And Jesus promises: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31 f.). To say that Scripture is obscure, so that it cannot be expounded and interpreted correctly, is almost a blasphemy. It is to accuse God of being dark, of being cruel and maddening, playing blindfold with people, and that also in the most important matters of life.

When Scripture repeatedly claims its clarity, its comprehensibility for people, it does not allow for different interpretations of any point of teaching. The Bible's many exhortations to unity in faith and confession would also be completely meaningless if God's speech was diffuse.

Behind the distorted interpretation and exposition of the Word of God is usually something else: man's unwillingness to submit himself and his reason to what is written. Either he rejects the Word altogether, or he wants to adapt it to what he thinks is reasonable. He does not want to be converted to the God's word, but wants the word, so to speak, to convert to him. We humans have a distinct desire to listen to lies and be deceived. But it is something that since the fall to sin is implanted in us by the "father of lies" (John 8:44), who can never let the word of God be the word of God.

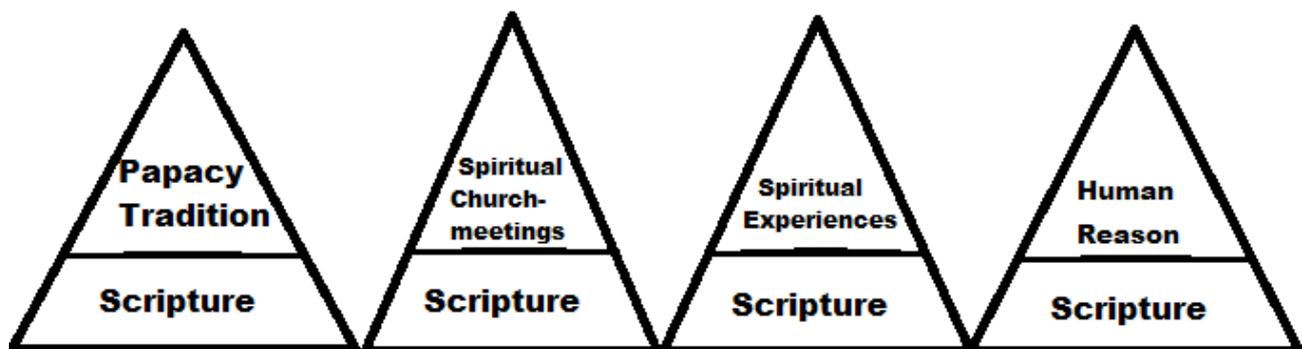
Few things upset the people of our time as much as when someone claims to know for sure what is right or wrong in the matters and questions of life, for it is said that nobody can have a monopoly on the truth. Anyone who claims such a thing must be sick or possessed of pride. And of course it can sometimes be the case. Yet, it is the task of the Christian Church to humbly, firmly and steadfastly claim: It is possible to distinguish between truth and falsehood! It is possible to determine what is true and false Christianity. It can be said that one interpretation is incorrect and that another is correct instead. There is an infallible yardstick, a standard that one can and should follow: God's pure and clear words. To give up this is

to give up all Christianity. It is to open the church's doors to a barrage of different interpretations and teachings. By Jesus' words: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" eventually nothing remains.

The confession must thus be proven by comparing it with what Scripture says. "If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God." (1 Pet. 4:11). But it is important that this test is done solely on the basis of the Word. Scripture alone, as the source and norm of everything that has to do with Christian faith, is a principle that the Lutheran Church has been particularly vigilant about. The Formula of Concord states:

"The Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule, and standard, according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned and judged, as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong."⁶

No other authority may be equated with or superior to the Word of God. "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6) is the rule given by the apostle. Among the churches, however, it appears that Scripture *and* some other measure is the highest standard. The following models provide examples of things that have been set over Scripture.



We must reject these annexations to Scripture as the basis for our confession. They all confess that Scripture is not sufficient and clear. If you change, supplement or reduce the Word of God through these additions, you override Scripture as the highest and only standard of the Church.

