

Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently

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Easter 1990
Revised Edition, October 1990

A Translation of *Thesen über Abendmahlsgemeinschaft mit Andersglaubigen*

An Essay Delivered at the 1870 Convention of the Western District
of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States

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“Please feel free to make the Walther essay available in PDF format. No charge is necessary. I will be happy to consider the translation a small contribution to the beleaguered cause of confessional Lutheranism.”

The pagination is retained from the print edition for consistency in citations past and future.

8 May 2009; corrected 23 May 2009, with special thanks to the Rev. Frederick Davison, as well as to the translator, who corrected an error that had crept into the October 1990 edition; corrected 15 July 2009, with special thanks to the Rev. Les Lanier, and to the translator for his assistance and permission regarding the noted portion of p. 44.

Translator's Preface

In his classic *The Two Natures in Christ*, Martin Chemnitz compares his theological relationship with the fathers of the early church to that of a pygmy standing on the shoulders of a giant. This admirable sense, of humility and historical perspective is a quality often lacking among theologians of our day. All too often we reverse the image and think of ourselves as theological giants who understand theology more fully and interpret the Bible more correctly than anyone who has come before. I am hopeful that Dr. Walther's essay on the question of communion fellowship will help to dispel this dangerous delusion. Contemporary discussions of this issue seldom get past the point of semantic wrangling over terminology ("close" vs. "closed", etc.). Walther, on the other hand, penetrates directly to the heart of the matter. Beginning with the biblical doctrine of the church he argues decisively that communion fellowship without agreement in doctrine is contrary to a scriptural understanding of the Sacrament and totally inconsistent with the historic practice of the Lutheran Church.

A bit of historical background will be helpful in understanding the approach and the emphasis of the essay. In 1866 the Pennsylvania Ministerium severed its connections with the General Synod and issued a call to all Lutheran Synods in the United States and Canada, "which confessed the Unaltered Augsburg Confession", to unite for the purpose of forming a union of Lutheran Synods. Thirteen bodies, including the Missouri Synod, reacted favorably to the summons. The constituting convention of this new group, called the General Council, was held in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1867. At this time the Missouri Synod, along with the Ohio and Iowa Synods, declined to join the new body because they did not believe that theological unanimity had been reached among the constituent synods. Shortly thereafter the Ohio Synod requested a position paper from the General Council on four specific theological points. They included: 1) chiliasm, 2) altar fellowship, 3) pulpit fellowship, and 4) secret societies. These issues became known as "the Four Points" and continued to generate a considerable amount of discussion among conservative Lutherans for many years. After much discussion and dissension within the General Council, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota synods, the so-called "Akron Rule", stating the Council's position on altar and pulpit fellowship, was adopted in 1872. The rule states:

The rule is: Lutheran pulpits are for Lutheran ministers only. Lutheran altars are for Lutheran communicants only. The exceptions to the rule belong to the sphere of privilege, not of right. The determination of the exceptions is to be made in consonance with these principles, by the conscientious judgment of pastors, as the cases arise."¹

While this position expressed the conviction of the majority of the Council and its able leader Charles Porterfield Krauth, and was reaffirmed as the "Galesburg Rule" in 1875, it was never consistently supported by all of the constituent synods. In 1877 Krauth prepared a series of 105 theses to explain and defend this principle, but even that did not settle the argument. Nelson describes the situation which prevailed in the General Council as follows:

Thus, while the General Council's practice regarding pulpit and altar fellowship was tighter than that of the General Synod, there was internal disagreement regard-

1 Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, p. 237.

ing the issue, with the result that the Galesburg Rule was interpreted and applied strictly by some and loosely by others. Uniformity could not be expected under such circumstances, particularly since the General Council's approach was educational and persuasive rather than disciplinary.²

It is in the context of this ongoing controversy that Dr. Walther's essay must be understood. The more liberal faction within the Council was highly critical of the Missouri Synod's practice on altar fellowship. This criticism was no doubt heightened by the fact that many of the more conservative Midwestern synods which left the General Council went on to join the Synodical Conference in which Missouri played a dominant role. The "Church Council", to which Walther refers repeatedly in the essay, is in fact the General Council, and the positions and practices criticized in the essay are those which were tolerated by some within the General Council.

While this translation lacks the "roll and thunder" of Walther's German it is a conscientious attempt to convey the sense of the original in contemporary idiom. Where this goal has not been fully accomplished the translator begs your indulgence.

L. White

² Ibid., p. 312.

Theses on Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently

THESIS I

The true visible church in an absolute sense, or part of the same, is that church in which the Word of God is preached purely and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution.

THESIS II

A Fellowship in which the Word of God is fundamentally denied, or in which a fundamental denial of the Word of God is tolerated, is not a true orthodox church, but a false heterodox church or sect.

THESIS III

Every man is obligated to recognize the true visible church, and, if he has the opportunity to join it.

THESIS IV

Every man is obligated to avoid heterodox churches, and in the event that he has belonged to a heterodox church, his obligation is to renounce it and separate himself from it.

THESIS V

True Christians are also found in heterodox fellowships as a result of their lack of knowledge.

THESIS VI

Those who are aware of the partial apostasy of the church fellowship to which they belong and yet continue to remain within that fellowship are not to be considered among the weak but are either the lukewarm whom the Lord will spit out of his mouth or Epicurean religious sceptics who within their hearts would ask with Pilate, "What is truth?"

THESIS VII

The main purpose of the Holy Sacrament is to be a tool and a means through which the promises of grace are offered, communicated, and appropriated, as with a seal, guarantee, and pledge through which these promises are confirmed. However, within this major purpose, as a secondary goal, the Sacrament is to be a distinguishing sign of confession and a bond of fellowship in worship. Therefore Communion fellowship is Church fellowship.

THESIS VIII

Holy Communion was not instituted to make people Christians. It was instituted to strengthen the faith of those who already are true Christians. Therefore Communion should be administered to no one who has been revealed as a false Christian.

THESIS IX

In Holy Communion the Body and Blood of Christ is actually present, distributed and received by every communicant. Therefore Communion can not be administered to anyone who does not confess a belief in this mystery without grievous sin.

THESIS X

Holy Communion is a mark of confession of Faith and Doctrine among those who cele-

brate together. Therefore the admission of members of heterodox fellowships to the celebration of communion within the Lutheran Church is in conflict with:

1. Christ's institution;
2. The commanded unity of the church in faith and accordingly in confession;
3. Our love for those to whom the Sacrament is administered;
4. Our love for our own fellow believers, especially the weak who by this action would be given serious offense.
5. The command not to become participants in the sin and error of others.

THESIS XI

We do not place members of heterodox fellowships under excommunication or declare them to be heretics or damned by our refusal to allow them to participate in the celebration of communion within the fellowship of the Lutheran Church. Instead, they are merely suspended until such time as by their separation from the false fellowship they are reconciled with the orthodox church.

THESIS XII

The heterodox themselves regard and declare it improper for them to commune with those who are orthodox. Would it not then be disgraceful for those who are last in regard to Christ's own institution and administration of the Sacrament to expose those who have been first?

THESIS XIII

The more unionism and syncretism is the sin and corruption of our time, the more the loyalty of the orthodox church now demands that the Lord's Supper not be misused as a means of external union without internal unity of faith.

THESIS I

The true visible church in an absolute sense, or part of the same, is that church in which the Word of God is preached purely and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution.

It is important to understand why the doctrine of the true visible church is established here as a foundation for what is to follow. Why don't we admit those who believe differently to Holy Communion? This is a burning question of our time. It is also the basis for most bitter accusations against us from our would-be counselors within the multitude of the gross undisguised union of a modern new-believing Lutheranism. I admit that our Lutheran accusers do not want to have anything to do with the wretched theory which holds that everyone should be admitted to Communion just as they are to preaching. This is based on a false appeal to the words of Christ, "Come to me all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy load and I will give you rest." (Mt 11:28) They too would label this theory as a vile sin and a distortion of the word of God and indignantly cry out; one would not cast pearls before the swine nor throw down that which is holy before the dogs. But nevertheless they are still willing to admit anyone to Holy Communion who is not openly unchristian regardless of his particular confessional position. This unionistic error is defended by the spokesmen of the so called "Church Council", among others, who wrongly appeal to a passage from our symbols.³ They say that we must admit all those who are proven to be dear Christians to Holy Communion. This basic principle of unionism originates in a perverted doctrine of the church. Our opponents do not really believe that there is one true visible church on earth in an absolute sense. Therefore it is all the more important that this doctrine be clearly understood in order to justify our doctrine and practice on Communion. If the opinion of the leaders of the "Church Council" and their spiritual comrades were divine truth then we Lutherans would have committed a grievous sin with our churchly separation from all other Christian fellowships. If this were true then those who believe differently would belong at our Communion. In fact they would really also belong in our church for the Sacrament is the church's mark of confession and band of unity. If this were the case then we would also necessarily have to unite with them in all other churchly things. But our thesis provides us with the correct explanation of the true visible church. It speaks of such a church in an absolute sense. One can also speak of a true visible church in a relative sense just as one can speak of a deformed man as a real actual human being. One is designated as a man only insofar as in all his parts he is a normal healthy human being; a man as he should be. In the same way, when we speak here of a true visible church in an absolute sense it is understood that we are referring to the church as it actually should be according to the will and institution of God, a model. However, it is good to note that we are not speaking here of the Church in general,⁴ but of a visible church. A true visible church in an absolute sense is a group of Christians, in which there are certainly always evil men and hypocrites intermingled, but among whom the pure unadulterated Word of God and Sacraments are found.

On the other hand, we can likewise call a mixed group in which the Word of God and the

3 That is namely in the *Preface to the Book of Concord*, "...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 but in no way approve the blasphemies which are cast forth against the Holy Supper as it is administered in our churches, according to Christ's institution, and, with the unanimous approval of all good men, is taught in accordance with the words of the testament it self."

4 *überhaupt*.

