

Love is the beginning of heaven on earth: it is given with and by the Spirit who is the down-payment of our inheritance (Rom. 15:30; Eph. 1:14); that Spirit is the Spirit of *agape*; and it never faileth (1 Cor. 13:8). But it is the beginning only, and we must therefore in the Church on earth “forbear one another in love;” we must endure, put up with, must learn to “stand” our friends and brethren. The difficulty of that task can be measured by the manifold cleverness of the dodges by which we avoid it; there is in all of us, whether we care to admit it or not, something of the cynicism which inspired Cosimo di Medici’s remark: “You shall read... that we are commanded to forgive our enemies; but you never read that we are commanded to forgive our friends.” For we Christians, we new men with the old man ever whispering bland and Satan’s suggestions in our ears, are “never *only* a help, an assistance, and a delight for one another; we are also a burden, a hindrance, and a temptation for one another. Therefore communion, fellowship, is a constant labor which overcomes evil with the power of enduring and forgiving.” (Schlatter, *ibid.*)

The hard realism of this last admonition—“*forbearing* one another in love”—makes it very plain that we here have to do, not with ripe and aromatic sentiments which pious ladies of either sex may sigh over, but with the down-to-earth and difficult business of living and working together in the Church on earth, into which the hosts of Satan continually and ominously intrude. Every synod that has entered the Synodical Conference has brought in with it a collection of very active young devils wholly intent on destroying the Synodical Conference; very clever young devils they are, too, and remarkably pious, who teach Missouri to repent of Wisconsin’s sins and Wisconsin to repent of Missouri’s. (I confine myself to these two synods only because I have been a member of both and know this much of the satanic dodge from my own experience.) Let us renounce these devils and all their works and stubbornly draw the line that should run from the New Testament to ourselves till it *touches* us, and ask ourselves the question that will lead each one of us to repent of his own sins.

To begin at home: I know a tall, thin man with horn-rimmed glasses who taught Greek at a Wisconsin Synod school for ten years; forty-five miles away was a Missouri Synod school. In it were some other men with horn-rimmed glasses also teaching Greek. But our fine, tall, thin man never met them until he accepted a call into the Missouri Synod. In fact, about all he knew about the other school was that it had an annoyingly good basketball

team. What right had that young man to go to Synodical Conference meetings and say, “Ja, wir sind Brueder”? Was he his brother’s slave, existing for him, forbearing him, loving him? How will he answer when God asks him, “Where is thy brother?”

And what of our pious zeal to beat each other to promising mission fields, what about all those intersynodical maneuvers that were so correct by the book without being right? Who was sowing the most seed on those disputed corners? What has been our attitude toward the Synodical Conference as an organization? Have we viewed it as a place where, or a means whereby, we could serve one another, exist *for* one another, help and sustain and, of course, forbear one another? Or have we been more concerned with the “rights” which our conveniently loose constitution guarantees us? One might even ask: Does not that constitution in a sense indict us? Ought we not to have grown closer together than this in our eighty common years? Have we, each of us, valued our “independence,” our “history,” our “tradition,” more highly than the oneness of the Spirit? What has happened to us? Our tragedy is not, at bottom, the fact that we have “differences”; the tragedy is that when we meet to discuss and remove our differences, our words fall in a hard and brittle atmosphere, in an air so tense and charged that no one speaks freely any more. It will not do for us to ask, “Whose fault is it?” We must each of us ask, “What is *my* share in the fault?” For if your experience is like mine, we shall find that in this one field, this field of nettles, we have achieved a remarkable degree of co-operation.

Martin Hans Franzmann, “The Forgiveness of Sin and the Unity of the Spirit,” in *Proceedings of the Forty-Second Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America*, 1952, 39-40.