⁶ Epitome of the Formula of Concord, Introduction, 7. (Trig)

We have seen that nothing but a unified and written confession to all of the word of God may be the basis for the external, visible communion of Christians. Where this exists, we have a true faithful church according to God's will. Establishing, living in, and inviting others to such a church fellowship is without argument the highest calling of Christians on earth.

4. The unity of faith strives to join together with all who profess the same faith

Christian love always strives for fellowship with other Christians. It seeks fellow believers and rejoices when it finds them. It mourns the sin of division and longs to celebrate in divine service with as many people as possible "in the same confession, worship and faith," as we sing in a communion hymn. A true Christian is ecumenically minded. On this matter there is no question.

It is mainly regarding the question of how to go about achieving true church fellowship with others that we come into sharp conflict with modern ecumenism.

Aspirations of unity have existed as long as Christianity has been divided - which it has been from the beginning. But in the past, the chief principle was this: first doctrinal talks to ascertain or obtain unity in the faith, *then church fellowship* in the form of joint services, shared communion tables, and exchanges in the pulpit. That this has been the chief ecumenical principle of the historical churches from the ancient church up to our century cannot be denied.

It was very strictly observed that church fellowship was the same as doctrinal fellowship, especially in the ancient church. Even deeply erroneous churches had religious fellowship only with those who professed the same doctrine.

This principle is not in any way remarkable. All realise that real unity must be based on common beliefs and values. In line with this, both Jesus and Scripture teach that church fellowship should be based on doctrinal fellowship, on unity in confession.

However, modern ecumenism has rejected both the natural and the biblical

rules of church fellowship. These, they say, represent serious obstacles on the way to the great church of the future, where all are gathered under a single roof. Therefore, the inverse principle has been chosen: fellowship and unity first, and eventually, hopefully, unity in faith. What is different is trivial in comparison to everything that unites and must not stand in the way of an ecumenical merger.

The result of this kind of ecumenism has been devastating. The developing direction has not gone towards greater agreement in the interpretation of the Bible. On the contrary, it is easy to conclude that less and less of what Scripture teaches is the ground of what constitutes unity. What one often seems most anxious to stress is that the Bible must not be interpreted literally. What is agreed upon is that it is not the actual word of God. The outer, apparent unity is more important than the truth. Therefore, Scripture has been sacrificed. Typically, one always quotes v. 21, "that they should all be one," but rarely or never v. 17, "sanctify them in truth; your word is truth". As a natural consequence of this, doctrinal freedom in the churches has become greater and greater. There will soon be no limits to what can be offered in the name of God in the churches of modern ecumenists. For some this illusion even includes the truly great churches of the world in fellowship with strange religions, which one no longer wishes to label idolatry, but merely regards as other forms of the revelation of god.

All manifestations of Christian unity without the unity of doctrine on the basis of the Bible are in direct disobedience to Jesus and his word, not least of all in John 17.

In this context, we can agree with a well-known Catholic theologian's statement about the annual so-called ecumenical prayer week: "They pat each other on the shoulder and pretend it is raining. No one should talk about difficult doctrinal questions. No, you should close your eyes and be silent about everything that is divisive". And about today's church leaders, he adds: "I shudder every time I hear one of them bark: We are one!" (Jean Paillard, SvD, 12/2 1983).⁷

The path to genuine church fellowship between separated Christians always goes through thorough and patient doctrinal conversations around that which separates, and that which does not. If one then succeeds,

⁷ SvD- Svenska Dagbladet, a Swedish daily newspaper.

through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in arriving at common faith and confession regarding what the Bible really teaches, then a true and genuine unity has been achieved. Only then can one establish a God-blessed church fellowship, and together "worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). If, on the contrary, you are unsuccessful, it is certainly God's will that for now you belong to different churches. Common honesty and respect for the beliefs of others also requires it.

We should be eager to pursue true ecumenism. But at the same time, we must be realistic and on our guard when the basic prerequisite for meaningful discussion is lacking.

Luther has said at some point that he was willing to dispute with anyone who confessed that the Evangelists wrote the Word of God, but that he did not intend to exchange so much as a word with those who denied this fact.