Sacraments are only generally or fundamentally present a true visible church in a relative sense. One such church, for example, is the Reformed. That is to say, they are a fellowship which is organized in the goal of promoting the Word of God and the Sacraments among themselves. It is only because they do not have these means of grace purely, in accordance with the institution, that they cannot be called a true visible church in an absolute sense. But praise God that there is still one such church! That church is the evangelical Lutheran Church. We confess joyfully and in steadfast certainty of faith that our beloved church is the church founded by Christ and his apostles more than 1800 years ago. We make this statement because our faith, doctrine, and confession, in all of its parts, agrees precisely with Scripture, the Word of Christ, and the apostles. The Lutheran Church is actually not only “a” but “the” true visible church of God on earth, insofar as “true” means nothing other than “as it should be according to the Word of God.” We neither can nor do we want to boast before other churches about our pious behavior. But we can and must boast about the pure doctrine which, by God’s grace to us poor sinners, shines among us like the clear bright light of the sun. But the leaders of the “Church Council” deny this. To them our church is merely the best among many goods; not the orthodox next to the heterodox; not the true visible church in an absolute sense. To these theologians the distinction between our church and others is a matter of degree, not substance. Therefore they consistently speak only of “denominations” and believe that those who in their arrogance claim to be the best must appear totally ridiculous and prove themselves to be a sect. This label “denomination” or “evangelical denomination” for all protestant groups, except perhaps the Unitarians, serves our opponents in the “Church Council” as a substitute for the more vulgar expression “union.” It implies that all Christians who are not either papists or gross rationalists are to be considered orthodox and that all these various orthodox groups must cultivate church fellowship with one another. But this label is just as distorted as the concept it implies. Then one cannot, for example, call the Reformed church an evangelical Reformed church because they have not been reformed through the pure Gospel. We rightly place the adjective “evangelical” before the name “Lutheran” because we do not believe in Luther but in the pure Gospel which Luther taught. We are not followers of Luther. Our opponents know this full well and hence our doctrine of the orthodox Lutheran Church is basically a horror to them. If we Lutherans maintain that we alone possess the truth they discard it as arrogant, intolerable, presumption. One can see that their unionistic communion practice originates in the wretched theory of open questions. For if within the Lutheran Church itself there were doctrines of the faith which Lutherans could either accept or reject, then why not also practice communion fellowship with non-Lutherans who hold to this or that particular doctrine? Our theologians of uncertainty wish only to endlessly seek the truth but have never found it, and they even study those heathen methods which also endlessly seek the truth without finding it, and they therefore style themselves philosophers, that is, lovers of the truth. But since Christ and His Gospel have appeared on earth the eternal, complete, sanctifying truth is on earth for every man. He who denies this and does not have the truth is truly a miserable, lamentable creature, and certainly no Christian. The doctrines of baptism, communion, and the eternal universal gracious will of God, for example, are contained in God’s Word clearly, plainly, and understandably enough for a child. Anyone who will hold his reason captive to the obedience of faith and not petulantly resist, can and must become certain of divine truth and convinced that the contrary doctrine is from the devil. Would our opponents dare to describe the apostolic congregation as arrogant and presumptuous when they refused the hand of brotherhood and communion fellowship to the insinuating erring spirits? The apostle warned against their soul poison by word and letter with this explanation: We have the truth but you do not. Yours is the doctrine of the devil. They would not. But they will not concede to us that which they will concede to the apostolic congregation. Why not? They explain their reason this way. We do not have the apostles but only Luther as our teacher. But what a foolish objection which

reveals to us their lack of faith in the Word of God! Do not we Lutherans still today have the holy Word of God “pure, as well as one may, written down through his power in Holy Scripture.” Does not St. Paul still speak to us in the Bible, in just the same way that he preached and wrote to his congregation? Do we not therefore still today have the eternal, complete, inerrant truth? And would it not be a totally false miserable sham stirred up by the devil to think that it would be arrogant and presumptuous to say, “I have the truth and therefore I stand on the rock of the Word of God and reject the contrary doctrine as the lies of Satan!” May God in his grace preserve us from such a sense of shame and all admiration for the spirit of unionism.

Moreover, many fear holding fast to the Word of God and pure doctrine so much the more because the true holding of a life that is in strict conformity with Scripture can be disclosed from it, rightfully and easily, and such a life style is basically just as hateful to them as pure doctrine. On the other hand, an orthodox Christian, who rightly understands the doctrine of original sin and the Word of God in general has admiration only for that piety which agrees with the Word.

We perceive that the great power for temptation within the church at this time is on the one hand the pope who considers himself alone to be infallible, and on the other hand, unionism which can find no infallible truth. We Lutherans firmly maintain against both of them that there certainly is infallible truth, but only in the Word of God. We possess that truth with certainty as long as we stand on the Word. Or is that an overstatement, the assertion of which makes us comparable to the Roman Antichrist, who claims for himself alone infallibility in matters of faith, practice, and discipline? No, not at all! For there in Rome one asserts an outward infallibility at the prompting of the devil without, and in fact contrary to the Word of God. But we confess that with all of our personal fallibility we are none the less infallible because and so long as we speak that which God speaks in His infallible⁵ Word. That is a major difference! Our Spirit, praise God, is a different spirit than that of the pope, and at the same time it is also different than that of the Methodists. For while they slander and condemn us for our doctrine of the only orthodox Lutheran Church, they meanwhile assert that they alone are the true church of God because they alone live devoutly. They therefore fall into what Paul writes about in I Timothy 3:1-9 in regard to the boastful, arrogant, conceited, and hypocritical people of the last evil times. It says to us that which is written in verse 14: “But you stay with what you’ve learned and found to be true. You know from whom you learned it.”

Let us hear what Luther says about the form of the true visible church and the infallible truth of its doctrine:

The children’s faith⁶ also says that the church is holy and Christian. And St. Paul says in I Cor. 3:17, ‘For God’s temple is holy and that temple you are. If anyone destroys God’s temple. God will destroy him.’ Therefore the holy church cannot and may not lie or suffer false doctrine, but must teach nothing except what is holy and true, that is God’s Word alone; and where it teaches a lie it is idolatrous and the whore-church of the devil... Now a kindhearted man, as they say, might ask, ‘What harm is there if one holds to the Word of God and yet lets all these matters, or at least those that are bearable, remain as well?’ I answer, ‘they may be called kindhearted but they are wronghearted and misled, for you have heard that it is impossible to teach any word other than God’s Word, to serve anyone other than God, to light any light other than that which has been placed by God in the darkness’ (Mt 6:24). It is indeed an error and a will-o’-the-wisp thing, even if it were only one single error, for the church ought not and cannot teach lies and error. If it teaches one

5 *unfehlbaren.*

6 Luther frequently refers to the Apostles’ Creed as “the children’s creed.” Ed.

lie then it is wholly false as Christ says in Luke 11:35-36—‘Be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no dark part, it will be wholly bright.’ That is to say it must be all light, without any darkness in it. The church must teach God’s Word and truth alone, and not error or falsehood. And how could it be otherwise? For God’s mouth is the mouth of the church and visa-versa. God cannot lie, nor can the church... Now the purpose of all this is to show that the church must teach God’s Word alone and must be sure of it. The church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth, built on the rock and called holy and irreproachable (Eph 2:21). Thus one rightly and truly says, ‘The church cannot err for God’s Word which it teaches cannot err.’ But whatever else is taught or whatever is not with certainly God’s Word cannot be the doctrine of the church... Even Duke George, of unhappy memory, said that he knew perfectly well that many abuses had spread within the church; but that one single monk from some obscure place should attempt a reformation, that he could not endure. Now then, he confesses (and undoubtedly not he alone) that your church is full of abuses—which means that it is not the true pure church, for the church must be pure and holy, without any additions, not to mention abuses.⁷

In these words Luther is certainly not saying that there will be no poor, weak, or erring Christians in the orthodox church. But as soon as such people have been convinced of their error from the Word of God they should abandon it, conform with the Word of God, and confess the truth. In the Lutheran Church, however, whoever stubbornly maintains his error must finally be removed. It is different in the Reformed Church. Their specialty is to stand for error and listen to their foolish reason instead of the dear Word. Their doctrine of Holy Communion is a good example of this. The man who holds fast to the Word of God is infallible and free of error in all things. As sure as the Bible is the Word of God, given by the Holy Spirit, and as sure as Christ is the Son of God and the source of eternal truth, so certain is it also that we cannot err, if we hold to the Word of Holy Scripture! He who does not believe this has neither power nor victory in the temptations of the devil nor comfort in the terror of death and must be miserably lost. His faith is nothing but a phantom. For the true believer, as Luther said, has died a thousand times that he might have the truth. He makes us infallible. We are not saying that a Lutheran Christian cannot err in anything that is contained in Holy Scripture. We only maintain that he has the full truth in all of the articles of faith, which are revealed for everyone clearly and plainly in Scripture, so that thereupon he may joyfully live and die. Another evil delusion of the erring spirits is their assertion that only this or that doctrine of faith (as for example the divinity of Christ) is clearly and plainly revealed in Holy Scripture. But others (like the distinctive doctrines of other churches) have not been clearly revealed, and therefore one cannot attain the infallible truth in such doctrines. To this we say no! Every doctrine of the faith is revealed in Holy Scripture with complete clarity and unmistakability and in that our Church confesses these doctrines, it is the infallible mouth of God. This is an assertion which is, as we have said, a scandal to our opponents. But to us it is a great comfort. That which we have confessed in the thesis we will now prove with the following Scripture passages. John 8:31, 32: Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” The first part of this passage actually says, according to the original text, “If ye continue in my word (λόγος) then are ye my disciples indeed,” and so one can plainly see that the Lord Jesus defines those who are his true disciples, that is those who are the true church, as those who hold fast to his Word, that is to the literal understanding of it. The Lutheran Church now does that.

Yes, this also applies to the living children of God in false churches, for although they may err here

⁷ *Against Hanswurst*, AE 41:214ff. When possible, references to Luther’s Works will be references to *Luther’s Works: American Edition* and will be abbreviated as *AE*.

and there, they do so unconsciously. But as soon as they perceive their error, let them depart and remain with the words of Christ. Also, in their hearts they do not cling to their error but to Christ their Lord alone. So also the same Lord also says of those who remain in His Word: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” He who would not make Christ himself a liar must according to this, confess that the true visible church of God on earth—that is, the evangelical Lutheran Church, and every Christian who remains in the Word—has found and attained to the infallible truth. The following passage says, John 10:4, 5: “The sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.”

Now according to this, what is the church? The gathering of the sheep, or the disciples of Christ. That which applies to them applies also to the church. A sheep hears the voice of his shepherd and follows after him. So it is also with Lutheran Christians and their Shepherd Christ. They believe his Word, even if their reason makes it appear to be unbelievable. Further, a sheep does not recognize the voice of a stranger, but flees from him. A Lutheran Christian does the same thing with the false spirits and their false doctrine even though their own reason may cling to it as so sweet and acceptable.