In ecumenical contexts, such an attitude is well thought out - especially in our day, when churches often question the inspiration of the Scriptures and divine authority. There is no need to place oneself in doctrinal conversation with those who deny that the Bible is the word of God in the true sense; there is no common source and norm to go by. For these one can only preach and pray.

One of the reasons for the strong growth of the ecumenical movement is without question the altered view of the Bible. The ecumenical tidal wave would never have swept over Christianity as it did if it had not the help of so-called liberal theology and biblical criticism at the beginning of our century.⁸ When one begins to see the Bible as a flawed, human document, contradictory and without uniform doctrine, ecumenism becomes easy. All the differences then fade away. At that point biblical truth is no longer worth fighting for. At that point one also does not understand the unity of faith and the struggle of faith.

But *true* ecumenism is always based on that statement "your word is truth." It does not seek fellowship with error and idolatry, but seeks unity on the basis of Scripture.

⁸ Here Ps. Bergman speaks of the 20th century.

5. The unity of faith separates itself from those who profess a different belief

This is the negative side of Scripture's requirement that church fellowship and doctrinal -or confessional- fellowship should coincide.

It is completely wrong to interpret Jesus' prayer that "they should all be one," as if He demands or expects all Christians, regardless of their doctrine, to belong to one and the same church fellowship. Most of all, He sees it as a condition for the growth and survival of the Christian Church on earth.

Jesus knew there would be division. He knew that false Messianic figures would arise (Matt. 24:23 etc). He realistically expected that people of differing faiths would seek to assert themselves within the church, and he saw it as a great danger. Therefore, he says: "'Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.'"(Matt. 7:15). We find the same attitude with the apostles. When Paul departed from the priests of Ephesus, he forewarned them that the congregation would not to be spared from division: "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. "(Acts 20:29 ff).

Historically, too, the Christian Church has never been a unified movement. Those who wax lyrically about the "One Church" during the first centuries cannot do so in the light of historical facts. Already even during the apostles' lifetime, factions began to arise (1 Cor. 11:19). In Galatia, there appeared false brethren that caused confusion in the congregations by proclaiming "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9). After the death of the apostles, we soon find a variety of churches with varying confessions. There were, for example, Gnostic, Montanist, Aryan and Novatian churches, churches that were for female priests and churches with opposite views.⁹ A Gnostic church that was widely spread in the 100s was founded by Marcion. He

⁹ Ps. Bergman wrote this in 1982 at a time when many of his contemporary scholars contended that some in the early church had ordained women to the priesthood. This is of course disputed to this day and still there has been found no historical or Biblical evidence at all that orthodox Christians had women priests in the early church. In fact, there is little evidence that even heterodox or heretical sects had women priests. The modernists make the assertion for female priests based largely on a conflation of the ordained ministry with the lay ministry in the early church with scant historical data. Ps Bergman is here mentioning this to address his contemporaries. He always upheld the orthodox position of an all-male ordained ministry (TLH)

argued that there was a great difference between the cruelty and the strictness of the Old Testament God and the New Testament God of perfect love and therefore rejected the entire Old Testament. Of the New Testament, he kept only the gospel of Luke and ten letters from Paul.

The overview of the various churches and confessions that we find in the first centuries is not so different from the present day. The difference is mainly that representatives of various confessions did not worship and celebrate communion together back then. Yet, this is done today.

The whole of Jesus' high priestly intercession, in which He so earnestly prays for unity, has its background in the certainty of the coming schism and the falling away from the word of truth. It would be found that there would be a true unity and fellowship and a false one, or in other words: two kinds of churches.

A church that together with the truth *also* confesses and teaches what is contrary to the word is a false church. On the other hand a church which unanimously confesses and teaches only what Jesus teaches is a true church. There are many who respond very strongly to such a "simple black and white division". But Jesus' prayer for unity on the basis of truth and the many clear warnings of Scripture about deviating from the Word leave us no other alternative.

The treacherous thing about the false church is that it is always in some way based on Scripture. It has "sheep's clothing", ie. it speaks with the Bible in hand and in the name of God. However misleading it is, it still holds to at least some biblical truth. When the Bible is not cited, it is no longer a question of being a false church. It is then about being pure heathenism.