The text of Revelation 3:7-11 presents a part of the letter to the bishop of the church in Philadelphia. Christ does not say to him through the mouth of John, “Because you have lived so piously.” Instead he says, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world.” This holding to the pure doctrine was also their crown which no one could take away. In fact, the text previously said, “I know thy works,” and nothing else is meant here than faithful holding fast to the Word of truth, just as with the bishop of Laodicea nothing other than his lukewarmness and apostasy from a good confession is meant. In the same way Christ gave a promise to the congregation at Philadelphia which has been kept to this very day, that a group of Christians would always live in that city. The Laodicean congregation has vanished and their city has become a heap of ruins. If we want the above-mentioned promise to be kept for us and for our children then it is truly important that we in these last days of temptation, hold faithfully to the Word. One also notices that here in this letter Christ does not call those who have fallen away “dear brothers who have another equally valid viewpoint, but he calls them “the liars.” I Corinthians 1:10 says: “Fellow Christians, by the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, I urge you all to agree and not be divided but perfectly united in your understanding and judgment.”

Here divine judgment is spoken over the spirit of this time and unionism is condemned by the Holy Spirit himself. In the same way the Lord says to them, “You are not my church!” It is well known that to the unionist, being of one voice, mind, and understanding is a horror which in their opinion has produced the division and splintering of the church. They would abandon this unity to us “old Lutherans.” But at the same time do they not therefore themselves show that their much-praised unity in the union is nothing more than a white-washed grave and a hypocritical comedy. How can one in truth speak of unity in the church where its members are only (as also in the papacy) outwardly pasted together and carry on with their various beliefs and doctrines? The reproach of “splintering the church” does not apply to us but to the unionists, for to them one might as well say, “You have as many divisions as there are men.” In the same way God the Holy Spirit here condemns the spokesmen of the “Church Council” with the words “perfectly united in your understanding and judgment.” I admit that they would like there to be a united voice in the church. That’s why they require subscription to the collected confessional writings of the evangelical Lutheran Church. Nonetheless over “perfect unity in understanding and meaning” they do not wish to spend a long time arguing and fighting. Thus in the

eyes of the Holy Spirit this is nothing less than a hypocritical and abominable tactic of unionism. For how can the words of the mouth or the writing of the hand produce unity where the heart is torn and divided by various understandings and meanings?

The text of Ephesians 4:3-6 also strikes the human effort of union down to the ground- “Do your best to keep the oneness (ed. not of the body but) of the Spirit by living together in peace: one body (ed. namely implanted together in the spiritual body of Christ) and one spirit—even as you have been called to share one hope—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...” This is the true inner unity in which Christians should live within the church. And where it thus exists now, there one ought to work diligently to preserve it and take care that envy and pride do not set one Christian against the other. One can also see how this passage, which is so often and eagerly produced by unionists as a motto and a favorite saying, contains precisely their destroying judgment.

THESIS II

A Fellowship in which the Word of God is fundamentally denied, or in which a fundamental denial of the Word of God is tolerated, is not a true orthodox church, but a false heterodox church or sect.

This is the clear conclusion of this text from John 10:26-27: “But you don’t believe because you’re not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:” In the same way also according to this (cf. also above the text of John 10:4, 5) only those are the sheep of Christ or the right, true church, who hear his voice, that is his Word and follow him. Therefore on the other hand those who do not hear his voice, that is those who do not believe his Word, are not his sheep but a false church. It says further: (Chap 14-23 24) “If you love me you’ll do what I say, and my Father will love you. And we will come to you and live with you. Anyone who doesn’t love me doesn’t do what I say.”

Thus Jesus also in these words clearly indicates the marks of the true and the false church. Those who hold to the words of Christ are the true church in which God himself makes his dwelling. They are the house of God and the true temple. The Lord of heaven and earth lives among them not only as he does everywhere according to his essence, but also according to his gracious presence. These are the marks of the true church. One can therefore recognize a false church in this, that it does not fundamentally hold to the Word of God but denies it. Therefore God cannot dwell in it. It is a sect—with which we will have no fellowship. I admit that within the evangelical Lutheran Church it sometimes happens that one will deviate in this or that from the Word of God. But because this happens out of weakness or in ignorance, our church still does not through it become a sect. But whoever fundamentally and persistently falls away from the Word of God belongs to the false church.

However, the point made in this thesis is also very important; a church in which a fundamental denial of the Word of God is tolerated is also a false church. This is the case, for example, in the Union. We do not deny that there may still be some within the Union who in general teach the Word of God purely. But this circumstance makes the union church neither pure nor a true visible church of God. Much more we must testify to them that they are worse off than any other protestant sect. For with the other protestant sects there exists true Christians in their midst who in their ignorance believe, and are convinced in their hearts, that their error is the truth. One can openly and honestly struggle with them, as we Lutherans also have done with honest Reformed on the doctrines of communion, baptism, the person of Christ, etc. But in the union church one can falsify the Word of God with impunity. Here the lie is reckoned to be as good as the truth and error is wickedly tolerated. Pure doctrine is generally interpreted to be an indifferent thing, while a life which evidences good works is of major importance. Truly this miserable principle of unionism would have been condemned by the heathen Cicero himself. In a speech which he made on the various teachings of individual philosophers Cicero once added: “I do not know which of these beliefs is correct. But this I do know, that only one of them can be correct.” The fearful judgment of Christ upon the bishop of Laodicea also applies to the Union, “Revelation 3:15, 16: I would that you were either hot or cold. But because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold I will spit you out of my mouth.”

In the same way when a person who is eager for a refreshing drink of water instead receives lukewarm water in his mouth, he is so disgusted that he immediately spits it out. So also the holy God is disgusted with those who consider his revealed Word to be an indifferent thing, and equate error with the truth. He is so disgusted that he will cast them out of his sight. The theory invented and maintained by the followers of the Union and unionistic, false, Lutherans which states that different directions may lead to the same goal is absurd. Just as little as it is

possible for a multitude of travelers to reach the same city when they follow roads that lead in different directions; just as little in the spiritual area can one and the same goal be reached by following different directions. Where different directions are followed different goals are always attained. The orthodox Lutheran Church knows full well that it bears in its midst those who are erring out of weakness in order that through admonition and reproof from the Word of God they might be moved to repentance. However, when these efforts fail and one is revealed as a stubborn errorist, our church will then no longer recognize him as a brother but will separate itself from him. The orthodox church can never tolerate or authorize false doctrine. It can never make a union with the lie. If, for example, a pastor were to propose false doctrine and his hearer were to allow this without protest or struggle, or did not withdraw from him, so must we consider them also to be erring and, under the circumstances, even heretical. One may with justification judge a member of the congregation by his pastor, just as one may judge a church by its confession. We also freely admit, for example, that there are many just souls in the Reformed Church, which with more precise knowledge we would have to consider as dear Christians and brothers. But our churches could never unite. The union church, on the other hand, is that in which false doctrines and also teachers are tolerated and considered as brothers. In fact the unionists would retort that they too are going by the Word of God, and that they have adopted the confessions of both churches—the Lutheran and the Reformed—where they agree- and where this is not the case, the decision is made by God’s Word according to the principle of evangelical freedom in the doctrine. But this is in fact nothing other than a hypocritical excuse and deliberate ungodliness. A third position is not confessed as correct, in regard to the divergent doctrines in question, but instead those who are of a Lutheran disposition hold and define it to be correct, while those who are Reformed do the same with the Reformed doctrine. Now we will also hear from the fathers. First of all Luther:

For the holy church sins and stumbles and can even err as the Lord’s Prayer teaches. However, it does not defend or excuse itself, but humbly asks for forgiveness and improves itself where it is able. Thus it is forgiven so that its sin is no longer reckoned as sin. Now if I do not know or distinguish the true church from the false one on the basis of obedience and obdurate disobedience, then I am unable to speak of a church any longer. Then one might accordingly also with due deference call all heretics, all factions and sects, that are wantonly disobedient to Christ, the holy church; for they are in no way worse than the pope’s church, if indeed wanton disobedience against God does no harm. On the other hand, the papal church is not better because it is stubbornly disobedient to God and wickedly perverts his word, and besides, it is more insistent on being right than any other faction and heretic.⁸

Further W. Baier says:

The unity of the church is also opposed by syncretism, or the unifying of discordant parts in religion in spite of the difference, in a fraternal, ecclesiastical union so that either the teachers of error in those parts which do not agree or at least the erring persons themselves are allowed within the church fellowship as brothers in Christ and joint heirs of eternal life; which toleration is also improper if the latter are seen as those who are weak and erring but still as brothers who are to participate in the same communion. In so doing it is indeed certain, that the weak who from invincible ignorance have submitted to certain errors, but who nevertheless hold to sanctifying faith, may be tolerated as weak brethren if they were known to us. But here

8 *A Letter From Dr. Martin Luther Concerning His Book on the Private Mass. AE 38:229.*

the comment in regard to the discordant parts is in view of the public preaching office, and the doctrine of faith and life, as it is publicly proclaimed, as also in view of the Sacrament as they are publicly administered, namely falsely, so that members of such a visible communion are regarded per se, inasmuch as they are a member of the same, but not in view of that which happens incidentally. All toleration of false teachers is in conflict with 1) the expressions of Scripture which require that the whole of Christian doctrine be maintained pure from all falsification (II Thess. 2:15); to beware of additions, taken in its entirety, unabridged, and unadulterated, (II Tim. 1:14); and to remain in what one has learned and trusted. This would not be purely preserved if the contrary falsifications were to be tolerated at the same time, and if man were allowed to mix them together. All toleration is in conflict with 2) the office of judgment which God has imposed on true teachers through which false doctrine is to be corrected and condemned. Titus 1:9,13; II Timothy 4:2,3,16; the example of Christ, Matthew 5:12ff.; and Paul, Galatians 1:6. It is 3) because every errorist and falsification, if it is not controlled, opposed, and condemned, will always spread further, making the truth of doctrine doubtful and suspect; or will be seen as an indifferent opinion, and the errorist himself will finally be confirmed in his error and the temptation will be given an opportunity to contaminate others. But the toleration of errorists, extended not only to the innocent but also to entire fellowships and therefore at the same time to the public preaching office [öffentliche Predigtamt] itself, and false teachers, is in conflict with the command to convict, punish, and avoid, disseminators of error. Romans 16:17; II Corinthians 6:14-17; Galatians 1:8; Galatians 5:12; II Thessalonians 3:6; I Timothy 6:3; Titus 3:10. 14

THESIS III

Every man is obligated to recognize the true visible church, and, if he has the opportunity, to join it.

This thesis is obviously important for our purpose. He who is convinced that there can be, should be, and is, a true visible church, as stated above, must also add that every man has the duty to join it. The belief that one has the freedom to join this or that church flows from unbelief that there actually can be a true visible church of God. Note what David said long ago in the words of Psalm 16:6-8: "I wash my hands in innocence and march around your altar. Lord, to praise you with a loud voice and tell all the wonderful things you've done. Lord, I love the house you've made your home, the place where your glory dwells."

The prophet is also thinking here of the true church. For the glory of God dwells in this church alone because 1) here alone his Word is decisive, and 2) because only here is taught that which alone justifies by grace through faith in the Gospel which resounds here in Preaching, Absolution, Baptism, and Communion.⁹ In false-believing churches work righteousness has been accepted contrary to the glory of God. It is as absurd as it is godless to say, "I have contributed something to my own physical life or to my creation out of my own works and service." But it is still more terrible and Godless to assert, "I have contributed something, if only the least bit, to the attainment of spiritual and eternal life." He who thinks this way is a robber of God's glory and is damned. And this is exactly what happens in the false church. Here one does not thank and honor God but himself. But the orthodox church is the church of thanksgiving, and in it all the wonder of the Lord are proclaimed. That is why David loves this church and belongs to it.

Matthew 10:32-33 is also a major passage which demonstrates that one should belong to the true visible church: "Whoever will confess me before other people, him I will confess before my Father in heaven. Whoever will deny me before others him will I deny before my Father in heaven." This is because profession is a duty. The papists wrongly assert that membership in the visible church is the primary way one becomes Christian and is made holy. Such membership is important not for God's sake, but for ourselves, and for the sake of our lost world. For it is God's will that all men would be saved through the Gospel. Christians should preach it to and confess it before the world, not because everyone should or must be a Minister of the Church, but so that they might join the true visible church in which they hear the pure Gospel. In this way the church is a saving leaven in the world. The Lord Jesus says in Luke 9:26: "If you're ashamed of me and what I say then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father and the holy angels." All those who do not confess the church of the pure Word but hang on to false doctrine, the Reformed for example, are ashamed of the Word of Christ. The first Christians in Jerusalem are an excellent example of faithful profession and holding to the true visible church.

Acts 2:41,42 declares of them that they remained steadfast not only in the apostles' doctrine, but also in fellowship—that is, they acknowledged the orthodox congregation, although there was great danger to life and limb connected with this. For they understood that it is not enough for you yourself to believe the pure truth, but that you are also responsible to confess this truth openly. If, therefore Nicodemus had remained as he was at first when he came to Jesus by night, in woeful timidity of profession, he would not have been a Christian and would not have been saved. Indeed, precisely because of this approach, the Lord Jesus said to him, "I tell you the truth, if anyone isn't born from above he can't see God's kingdom." (John 3:2) Hebrews 10:24,25 says: "And let us consider how we can stimulate one another to love and do good

⁹ welches hier in Predigt. Absolution. Taufe und im Abendmahle erschallt.

works. Let us not stay away from our worship services, as some are regularly doing, but let us encourage one another all the more because you see the day coming nearer.”

The “staying away” does not so much mean a withdrawal from congregational gatherings or divine worship services, as much as it means a keeping away from the fellowship of the orthodox church generally; although it is certain that he who first neglects divine services and gatherings of the congregation has therefore already separated himself from the church. The Lord says in Matthew 18:17, “If he won’t listen to them (to the witnesses) tell it to the church; but if he won’t even listen to the church, then treat him like a pagan and a tax collector.” One should bear this word in mind against the enthusiasts, who allege that Christ has, as it were, thrown the truth into the world and anyone who has the desire to receive it may do so. But that is perverted. Christ has established a kingdom through which to save the world, and according to his Word and will, there actually should be a true visible church whose voice one can hear, and which one should acknowledge. I John 2:19 says, “They left us but they never really belonged to us. If they had been a part of us they would have stayed with us. But they left to show that not all belong to us.” One should hold up this passage before those who believe differently who perhaps come to us and speak of us and our confession in a praiseworthy way but who then desire to quietly remain in their faith and their church, in which, as they believe, they can also just as well be saved without coming over to us. To such people one should say, “If you really belonged to us you would also come to us. Either your praise is only hypocrisy, or you are acting contrary to your own conscience.” In II Timothy 1:8 the apostle writes to Timothy, “So don’t be ashamed to tell about our Lord, and don’t be ashamed of me, his prisoner ...”

This passage demonstrates why we should also be called Lutherans. Paul asks Timothy not only to confess the Word of Jesus, but also to acknowledge him. He who confesses Jesus should also acknowledge those who properly preach Jesus. Some who acknowledge our Lutheran confession as correct still deny it before our enemies in that they deny the name Lutheran. We can find consolation in the face of such a denial because these people are hypocrites to whom Christ will one day say, “You have betrayed me in that you have betrayed my faithful witnesses. Or have you never read, ‘What you have done to my brothers and my servants you have done to me.’” Of course we are only speaking here of those who deliberately deny the true church. It could very well be possible that someone might leave the evangelical Lutheran Church and still remain a true Christian. It could be, for example, that an aroused but ignorant Christian from Germany who had previously belonged to a Lutheran congregation, bewitched by the appearance of the Methodists, could conclude that only in this fellowship is true, living Christianity to be found, and that therefore he could go over to them without losing his Christianity. But over all we can see that it is not enough to believe the pure doctrine but that one should also publicly acknowledge orthodox believers.

Luther also writes on this topic most excellently:

Finally I see that I must add a good word of admonition to those whom Satan has now begun to persecute. For there are some among them who think that when they are attacked they can escape the danger by saying: I do not hold with Luther or with anyone else but only with the holy Gospel and the holy church, or with the Roman church. For saying so they think they will be left in peace. Yet in their hearts they regard my teaching as the teaching of the Gospel and stand by it. In reality this kind of statement does not help them, and it is in effect a denial of Christ. Therefore, I beg such people to be very careful. True, by any consideration of body or soul you should never say: I am a Luther, or Papist. For neither of them died for you, or is your master. Christ alone died for you; he alone is your master, and you should confess yourself a Christian. But if you are convinced that Luther’s teaching is in accord with the Gospel and that the pope’s is not, then you should not discard

Luther so completely, lest with him you discard also his teaching which you nevertheless recognize as Christ's teaching. You should rather say: Whether Luther is a rascal or a saint I do not care; his teaching is not his but Christ's. For you will observe that the tyrants are not out merely to destroy Luther, but to wipe out his teaching. It is on account of the teaching that they attack you and ask you whether you are Lutheran. Here you must be sure not to speak with slippery or evasive words but frankly to confess Christ, no matter who did the preaching—Luther, or Tom, Dick, or Harry. The person you can forget, but the teaching you must confess. Paul also writes thus to Timothy in II Timothy 1:8, 'Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake.' If it had been enough here for Timothy to confess the Gospel, Paul would not have commanded him not to be also of Paul—not of Paul as a person but of Paul as a prisoner for the sake of the Gospel. Now if Timothy had said, I do not hold with Paul or with Peter but with Christ, then he would actually thereby have denied Christ himself. For Christ says in Matthew 10 concerning those who preach him: 'He who receives you receives me, and he who rejects you rejects me.' Why this? Because holding thus with his messengers, those who bring his word, is the same as holding with Christ himself and with his word.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament, AE 36:265ff.*

THESIS IV

Every man is obligated to avoid heterodox churches, and in the event that he has belonged to a heterodox church, his obligation is to renounce it and separate himself from it.

This is taught by Psalm 26:4,5, “I don’t sit with men who lie; I don’t keep company with hypocrites. I hate every assembly of those who do wrong and will not sit with the wicked:” The vain people from whom David separates himself are the erring spirits, who stand on their own vain wisdom and righteousness and not on the Word of God. Furthermore it says in Psalm 94:20, “Can anyone on a throne of iniquity be your partner, when he uses the law to do mischief” “Throne” here means the seat of a teacher or a pulpit. God will never be one with those who from this position use the law—that is, the Word of God in general—wrongly—that is, falsely He is always their enemy. But if God is their enemy how can we have friendship and oneness with them? Therefore we should and must be separate, not only from those who as unbelievers wish to know nothing from the Word of God in general, but also from those who use the Word wrongly or pervert it to false doctrine.

The following text from Jeremiah 15:19 says exactly the same thing, “If you will turn back to me I will take you back and you shall stand before me. If you choose noble utterance and reject the base, you shall be my spokesman. The people will turn again to you but you will not turn to them.” Here separation from the ungodly is also commanded. One might object: Are all the members of heterodox churches ungodly? We can only reply: Certainly not all. There are Christians among them. Only the ungodly, namely false teachers and stubborn defenders of error are to blame for the fact that such heterodox fellowships exist and are maintained. Therefore we must withdraw and be separate from them. “I urge you, fellow Christians, to watch those who cause disagreements and make people fall by going against the teaching you learned. Turn away from them,” Romans 16:17. We have been falsely blamed for destroying and splintering the unity of the church because we divide and separate from the heterodox. Here we see this is not true. Instead, everyone who causes division and offense contrary to the pure, sound, doctrine of the Word of God is responsible for the division. St. Paul says in I Corinthians 11:19, “Of course there must be divisions among you to show clearly which of you can stand the test.”

Divisions, according to the original text, ἀἵρεσις, here means a fellowship of people who hold to erring doctrine contrary to one or more of the articles of faith a sect. Thus orthodox Christians will be revealed if they separate themselves from such sects. The Christian who unknowingly remains among them can also remain a Christian through the wonderful gracious preservation of God, but he is not revealed to us as such.

Among other things I Corinthians 10:18 says, “Don’t those who eat the sacrifices share the altar?” This text indicates an important element of our separation from the false church, namely, that we include all communion fellowship with them. Because in the same way as that Corinthian who ate from the heathen idol offerings had fellowship with the heathen, so still today a Christian who takes part in a false communion service practices fellowship with the heterodox church.