Satan never leaves the Church of God in peace. We cannot, therefore, avoid being confronted by preachers who in some respect or another confess and promote opinions contrary to the word.

What instructions do Jesus and the New Testament give us in that situation?

The answer is unambiguous and clear: Beware, do not join them and have

no worship with those who confess something that is contrary to Scripture!

This has also proven to be the Christian position from the beginning. In the language of theologians, the phrase was eventually formulated: *Nulla communicatio in sacris cum haereticis aut schismaticis* - No communion in sacred things with heretics or schismatics!

For many contemporary Christians, brought up in ecumenism and tolerance, this rejectionist attitude is almost inconceivable. Nevertheless, its biblical basis is overwhelming. A long line of words in the New Testament forbid us to have spiritual and church fellowship with those who believe and teach differently, e.g. Mat. 7:15, Rom. 16:17, 1 Tim. 6:3 etc, Titus 3:10, 2 Cor. 6:14-18, 2 John 9-11.

None of these passages are about dragging people away in ordinary social and social contexts. It is a question of church and religious separation. Here we can also think about what Jesus says in John. 17:15 "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."

Since Scripture clearly and unequivocally teaches that unity in doctrine and confession should be the basis of the Christian's outward fellowship, the many and strict prohibitions of fellowship with different faiths constitute only a natural consequence of this. They only show how much importance God places on this matter, and how eager He is that we follow his commandments.

The powerful warnings about fellowship with false prophets and with those who follow them impacts on all forms of church fellowship. These warnings mean that we must not belong to the same church fellowship as them, that we do not sing and pray with them in worship services, do not support them with offerings, and above all, we cannot celebrate communion, the sacred sacrament of unity, with them. Through all such, we would participate in the evil deeds of the villain — or, as the Apostle John also puts it: We “greet him” (2 John v.11)¹⁰, ie. we show both in word and in deed that we tolerate his error in the church.

The sin into which we are drawn and become involved in by practising

¹⁰ 2 John 11 - “for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.”

forbidden church fellowship is actually a sin against the Second Commandment: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." About this commandment Luther says in the Large Catechism:

"But, the greatest abuse occurs in spiritual matters, which pertain to the conscience, when false preachers rise up and offer their lying vanities as God's Word." (SKB, p. 397)¹¹

He also characterises the abuse of God's name as "the most grievous sin that can outwardly be done". To twist and distort God's holy and salvific word is the worst thing men can do.

Many - even among those who want to be faithful to the Bible and the orthodox confession - have found it difficult to reconcile themselves to Scripture's exclusive line on the question of church fellowship. One is fearful of the practical consequences, for the risk of becoming an isolated group, or for being considered an elitist self-righteous church.

A common way to try to come to terms with Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: "Beware of false prophets!" (Matt. 7:15) or for apostolic words like "Mark...and avoid them!" (Rom. 16:17), "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord." (2 Cor. 6:17) and "flee these things" (1 Tim. 6:11) has been to not interpret them as something that requires external action, but as something that only requires an inner, spiritual distance. Thus, one would no longer have to worry about severing any existing church fellowship over false doctrine.

However this way of reading Scripture is very hazardous. One can thereby easily and conveniently free oneself of everything in the word of God that feels difficult to follow. But instead of this, *all* obedience to God encompasses both the inner and the outer, both body and soul. It is impossible to follow Jesus "in the heart" and deny him with one's deeds. The Apostle Paul urges Christians to present their "members as slaves to righteousness"(Rom. 6:19) and to fulfil their "spiritual worship" by presenting their "bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God"(Rom. 12:1).

"Beware of" "Keep away" and "Go out from among them" can not

¹¹ Trig., Large Catechism, Second Commandment, 54.

possibly mean "greet them as brothers in worship" or "celebrate the Eucharist with them." Nothing but a complete breaking of external church fellowship, a physical removal of oneself from the false church, can harmonise with these, and similar, words of the Bible.