Matthew 7:15 is the well known but, sadly, little heeded warning of Christ, “Beware of false prophets. They come to you dressed like sheep but in their hearts they’re greedy wolves.” I admit that some who would listen to false teachers say, “We take out for ourselves the best of that which they preach.” But we would ask, “Is that what it means to beware of the wolf, or are you running into the jaws of the wolf?” Christ says, “Do not listen to them.” And in fact if one were not to listen, the preaching would have to stop. Yet, for the most part, such people are also belly-servers who only want to preach for good wages. Luther could say, “All that is lacking in order to overthrow the papacy is a great sack of money.” I Timothy 6:3-5 is also a major is also

a major proof text for our thesis, “If anyone teaches anything else and will not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and godly teaching, he is proud and doesn’t know anything; he has a morbid craving for debates and arguments which produce jealousy, quarreling, insults, evil suspicions, continued wrangling of people whose minds are corrupt, who have lost the truth and think that religion is a way to make money.” Titus 2:10, “A heretic warn once and then a second time, and then don’t have anything more to do with him.” A heretic is a man who stubbornly errs in an article of faith. Acts 20:30, 31, “And even some of you men will start to tell perversions of the truth to get the disciples to leave and follow you. So watch and remember how for three years, day and night, I didn’t stop warning everyone with tears.”

Unionists are willing to repudiate obvious unbelievers. But they are not willing to repudiate the heterodox. This is, however, in conflict with this passage in which the congregation is warned against those who carry on perverted or false doctrine. II John 10:11 says, “If anyone comes to you and doesn’t teach this, don’t take him into your home or greet him. If you greet him you share the wicked things he does.” This is a major text. John is called the beloved disciple but if he were to preach this text in the world today they would stone him. But he speaks divine truth. He has also previously said, “Anyone who goes too far and doesn’t stay with what Christ has taught doesn’t have God.” Therefore one should not greet such people. This does not mean that one should avoid secular courtesy and necessary communication. Instead, it means that over against the heterodox one should avoid all that communication which could open up our sympathy for them, because that would mean a denial of Christ. Therefore marriage with those who believe differently is dangerous, particularly if the man is the erring partner. What a difficult cross the orthodox partner then has to bear, and how many often succumb and therefore lose faith and good conscience totally. Business associations with the heterodox are also not recommended. The apostles says of such, “Do not take him into your house.” that means that one should, except in cases of actual destitution not extend cordial hospitality and in no way provide support for their religious goals. Finally, II Cor. 6:14 says: “Don’t be yoked with unbelievers. How can right and wrong be partners? Or how can light have anything to do with darkness?”

Many think that this text does not apply to erring believers, but is only speaking of unbelievers. But they are wrong. Unionism is based on nothing but unbelief, in that it receives, justifies, and tolerates erring believers and those who openly teach contrary to the Word of God For that reason it is actually unbelievers who build the temple of unionism. He who takes part in unionism also therewith takes part in the evil and unbelief that is basic to it. An orthodox Christian should and must earnestly flee from that kind of fellowship; and would better never receive Communion or die rather than partake of a Zwinglian Communion. We know well that the false believers charge that conflict and quarreling over pure doctrine and disunity in the church are our chief delights. Little do they suspect that they are heavy crosses for us. But God’s Word unites us. The Savior says, “If you love father or mother more than me you’re not worthy of me; and if you love son or daughter more than me you’re not worthy of me. Matthew 10-37 “ Indeed he says: “If you come to me and don’t hate your father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, and even your own life you can’t be my disciple,” Luke 14:26.

In these latter words the Lord wants to say, he who is not resolved to do something out of love for me, and also does that which may be viewed by his own parents or other relatives as something hateful, cannot be a true Christian. So perhaps a true Lutheran may have a tender loving father who is erring and deluded in faith, who comes to him with many moving words and pleas, yes with threats and oaths, that he not belong to the Lutherans, that (in his view) stubborn obnoxious sect; that he would not by the reception and defense of the Lutheran name and confession cover his grey head with disgrace and bring him down to his grave in grief. But even then, in this situation, he cannot retreat and give way, nor consider his own father’s grief

and crying, but only the Word of God. But how will the blind world interpret this obedience to the scriptures? They will interpret his action as disgraceful hatred and evil against his beloved father. To endure that is not easy but it is important. The Appendix [Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope] to the Smalcald Articles says,

This being the case, all Christians ought to beware of becoming partakers of the godless doctrine, blasphemies, and unjust cruelty of the Pope. On this account they ought to desert and execrate the Pope with his adherents as the kingdom of Antichrist; just as Christ has commanded. Matt 7:15: ‘Beware of false prophets.’ And Paul commands that godless teachers should be avoided and execrated as cursed, Gal. 1, 8; Titus 3, 10. And II Cor. 6:14 says, ‘Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with darkness?’ To dissent from the agreement of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a grave matter. But divine authority commands all not to be allies and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty.¹¹

Luther:

Because so many of God’s great warnings and admonitions have simply had no effect on them (the Sacramentarians, ed.)... therefore, I must leave them to their devices and avoid them as the *αὐτοκατακρίτος* (self-condemned), Titus 3:11, who knowingly and intentionally want to be condemned. I must not have any kind of fellowship with any of them, neither by letters, writings, and words, nor in works, as the Lord commands in Matthew 18, whether he is called Stenckefeld, Zwingli, or whatever he is called. I regard them all as being cut from the same piece of cloth, as indeed they are. For they do not want to believe that the Lord’s bread in the Supper is his true, natural body which the godless person or Judas receives orally just as well as St. Peter and all the saints. Whoever (I say) does not want to believe that, let him not trouble me with letters, writings, or words and let him not expect to have fellowship with me. This is final.¹²

11 *Tractate on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, 42.

12 *Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament*, AE 38:304.

THESIS V

True Christians are also found in heterodox fellowships as a result of their lack of knowledge.

One reads in Galatians 1:2 where the holy apostle Paul still calls the Galatians a church Greek: ἐκκλησία, German: *Kirche* although in chapter 3 he must refer to them as foolish people who have not obeyed the truth and have become a sect. But he nonetheless calls them a church because there are still true Christians among them. Furthermore, “But I say to the rest of you in Thyatira all who don’t hold this teaching and haven’t learned ‘Satan’s deep things,’ as they call them, I’m putting no other burden on you.” The Son of God had previously said to the same congregation, v. 20, ‘But I hold it against you...’ That is sanctified satire. That which you consider minor, Christ wants to say, is really something of major importance, a terrible sin “...that you let the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, teach my servants and mislead them to sin sexually and to eat food sacrificed to idols.” Revelation 2:24,20, “The congregation at Thyatira was also openly sectarian. Nevertheless, this text provides definite proof that there remain in the sects those who have not taken false doctrine to heart, but they remain in the sect because they have not recognized the deep things of Satan.

I Chronicles 19:14,18 is the complaint of plaintiff Elijah over an Israel that is faithless and apostate from the Lord, and the comfort which God offers the prophet. False believers so totally dominated the Jewish church that the dear prophet in his despondency could believe that he alone remained. But God revealed to him that there still remained 7,000 in Israel who along with him had not bowed the knee to Baal. Generally speaking, where the Word of God is still essentially present, there the church is still present. There are always sincere Christians souls hidden in the sects.

The story of II Samuel 15:11 also shows this: “Two hundred men from Jerusalem, who had been invited, went with Absalom. They went innocently, without knowing anything.” As is well known, the infamous Absalom secretly prepared a rebellion against David, his father and king, in that he enticed and captivated his subjects with all kinds of deceptive words. Now some good men, who did not perceive his evil purpose, believed that as the king’s son and by the will of the king Absalom was gathering the people around himself, and so their legs followed him although their hearts remained loyal to David. This is an appropriate picture of Christians in the sects. Absalom represents the false prophets who rebel against the king—that is, Christ. But they do so under a pious facade. For that reason sincere Christians often do not perceive their evil and outwardly follow them while in their hearts they depend on Christ. Our confessional writings also witness to the truth expressed here.

As to the condemnations, censures, and rejections of godless doctrines, and especially of that which has arisen concerning the Lord’s Supper these indeed had to be expressly set forth in this our declaration and thorough explanation and decision of controverted articles, not only that all should guard against these condemned doctrines, but also for certain other reasons, could in no way have been passed by. Thus, as it is no way our design and propose to condemn those men who err from a certain simplicity of mind, but are not blasphemers against the truth of the heavenly doctrine, much less, indeed, entire churches, which are either under the Roman Empire of the German Nation or elsewhere; nay, rather has it been our intention and disposition in this manner openly to censure and condemn only the fanatical opinions and their obstinate and blasphemous teachers... 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.¹³

None of our confessional writings are decried as intolerable by our opponents more than the Formula of Concord. Yet is the Formula more than any of the others which asserts, as does the passage we have cited, that although our church is the only church which stands on the Word of God and not the doctrines of men, it is not to be considered as the only saving church, outside of which there can be no salvation. There are also Christians in other churches. We do not condemn them, but only the false doctrine and its stubborn teachers and defenders. This passage is all the more significant in this discussion because from it, as noted above, the spokesmen of the “Church Council” wish to conclude that one can rightfully admit heterodox, simple, dear Christians and their preachers from other church fellowships to altar and pulpit fellowship.¹⁴ They contend that we are guilty of un-Lutheran practice because we exclude these people from our altars and pulpits. But we will hear later how false that conclusion is from this passage.

¹³ *Preface to the Book of Concord*, Tappert, p. 19.

¹⁴ *Abendmahls oder Kanzelgemeinschaft*.

THESIS VI

Those who are aware of the partial apostasy of the church fellowship to which they belong and yet continue to remain within that fellowship are not to be considered among the weak but are either the lukewarm who the Lord will spit out of His mouth or Epicurean religious sceptics who within their hearts would ask with Pilate, "What is truth?"

It is certainly true that there are Christians in false-believing churches. But they are weak Christians who unknowingly labor under a delusion. But it is hypocrisy if they are convinced of their error and still remain in the sect, still desiring to be considered as the weak. They are either the lukewarm or epicurean religious sceptics. Then what does the Lord say? He says: "Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not help me gather, scatters." Luke 11:23: "He who hears the truth and pretends to believe it but will not also publicly confess it does not honestly believe his Christianity. Neutrality in the kingdom of God is condemned. He who is not openly for the truth is against it. As far as in him lies, he does not strengthen the congregation of God. Instead he scatters it. Christ says further: "Don't think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I didn't come to bring peace but a sword. I came to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those in his own house."