Membership in a church fellowship is always a confession. Many people do not want to see it this way, but rather believe that what one thinks and believes inwardly is decisive. But a confession, as we have seen above, is an external, visible thing. With my membership, I objectively and outwardly confess to the doctrine- or lack of doctrine - of the church to which I belong. A Catholic is rightly regarded as one who believes in the Papacy, a Baptist as one who rejects infant baptism, etc.

Admittedly I can protest, distance myself from the errors in my church, align with like-minded people in intra-church resistance organisations, or simply drag myself away to a corner where I may as much as possible exist in peace. But it does not matter much in this context. With my membership and my church tax,¹² I support those who deny the words of Christ. Membership is always participation, no matter how you twist and turn it around.

Being a Bible believing and confessing Christian in an obviously false church is an impossibility.

But what then should we say about the church fellowship of Jesus and his disciples with the Jewish Church? Even if there are no explicit examples of the practice of prayer and worship with their spiritual enemies, one may gladly point out that Jesus and the disciples did not leave the Jewish church, but visited both synagogue and temple.

The mistake one makes here is to equate the Jewish national church with the Christian church. Jesus was primarily sent to the chosen people of Israel. Their society was entirely regulated religiously by the law of Moses. Church and state were one. In principle, it was not possible to be a Jew without belonging to the Jewish church. And according to the scriptures it was precisely to the Jews that Jesus would come. From among

¹² Up until 1996 people born to members of the Church of Sweden automatically became members of that church themselves. Since that time one must now apply for membership. Members of that church pay a "church tax" to the government which is used to finance the church's activities both locally and also elsewhere in Sweden and abroad. While Lutheran free churches and others in Sweden do not require a tax or receive assistance from the government, the principle regarding the financial support of one's church is the same. (TLH)

them, the Messiah would be born, placed under the law, and become "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He alone would complete what was taught over the centuries from the sacred scrolls of the synagogue, and what was exemplified by the sacrifices and ceremonies of the temple. If Jesus had left the Jewish Church, He would have failed his mission.

But, in contrast to the Jewish Church, the Christian Church is not a divinely ordained order which is bound to a particular people and country with a central sanctuary. The church is a world-wide spiritual kingdom, found everywhere where people gather around the Word and the sacraments. Israel as a special divine state ceased to exist with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, which Jesus Himself very clearly predicted (Luke 19:41 etc.). This punishment for the unbelief of the people became the definitive end point of the old order. The new people of God are no longer bound in any way to the Temple of Jerusalem. It is no more. Jesus also pointed toward this in His conversation with the Samaritan woman at Sychar's well: "Believe me, there will come a time when you will neither worship on this mountain nor in Jerusalem ... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth"(John 4:21, 23).

Thus we cannot, in defence of fellowship with false doctrine, refer to the special and national order which Jewish Christians lived under, which, while transitional, still existed in the time of Jesus and the apostles. For the Christian Church valid and unabridged worship in spirit and truth cannot occur in union with error.

It is mainly on two occasions that it becomes relevant to apply biblical separation. If we belong to a true, faithful church, and false doctrine is intruding, then we must separate ourselves from it through doctrinal discipline and by excluding from the church community those who do not want to cease from their contrary biblical views. The second case is when we already belong to a false church - perhaps from our childhood - but over time through God's grace and God's Word have come to realise that the actual confession of our church, e.g. in the form of preaching and ecclesiastical declarations, is not compatible with the Word of God. Then we must leave this church.

From the days of the ancient church, separations, withdrawals and sometimes even migrations have been the way of many Christians were compelled to save their souls when the spirit of antichrist and deception had taken its seat and ruled in the church. The people of the Reformation in the 16th century were also compelled to break with the church of their fathers. When defending their divorce from the great Church of Rome they said, referring to Matt. 7:15 and 2 Cor. 6:14:

“It is a grave matter wanting to separate one’s self from so many lands and nations, and to profess a separate doctrine; but here stands God’s command, that every one should beware and not agree with those who maintain false doctrine, or who think of supporting it by means of cruelty”¹³

Notice the reason stated: "here stands God's command ...". If it was not for a clear command of God we could have made an effort to find different ways to survive and operate in a heretical community. Then, perhaps, like the priest who in an article firmly rejects the idea of leaving an apostate church, we could speculate and ask ourselves: "When in church history has it been found that a separation has been fruitful?" (Sw. Pastoral Journal, 1982 p. 275). Here it is not a matter of such calculated human judgements and considerations but about following what God in His word bids us to do, believing that it is always good and blessed.