Some who recognize the errors of their sect still remain in them because of timidity, fear of conflict cross and all kinds of earthly trouble. They have misgivings about publicly separating themselves and joining the orthodox church. They should take particular note of this text. But truly struggle in the kingdom of God for the sake of God's Word is a holy, sanctifying struggle, a struggle against the devil. It is ordained for all true Christians that the church here will always be the church in conflict. Those who think that a quiet, comfortable, outward peace is more edifying and conducive to the growth of the church are fools. No, nothing is more dangerous, or more evil, than if a so-called graveyard peace prevails in the church. The Savior says, "I have come to kindle a fire on earth, and he who would love me must already be burning." Luther, his warrior, experienced and tested in holy war, often pointed out the great blessings which follow where the spirits explode in spiritual conflict with one another. Conflicts, crosses, and hardship appeared in the household of Job, as in a synagogue of Satan, and yet it was still a true house of God. Unionists hate conflict for the sake of God's word. At most they would, perhaps fight against the unbelievers but not against the heterodox and false doctrine. They do not want to understand that false doctrine is much more dangerous to the church than open unbelief.

"I know what you are doing, that you aren't cold or hot. How I wish you were cold or hot. But now that you are luke warm and not hot or cold, I'm going to spit you out of my mouth," Revelation 3:15, 16. This passage, which we mentioned before, condemns as lukewarm those who believe that it is absolutely improper to change their religion. It is true that he who has the true Christian religion may not exchange it for another so that he may have a certain hope of salvation. But woe to him who recognizes that his faith, doctrine, and church are not correct and still will not move to join the true orthodox church. Adam would never have become a Christian or Luther a man of the Gospel if both of them had not penitently abandoned their false religions; in the case of the former, his service of the devil, and with the latter, his papism. Whosoever, therefore, pronounces our evangelical Lutheran doctrine and church to be correct but nonetheless remains in the false church and does not come over to us, burdens himself with a serious condemnation. He then knows full well the way of the truth, but that does not change him; as Christ says: "The slave who knew what his master wanted but didn't prepare himself to do what he wanted will get many blows. But he who didn't know, but did things for which he deserved to be beaten, will get few blows" Luke 12:47,48.

Therefore, so that no one who, because of his own infidelity and laziness is guilty of ignorance, might use that as a defense for remaining in a false church, our Lord Jesus also says, “If you have something, you’ll be given more, and so you’ll get more and more. But if you don’t have what you should have, even what you have will be taken away from you,” Matthew 13:12. Our gracious God will allow his gifts (knowledge, for example) to an individual to increase and grow if the person to whom God has given any measure of spiritual gifts uses them faithfully for honest searching of God’s Word. On the other hand, the gift of knowledge is gradually reduced in him who does not faithfully use it, until it is totally lost. For example, if a Reformed person perhaps perceives through the grace of God that a particular point of his doctrine is false, and he faithfully uses this light and searches further. God will also help him to be convinced little by little of all the errors of the Reformed Church and then to settle on the Lutheran Church and its doctrines. On the other hand, if he does not use the first gift correctly, all the light of knowledge will once again be extinguished in him and he will be all the more deeply mired in error. According to Romans 14:23: “If anyone doubts (whether the eating of meat is proper) and still eats, he is condemned because he doesn’t go by what he believes...” Those also are committing a damnable sin who are in doubt over the orthodoxy of their church and still remain in it for thereby they demonstrate that sin in general is an indifferent thing to them. One should also listen to Luther, who in his conversation with George Major said, among other things:

Whoever really regards his doctrine, faith, and confession as true, right and certain cannot remain in the same stall with such as teach, or adhere to, false doctrine; nor can he keep on giving friendly words to Satan and his minions. A teacher who remains silent when errors are taught and nevertheless pretends to be a true teacher, is worse than an open fanatic and by his hypocrisy does greater damage than a heretic. Nor can he be trusted. He is a wolf and a fox, a hireling and a servant of his belly, and ready to despise and sacrifice doctrine, Word, faith. Sacrament, churches, and schools. He is either a secret bedfellow of the enemies, or a sceptic and a weather vane, waiting to see whether Christ or the devil will prove victorious; or he has no convictions of his own whatever, and is not worthy to be called a pupil, let alone a teacher, nor does he want to offend anybody, or say a word in favor of Christ, or hurt the devil and the world.¹⁵

It is also very significant to note what J. Spener, the mildest of all the Lutheran theologians in the 17th century, who has often been called the grandfather of unionists, says in this regard.

Since in God’s providence Christendom has been divided into many parts because of infiltrating false doctrine, I can call no one my brother other than those who acknowledge the Lutheran Church.¹⁶

As relates to outward brotherhood which is based on the fellowship of the faith, that which one believes, or religion; all Lutherans are my brothers since they confess and hold to one faith; but no Reformed, as long as he remains such is my brother, because he confesses another religion, a religion whose doctrine I recognize as dangerous error.¹⁷

15 Quoted in Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921.

16 *Übereinstimmung mit der Augsburg Conf.*, 226.

17 *Letzte theol. Bedenken*, Cap. II, 605.

How grievously sin also those who pursue their devotion in heterodox churches, especially here where full religious freedom prevails, and they only have to put up with the cost and discomfort of a trip, in order to hear the pure Word in a Lutheran Church!

THESIS VII

The main purpose of the Holy Sacrament is to be a tool and a means through which the promises of grace are offered, communicated, and appropriated, as with a seal, guarantee, and pledge through which these promises are confirmed. However, within this major purpose, as a secondary goal, the Sacrament is to be a distinguishing sign of confession and a bond of fellowship in worship. Therefore Communion fellowship is Church fellowship.

This thesis is particularly important because our opponents contend that if you Lutherans acknowledge that there are also Christians in other churches, then you must admit that they also should have a part in your Sacraments which are signs and seals of the gracious goodwill of God which belongs to all Christians. Against this we now say: It is true that the Sacraments are this and indeed primarily and principally this, and it would have also been proper, if they had been nothing other than this. But they are also distinguishing marks of confession and bonds of fellowship in divine service.¹⁸ Surely we allow the Catholics or even the heathen to hear the Word of God with us; but if one is to be permitted to participate in the Sacraments he must be recognized as a person who stands in proper Christian faith, for by his participation he is marked with a seal of brotherly fellowship in the faith. This applies equally to Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. And for that reason Christ has also ordained both Sacraments. For the Gospel is not a philosophical system but a productive power of God. It is preached, and there is the church in which believers find unity together. And the Sacraments are in the same way the holy bonds and fences within which Christians stand over against the world. This was already the case in the Old Testament with circumcision. “Circumcise the flesh of your foreskins and that will be the mark of my covenant with you” Genesis 17:11. “And he (Abraham) received circumcision as a mark to confirm the righteousness he got by believing before he was circumcised” Romans 4:11.

From this we see that it was not the outward hearing of the Word of God in Israel, but circumcision by which one was to be recognized as belonging to the people of God. He who would belong to God’s people must allow himself to be circumcised. And if he stands then in justifying faith in the promised Messiah, so was this circumcision a holy binding mark and a sign of the acquired righteousness of faith. Exactly the same thing is true of the Passover, “ ‘These are the rules for the Passover,’ the Lord told Moses and Aaron, ‘no foreigner should eat of it... If a stranger is staying with you and wants to celebrate a Passover for the Lord, all his males should be circumcised, then he may come to celebrate it and be like anyone born in Israel’ “ Exodus 12:43,48. The Passover was also in the same way a sign of unity within Israel separating them from the heathen. The heathen could and indeed should be allowed to hear the proclamation of the Word of God, but no Gentile could be allowed at the Passover meal who was not himself a believing proselyte. Only circumcised Israelites participated. The same also holds true now for the Sacraments of the New Testament I Corinthians 12:13 says of Holy Baptism: “By one Spirit all of us... were baptized to form one body.”

He who is baptized will therefore be declared as a member of that mystical body; the body to which I too belong as a Christian, and through the Baptism I give the baptized this witness: you are my dear fellow Christian, my brother in Christ. Exactly the same thing is also the case with Holy Communion. I Corinthians 10:17 says this: “All of us are one body because there is one bread and all of us share that one bread.”

In that Christians eat of the one bread of the Sacrament, all of them become mystically, that is spiritually—morally or figuratively—one body; and by the one action of eating together a person is declared to be one in Christ with all Christians. Then in the same way as the bread

18 *Bänder gottesdienstlicher Gemeinschaft.*

consists of a vast multitude of tiny kernels of grain which have been baked, and just as it is impossible to separate these kernels again from one another, in the same way through Communion all Christians are one in Christ, and many thousands are inwardly bound together, as body and soul themselves to form one organism. They are actually one. One God dwells within them One Spirit rules within them. They all have one Savior and one Lord Jesus Christ speaks from them. And now consider what a grievous sin those commit who administer Communion to those who are of another faith and confession, and thereby recognize them as being one and a brother: “When you get together for a common purpose it is not the Lord’s Supper you are eating” I Corinthians 11:20.

Here the apostle rebukes the fact that the Corinthians celebrated communion without showing in practice the brotherhood in faith and fellowship in love which is therewith declared. One can also see here that Communion should be a bond of fellowship in worship. All should come to preaching, but only Christians should come to Communion who have confessed the proper Christian faith with their mouths. Whoever, therefore, goes to Holy Communion in a Lutheran Church declares openly before the world: “I belong to this church, to the doctrine which is preached here, to the faith which is confessed here, and to all the confessors who belong here.” The pastor who administers the Sacrament to him declares exactly the same thing.

In Acts 2:42, 46 and Acts 20:7 the Holy Spirit mentions with praise how the Christians in Jerusalem and at Troas in Asia Minor demonstrated their oneness in the faith and their brotherhood in the breaking of bread, that is, in the celebration of Holy Communion. If heterodox Christians come to our communion, with our knowledge, then both we and they are hypocrites. They appear to be Lutherans, but are not.