There is no easy way. But who has promised that it will always be easy to be a Christian? Some fanciful charismatic movements seem to teach this, but not the Lord Jesus Christ. It is significant that immediately before His words that speak of departing from false prophets, He talks about the conditions of the Christian life being the narrow gate and the narrow way "that leads to life" and that "those who find it are few." It is much quieter and more comfortable on the broad road of tolerance, in fellowship with the majority in the greater community, but the road leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13 f.).

The narrow way, on the other hand, must not be made narrower than the Lord intended. This means, in this context, that nothing but a clearly proven false doctrine must be Church divisive. Not everything that looks like a doctrinal difference is necessarily so. You can sometimes mean the

13 Trig. Solid Declaration, X, 23

same thing although you are using different expressions. Here, the church must always be on guard against carnal fault-finding and impetuosity, which without calm and objective investigation are quick to pass judgements and put the “heretic stamp” on others.

In a true Church fellowship there can be different opinions about things that God has given the Church the freedom to arrange in the best way according to circumstance, such as liturgy, church rites and customs etc. Priests in an orthodox, faithful church can sometimes also have different interpretations of individual Bible passages yet still do so without disagreeing on any point of doctrine.

But there are a thousand and one opportunities to divide the church on the basis of evil, selfish, vengeful and power-hungry motives. The apostle John cites Diotrephes as a dissuasive example, a priest who wanted to attain a position of power and who engaged in slanderous and unpleasant attempts to expel good Christians from the congregation (3 John v.9 f.). When that happens, we face the ever-sinful schism, inspired and abetted by Satan himself.

Yet it is quite another thing when God commands us to separate ourselves from false doctrine and to have no fellowship with it. Such is a necessary, sacred and good separation.

6. Through the unity of faith, God wills to preserve the Church from evil

Behind God's strict requirements for unity and purity of doctrine lies God's love. He is endlessly caring for His church. This is also reflected in Jesus' high priestly intercession. Jesus, who Himself watched over the disciples so that "not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction" now prays with intense love: "Holy Father, keep them in your name ... keep them from the evil one. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:11-17).

There is no doubt that both Jesus and Scripture see false teaching as something extremely evil and dangerous to the Church. All of Israel's history shows what terrible calamities struck the people as they listened to false prophets, fell away into syncretism, and soon desired to serve both

God and Baal. The New Testament also strongly warns against intermixing truth with false doctrine. Jesus likens it to leaven (Matt. 16: 6, 12). The error that is mixed with the truth like yeast mixed in flour is no idle matter. Even in small quantities it ferments and spreads in all directions. The apostle Paul warns that "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." (Gal. 5: 9). He points out the same danger when he urges Timothy to beware of those who taught incorrectly about the resurrection: "Their teaching will spread like gangrene." (2 Tim. 2: 16-18). False doctrine is a deadly threat like cancer which must be averted at an early stage.

The usual way the error advances has been aptly described as a process with three stages: tolerance, equality and dominance. First, it humbly asks to be tolerated only as an innocent novelty or interpretation which does not touch on anything central to the Christian faith. When it has grown a little stronger, it demands equality and asks to exist as equal to other teachings in the church. Finally, it claims dominance: biblical doctrine must not be presented and, above all, not practised. The implementation of reforms for women's clergy in our country has followed this pattern quite clearly.

There are, of course, greater or lesser false churches. Whether or not it is a very erroneous church or one that may on some point deviate from the truth is irrelevant. Either way it means spiritual danger to abide in a false church. You deceive yourself if you think you can do it without being affected. Occasionally we read in articles or interviews where previously relatively faithful confessing theologians describe how, after struggle and agony, they were gradually delivered from "constraints" and drawn into abandoning their belief in narrow dogmas and defined statements. Instead, they have now come to a so-called liberating insight of new ways for the Church. When that happens to priests and theologians, what then happens afterward to the church people who listen to them?