Thus all of these passages from Scripture corroborate the truth of our thesis. If the leaders of the “Church Council” were to accept them they would have to give up their false principles and practices; but they will not soon accept them until they recognize that there actually is a true visible church of God in an absolute sense on earth. They do not say to their communicants who believe differently that they through their partaking of communion with us are confessing our doctrine and our church. Instead, they allow them to remain stuck in their error and plunge them and themselves into the sin of hypocrisy. So it is still necessary and important to testify before all over against the Reformed and the unionists that the Sacraments actually are means of grace and guarantees of our faith. The time has now also come when we must confess over against unionistic Lutherans that the Sacraments are also marks and bonds of Divine Service and brotherly fellowship in the faith. Our church also confesses this in its symbols. The Augsburg Confession says:

Of the use of the Sacraments they teach that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but rather to be signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us.¹⁹

The Apology adds in the corresponding article:

The Christian Church consists not alone in the fellowship of outward signs, but it consists especially in inward communion of eternal blessing in the heart, as of the Holy Ghost, of faith, of the fear and love of God; which fellowship nonetheless has outward marks so that it can be recognized, namely the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ! And this Church alone is called the body of Christ in Scripture...Neither have we said anything new. Paul has defined the Church in precisely the same way, Ephe-

¹⁹ *Augsburg Confession*, XI II. 1.

sians 5:25f, that it should be cleansed in order to be holy; and he adds the outward marks, the Word and the Sacrament. For he says thus: Christ also loved the Church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of the water with the Word.²⁰

Luther:

That Christ added to the first phrase, he who believes and speaks of baptism involves the command of the external office in Christendom. He also combines both together in Matthew 28:10, "Teach all nations and baptize them...". And this shows first of all that the faith of which this Gospel speaks must not remain secret and hidden, as if it were enough that each one would return when he had heard the Gospel and believe for himself alone, and did not have the authority to confess his faith before others; but so that he might be revealed not only where the Gospel had been preached, but also be believed and received wherever the church and the kingdom of Christ exist in the world. He wants to bring us together and hold us through the divine sign of baptism. Then if we were without this and we were to be scattered without outward gatherings and signs, Christendom could not have spread nor have been preserved until the end. But now through such divine gatherings he wants to bind us together that the Gospel may always go further and farther and by our confession others might also be brought to it. Baptism is also a public testimony to the doctrine of the Gospel and our faith before all the world through which one can see where and in whom the Lord rules.²¹

Luther:

To promote and use such doctrine among Christians he has ordained that they should come together and hold to two ceremonies, that is baptism and the Sacrament of his body and blood: and this has been sufficiently revealed in the gospels and the epistles of St. Paul; so that such doctrine, faith, and grace may not only be received and daily increased but also so that it may be known publicly before the world, as with an action, who is a Christian and who is not and whether he will freely and fearlessly confess such doctrine and honor God and provide his neighbor with an encouraging example; as he himself says: 'Do this in memory of me.' (I Corinthians 11:24, 25) which is nothing other than publicly to remember, confess, praise and thank; as St. Paul interprets and says, 'Do this that you may proclaim the death of our Lord.' (I Corinthians 11:26) Than is all a part of that which we should do for God, namely preach his word and believe and receive the Sacraments as distinctive marks and confession. Hence it follows that the cross is over those who confess such doctrine.²²

Luther:

The Sacrament is a public confession, and should have public servants because

20 *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, VII/VIII.5-7.

21 From *Kirchenpostille: Uber das Evangelium am Tage der Himmelfahrt Christi*, Translated in *Sermons of Martin Luther*; 8 vols.. Edited and Translated by John Nicholas Lenker. et. al.. Vol. 3: *Sermons on Gospel Texts for Pentecost*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, p. 234.

22 St. Louis X, 2720.

thereby it happens, as Christ said, that one should do in remembrance of him; that is, as St. Paul says, to proclaim or preach the Lord's death until he comes.²³

Luther:

Although also under the papacy there have been such abuses that some have had partake in this home for individual masses, but for the sake of this instance and other reasons, I will and cannot judge. Then for a time someone could want to use it in this way so that the public church and gathering would be abandoned and deserted; even so it still should be a public and common confession.²⁴

Luther:

Now we shall speak of the proper manner of communicating the people... Here one should follow the same usage as with Baptism, namely, that the bishop be informed of those who want to commune. They should request in person to receive the Lord's supper so that he maybe able to know both their names and manner of life. And let him not admit the applicants unless they can give a reason for their faith, and can answer questions about what the Lord's Supper is, what its benefits are, and what they expect to derive from it... Those, therefore, who are not able to answer in the manner described above should be excluded and banished from the communion of the Supper since they are without the wedding garment (Matthew 22:11, 12).. For participation in the Supper is part of the confession by which they confess before God, angels, and men that they are Christians. Care must therefore be taken lest any, as it were, take the Supper on the sly and disappear in the crowd...²⁵

Luther:

Third, God's people, or Christian holy people, are recognized by the holy Sacrament of the altar, whenever it is rightly administered, believed, and received, according to Christ's institution This too is a public sign and a precious holy possession left behind by Christ by which his people are sanctified so that they also exercise themselves in faith and openly confess that they are Christian, just as they do with the word and with baptism.²⁶

John Gerhard lists among the purposes of the Holy Sacraments which do not belong to its major purpose:

That we testify that we consent to the doctrine which resounds in the particular church in which we, along with others, eat the same bread of holy communion and drink from one and the same cup, according to I Corinthians 10:17: 'There is one bread and so we many become one body in that we share in the one bread.'²⁷

23 *Briefe an Wolfgang Brauer vond der Hauscommunion*. St. Louis Ed., X, 2225.

24 *Bedenken, ob man das hochw. Sacrament beider Gestalt in geheim, zu House sich reichen moge lassen*, St. Louis Ed., X, 2226-2227.

25 *An Order of Mass and Communion*, AE 53:32-34.

26 *On the Councils and the Churches*, AE 41:152.

27 *Loci Theologici: Locus de s. coena*, 214.

Gerhard:

Just as the church is distinguished from worldly fellowships which are outside the church by the preaching of the word and the administration of the Sacraments, so it also distinguished itself through pure preaching and legitimate administration of the Sacraments from the sectarian fellowships which are within the church.²⁸

The theological faculty of the University of Leipzig writes in the year 1620:

So the Sacrament is also a distinguishing mark of the Christian Church. Then because we cannot acknowledge consistent Calvinists as righteous members of our church because of their unbelief; so also we cannot permit them to participate in the distinguishing marks of our church because there could not be a greater scandal than when religions are mixed together.²⁹

Then Christians should demonstrate that they are the Church and the people of God, not only through good works, but also and especially through the Holy Sacraments. The Sacraments should gather the Church and mark its members. A communicant comes forward as a preacher in that he confesses the true church to be there where he eats the Sacrament. The spokesman of the "Church Council" would also admit that Baptism and Holy Communion are the distinguishing marks of the orthodox church. This being the case it is a most grievous fraud and a deception in the name of God to impress the seal of orthodoxy upon those who believe differently, in that they are received at Holy Communion. In an attempt to justify themselves the spokesmen of the "Church Council" accuse us of treating those Christians who believe differently the same as those who are excommunicated and banned. But this charge is thoroughly false. We have often said and we say it now again, that there are still true Christians in heterodox churches. But they stand under a false banner and label. Now we cannot and will not give them the true spiritual banner until they also confess to it from their hearts with us. In fact, our opponents object that the Sacrament and even the mutilated Sacrament of the sects is to be a distinguishing mark of confession of Christianity generally over against the heathen, the Jews, and the Turks, and therefore Christians should very well cultivate communion fellowship among one another. But this is also in error. If the Sacrament is a mark of confession, as it is, then it is a mark of pure confession. If anyone comes to our altar we must first ask him: "Do you believe and confess what we Lutherans believe and confess?" And if someone would answer, "Whether the Lutheran or Reformed faith is correct I do not know and I will not judge." It should be known that he is either an unworthy hypocrite or an epicurean sceptic. We for our part know that we Lutherans alone have the correctly administered communion. But if we were to suppose that there might also be others, it would still always be valid that wherever anyone participates in Communion he thereby confesses as his own the doctrine which prevails there. Our Communion is our banner.³⁰ He who in his heart does not stand with us Lutherans should also not stand under this banner, and he who does this nevertheless we declare to be a traitor.

28 Ibid., 131.

29 *Dedekennus Thesaur.*, Vol. I, P.II, fol. 313.

30 *Unser Abendmahl ist unser Banner.*

THESIS VIII

Holy Communion was not instituted to make people Christians. It was instituted to strengthen the faith of those who already are true Christians. Therefore Communion should be administered to no one who has been revealed as a false Christian.

This is clearly asserted by this passage: “Anyone who eats the bread or drinks the Lord’s cup in an unworthy way is sinning against the Lord’s body and blood. Examine yourself and then eat some of the bread and drink from the cup. Anyone who eats and drinks without seeing that the body is there is condemned for his eating and drinking” I Corinthians 11:27-30.”

If the external use of Holy Communion itself were saving then it would not matter so much if one misuses it. But the Sacrament does not work *ex opera operata*, that is, for the sake of the mere performance of the act. Unbelieving mere so-called calendar goers are unworthy. Unworthy users bring down the judgment of God upon themselves, often, as already in Corinth, in all kinds of temporal punishments, “You can’t drink the Lord’s cup and the cup of devils. You can’t share the Lord’s table with the table of devils.” Certainly this is possible on a physical or bodily level, and unfortunately it happens all too often; but morally and spiritually it is impossible. Matthew 7:6 also applies here: “Don’t give anything holy to the dogs or throw your pearls to the pigs, or they’ll trample them under their feet and then turn and tear you to pieces.”

From this it follows that a preacher does not have the obligation to give Holy Communion to everyone. He should not administer it to heretics, to the heterodox, to openly fleshly people, but only to those of whom he cannot publicly prove unchristian behavior. Luther also writes about this.