No Christian - whether preacher or layman - should expose himself to the danger of seduction by belonging to a church that is not governed by God's Word alone. What then should they do? They should seek to find where they can fully exercise all the rights of God's children. They have the right to hear and rejoice in the clear and unadulterated Word of God every time they visit their church. They have the right, in one and the same faith, to kneel at the Lord's table and receive Christ's true body and blood for the remission of sins. They have the right to be preserved in Jesus Christ by

the Holy Spirit, in the fullness and richness of faith. The sheep of the good shepherd's flock are entitled to his shepherding care, the one based on the words of truth. They will listen to His voice, "A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." (John 10:5).

For a Christian who wants to be preserved in the unity of faith, there are really only two alternatives. Either one may seek a church where the Word of God is preached in a pure and clear way and where the sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ, or if such a church were not to be found in the land, one should go out and under prayer begin the work of establishing it. That's what God calls us to. And in doing so, there is a reason to remember Jesus' promise to the very smallest congregation: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matt. 18:20).

But can one then be preserved unto salvation even in churches that are less scrupulous with doctrine? We have previously shown that *Una Sancta*, the invisible church that only God sees, is not limited to a particular community, not even to a purely orthodox one. It is everywhere where there is enough of God's Word remaining in order that people can come to faith. It would be gross error to claim anything else. The fact that there are Christians in communities with different beliefs is stated in the Lutheran confessional writings with all desirable clarity, evident from the following quote:

“For we have no doubt whatever that even in those churches which have hitherto not agreed with us in all things many godly and by no means wicked men are found who follow their own simplicity and do not understand aright the matter itself... We are also in great hope that, if they would be taught aright concerning all these things, the Spirit of the Lord aiding them, they would agree with us, and with our churches and schools, to the infallible truth of God’s Word.”¹⁴

God is indeed mighty to preserve Christians unto salvation even in erroneous churches. However, it must not be taken as an excuse for remaining in such a church. Knowing what God commands - being taught and "rightly understanding the matter" - and yet not doing as He says is a

14 Preface to the Book of Concord, Trig. p. 15

sin that removes us from grace, just like all other conscious sins that we do not want to forsake. God does not preserve those who against better knowledge act against His word. On the other hand, He makes many glorious promises to faithful Christians who are driven on to sanctification by the Holy Spirit, to escape evil and seek the good according to God's instructions. As it is said in 2 Cor. 6:17ff:

“Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

7. God wants the Church to witness to the world through the unity of faith,

In His prayer, Jesus prays that the Christians will be one "so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). The Church is not present here for Himself, but for the world, for the ungodly and unconverted people, of whom it is said: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16). The reason that God keeps His Church on earth is to carry this saving love to the world. It has been given the great commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," (Matt. 28:19).

The unity of faith is of great importance to all missionary activities. A church that is to properly witness to the world must have a unified and biblical confession. With the Augsburg confession, we should boldly say: "Our churches teach with common consent ...".¹⁵ The world has the right to hear clearly and distinctly what God says in His Word about the path of salvation.

But modern ecumenism advocates merging and collaboration between different churches without the existence of any doctrinal unity. They say one must disregard such things and walk together just for the sake of the mission - "for the world to believe." But this form of ecumenism is, in fact, doing the world a great disservice: the world's people are gradually deprived of the Word of God that can lead them to a true conversion and saving faith in Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ Augsburg Confession, Art I,1

The first person who began to earnestly tread this path was the pious Count Zinzendorf, the founder of Herrnhutism in the 18th century. He led missions to the heathens, for which he had a passionate interest, which then became an excuse for ecumenical cooperation. The idea of bringing a divided Christendom to the heathen troubled him, making him prone to smoothing out certain doctrinal differences. In his ecumenical endeavours he certainly had no idea what consequences the thinning and diluting of Christian doctrine would lead to in the long run.

Today, the doctrinally mixed ecumenical church has made itself fundamentally incapable of following the great commission to "teach them to keep all that I have commanded you". For how can one do it when agreement on what Jesus teaches is neither present nor sought after?

Not least for the sake of the mission it is important to assert the unity of faith and flee from all fellowship with false doctrine. We must not fall into the temptation to pit the missionary motive against the doctrine of church fellowship. Some would like to defend remaining in an manifestly erroneous church by pointing to the rich missionary opportunities there. So, for example, the large folk churches have a certain reputation and position in society.¹⁶ They have beautiful church halls, state support and broad areas of contact, etc. It is obvious that many more can be reached by the gospel there than in small minority churches.

But no matter how true this is, Scripture does not allow us anywhere to belong to false churches to be able to carry out missions in them. No exception is given under the principle "the end justifies the means".

The fact that the Lord of the Mission wins souls in deeply erroneous churches is something we should rejoice in. But we must remember that He does not do that for us to go over to them. Instead, we must testify to them whenever possible, and invite them to the church where members are not confused and seduced by obscure and contradictory messages from shepherds and spiritual guides who do not feel bound by Scripture.

Such a mission can be pursued - and is morally defensible - only from a position outside the fellowship of the false teaching church.

¹⁶ "Folk Churches" refers to the national, or State churches.

8. The struggle for the unity of faith does not end until glory

At the end of his high priestly intercession, Jesus looks forward with deep desire for the time when the Christians have reached their goal and their faith is transformed into sight: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory" (John 17:24).

It is sometimes said that Christians, who after all think of going to the same heaven, should be able to spend time in the same church on earth and disregard their doctrinal differences. They all believe in the same God! However, it is not that simple. In heaven there are no different denominations and no different opinions. There are only former Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, etc. who have been saved by grace alone for the sake of Christ, and who now live in perfect, blissful and visible unity in all respects. But here on earth there are differing opinions about God and what He says in His word. When one says that God teaches this or that, and the other claims the opposite, then it is obviously not really the same belief in God.¹⁷ Both Jesus and his apostles have given us clear instruction on how we should behave in this situation, as we have seen above.

As long as the earth stands and Satan and sin are working together, there will be different faiths. Therefore, the true church must always be the militant church, which in faithfulness to the Word fights "for the faith once and for all has been given to the saints" (Jude. 3). To give up that struggle is, in fact, to give up the Holy Gospel, the good message of grace and justification from God through Jesus Christ, the only one who can populate heaven with saved sinners.

Orthodox churches according to God's will are not something found in every country and time. They can arise and they can also disappear when one no longer is prepared to fight the good fight of faith. But one thing is certain: God wants churches with the unity of faith to be among us, in our country, and in our day. Therefore, He calls us regarding the question of Church fellowship not only to be the hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word as well.

It is an extraordinarily great, important, and glorious task to join with and

¹⁷ Or not really the same God one believes in (TLH)

fight for the Church of God on earth, and to invite others to the Church, the Noah's Ark of our time. But at the same time, we must be clear that it is not a particularly honourable struggle in other people's eyes. The true church has rarely been heard in the established, widely recognised churches, but has found itself referred to as among the group of ignorant, narrow-minded and misguided sects. But we should not let ourselves be discouraged about this. Such belongs to the conditions of the Christian life, to crucifixion in the imitation of Christ, to the sufferings and struggles here in the world, which will continue until the Lord comes again for His Church in glory.

We pray in the Our Father that God's name be sanctified.¹⁸ This is in fact a prayer about the unity of faith on earth. Luther asks in the Small Catechism:

"How is God's name kept holy?"

Answer: "When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God also lead holy lives in accordance with it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven. But he that teaches and lives otherwise than God's Word teaches profanes the name of God among us. From this preserve us, Heavenly Father."

Today we need to constantly pray the Our Father. Only in glory, when Jesus' high priestly intercession is fully fulfilled, will it be replaced with other prayers and songs of praise.

Staffan Bergman

¹⁸ The words "hallowed be Thy name" in the Lord's Prayer. To hallow means to sanctify, make holy. (TLH)