Although indeed until now according to the old custom, everyone has been admitted to the Sacrament who comes to it; this should not continue from now on, but instead it should be established that he who would take the Sacrament should henceforth be asked what the Sacrament is and what it is he seeks there, and if he answer that.. he cannot do that then he would not be given the Sacrament.. The Sacrament also should not be cast out among people in their homes as has been done under the pope. If I preach the Gospel, I don’t know whom it strikes; but here I should have the opinion that it has struck those who come to the Sacrament; I must have no doubt but be certain that those to whom I give the Sacrament have laid hold of the Gospel and sincerely believe.³¹

Luther:

No one should be allowed to go to communion who has not been individually examined by his pastor to see if he is prepared to go to the holy Sacrament. For Paul says in I Corinthians 11:27 that they are guilty of profaning the body and blood of Christ who receive it unworthily. Not only do they who receive it unworthily dishonor the Sacrament, but also those who carelessly give it to the unworthy.³²

Dannhauer:

The teachers should do and go as far as he can. If they are not able to do more they should still prevent wicked sinners from coming to communion For whoever ad-

31 *A Sermon on the Reception of the Holy Sacrament*, Lenker, 2:230.

32 *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors*, AE 40-.296.

mits an obstinate sinner, for whose iniquity there is sufficient evidence, and gives him the pledge of the forgiveness of sins, sins against him in a threefold way with a false witness in which he takes part, with an increase of condemnation and with a betrayal of the body and blood of Christ.³³

George Koenig:

Can an acknowledged Papist or Calvinist be admitted to communion in good conscience by a minister of the Lutheran Church? Some believe that these certainly ought to be admitted for two basic reasons. First because the church and its spiritual blessings should be open to all and closed to no one. And here perhaps the word of Christ also applies: ‘Come to me...all you weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Matthew,” 11:28. Secondly, because the true and proper Sacraments are found in the Lutheran Church which they are missing in their own fellowships. However, in their desire to accomplish such a great blessing they reveal a foolish envy. But these are fables. We then put no one off of the way to the church and its blessings, but we do encourage this, that everyone follow the right way. If then a shaking reed seeks a street which is ridden with invisible barriers and proceeds in the wrong way, is it any wonder that they then wander about, lost in the open fields and can positively not find the door. The voice of Holy Scripture itself acknowledges: ‘Such people leave the right paths and walk along dark roads.’ Proverbs 2:13. Also Christ does not call everyone with no distinctions to himself, and does not promise the unworthy rest as well as the worthy, but those who are weary and heavy laden, that is, as it is interpreted by Theophylakt, those who are weary from the working of the law and heavy laden with the burden of their sins. These he calls to come to himself, not with their bodies but with their hearts, and if they do so he promises to them, and not to the others, his willing aid, namely spiritual and eternal rest. As regards the other reason we neither can nor want to deny that everyone receives the true supper from our people. Therefore, because we are the true church which correctly believes in the Sacrament of Holy Communion according to Christ’s institution, they also administer it according to Christ’s will in his place. It does not therefore follow that whoever knows where the true celebration of communion is should at once therefore be admitted to it. In this regard it is also important that he be a true member of the true church and wear the wedding garment. The guest of Matthew 22:11 is an example of this. This one desired the heavenly wedding, in fact he appeared at it, and what’s more, he took his place among the guests; nevertheless he was thrown out and in fact by his own fault because he lacked the wedding garment. Therefore also that one who does not wish to be refused admittance should previously provide himself with a wedding garment namely preparing himself through conversion and joining our church through a genuine recognition and confession of sin, through true trust in Christ and his servants, and therefore properly examining himself, etc. Then he will be accepted at this heavenly meal with joy as a person who hurries after the blessings of the church.’³⁴

In his famous work *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin himself writes:

33 *Catechismus-Milch.*, X, 489.

34 *Casus conscientiae*. Altdorf 1654, 592ff.

And here also we must preserve the order of the Lord's Supper that it may not be profaned by being administered indiscriminately. For it is very true that he to whom its distribution has been committed, if he knowingly and willingly admits an unworthy person whom he could rightfully turn away, is as guilty of sacrilege as if he had cast the Lord's body to the dogs.. .Therefore lest this most hallowed mystery be disgraced, discretion is very much needed in its distribution.³⁵

This indicates the continuing importance of personal announcement before Holy Communion in our churches. Those pastors who do not continue these announcements, practice shamefully, faithlessly, and unscrupulously and do not exercise the utmost care toward the salvation of the members of their congregations. The thought of the most holy body and blood of Christ being eaten by false Christians is even more dreadful than the thought of throwing them down into the mud! A false Christian is one who will not give up either false doctrine or a godless life. However, even one who still has love for Christ may not automatically receive Holy Communion in all circumstances. For example, Holy Communion should not be received in situations where offense has been given or taken and there has been no Christian reconciliation. In the same way those who believe differently should not receive Holy Communion as long as they have not renounced their error or their heterodox fellowship and in this way reconcile themselves with the orthodox church. If, however, one does not give the Sacrament to a Christian in this kind of individual situation one has not thereby excommunicated him but only suspended him. Someone may ask, if we suspend the Reformed from Lutheran Communion, how can we tolerate receiving a lodge brother to the same who has not yet decided to give up his evil association? We answer: The former is a sin in doctrine and the latter is a sin in life. That is a major distinction. Now we Lutherans who eat of this Holy Communion are all poor miserable sinners, but in doctrine we are pure in spite of the devil who wants us to wander off. We can admit a penitent fellow sinner with us, as in the case of a lodge brother, so long as he does not openly sin wantonly and does not intend his association to have any religious character—or as long as he does not participate in a single religious act of the lodge. But from the pure doctrine and confession, because it is God's, we can abandon nothing, not even one letter. He who does not hold to it with us totally and completely cannot go with us to Holy Communion as has been previously stated.

We would be sinning dreadfully if we held ourselves separate from all other fellowships only out of mere blind preference or taste. But this division and standing alone is the command of God and therefore necessary. We may not invite the heterodox as such into our fellowship as our opponents in the "Church Council" have done and want to justify. For thereby they have become guilty of a severe sin. And we for our part will endure our standing alone as a cross inseparably united with the slanders of our enemies and the unjustified accusations of our erring fellow Christians. We are all the more encouraged by this as by faith we remember the high and holy goal which God has revealed to us in His Word for the divisions of His New Testament church before the world. God in His merciful love has given the world a great host of preachers and living witnesses to Christ in the church. They should work in the world as a saving leaven. They should be heralds who through their faithful holding fast to a pure confession, through their listening to preaching and going to communion, are calling out to the world, as it were, "Come also with us! Believe as we believe! Be reconciled as we are and therefore take part also in the guarantee of your reconciliation as we do!" And certainly more of God's pleasure and blessing rests upon this decreed and enduring witness and preaching of the church than on all experiments in church politics and unscriptural unionism. What would have happened to the Lutheran Church in America without the orthodox Lutheran synods? If 25 or 30 years ago a few

35 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.xii.5.

Lutherans had sat in the corner with their faith there would hardly be an orthodox Lutheran Church in our land today. But there are now thousands upon thousands of Lutherans here who have come to life in Christ, who circulate confessionally faithful church publications, and who have founded Lutheran Church institutions for education and charity which are now in full bloom. Our gracious God had accomplished all these through the faithful witness to and confession of the truth from the mouths of orthodox Lutheran Christians. And if this is already the fruit in so small an ecclesiastical circle such as ours, how richer could it be in the greater church at large. This is also the blessing of the church coming together and its separation from the world. And furthermore, just as our Lord Christ at one time for eternity separated us from the fellowship of the ungodly so must we already here be separated from the world.

THESIS IX

In Holy Communion the Body and Blood of Christ is actually present, distributed and received by every communicant. Therefore Communion can not be administered to anyone who does not confess a belief in this mystery without grievous sin.

I Corinthians 11:29 says, “Anyone who eats and drinks without seeing that the body is there is condemned for his eating and drinking.” “Think of us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (I Corinthians 4:1). Accordingly pastors are not only distributors of the divine mysteries of grace but also their stewards. God, the heavenly landlord, has bound them to definite instructions according to which they are to administer his mysteries, as treasures entrusted to the Church. And from this flow the shepherds’ responsibilities for the administration of the Holy Sacrament which have already been mentioned in our thesis and the earlier theses and their explanations. In this regard let us now hear our public confessions and the voice of our fathers.

In his “Questions for those who wish to go to the Sacrament” (Number 13) Luther poses the question: “Do you believe the true body and blood of Christ to be present in the Sacrament?”, and instructs that the response be, “Yes, I believe it.”

Luther:

For it is not our intention to admit to it and to administer it to those who know not what they seek or why they come.³⁶

Augsburg Confession:

Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the mass. But it is obvious without boasting that the mass is celebrated among us with more devotion and seriousness than by our opponents. And so our people are frequently instructed on the Holy Sacrament with the utmost diligence as to how it was established and is to be used.. .And in that regard there is also instruction against other impure doctrines on the Sacrament.³⁷

Luther:

It is very well true that where preachers administer mere bread and wine as the Sacrament there is no more concern about to whom it is administered; or what they understand or believe; or how they perceive it.. .But we intend to educate Christians and to leave some behind us; for in the Sacrament we administer the body and blood of Christ. We cannot and will not give such a Sacrament to anyone who has not been previously examined as to what he has learned from the Catechism and whether he is willing to abandon the sins which he has done to the contrary.³⁸

³⁶ *Large Catechism*, V.2.

³⁷ *Augsburg Confession* XXIV, 64.

³⁸ *Warnungsschrift an die zu Franfut a. M., sich vor Zwinglischer Lehre und Lehrern zu Hutten*, St. Louis, XVII, 2018.

THESIS X

Holy Communion is a mark of confession of Faith and Doctrine among those who celebrate together. Therefore the admission of members of heterodox fellowships to the celebration of communion within the Lutheran Church is in conflict with: 1. Christ's institution; 2. The commanded unity of the church in faith and accordingly in confession; 3. Our love for those to whom the Sacrament is administered; 4. Our love for our own fellow believers, especially the weak who by this action would be given serious offense; and 5. The command not to become participants in the sin and error of others.

The premise of this thesis has already been demonstrated in thesis seven. Therefore only the conclusions cited on the basis of the thesis still remain to be proven. And so, first of all, we give an account of number one. "Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup you are telling how the Lord died until he comes" I Corinthians 11:26.

The holy apostle explains herewith the solemn words of institution themselves which the Lord quoted twice. ("Do this to remember me." vs. 24,25) The entire doctrine of the redemption won through the blood and death of Christ is included in this "telling how the Lord died." Therefore in that anyone eats of Holy Communion he is confessing for himself the whole doctrine which is false. Only Lutherans confess the one pure doctrine. It is impossible for anyone to go to Communion with a person like this without grievous sin against the testament of Christ. Listen to Hulsemann on this topic.

There is controversy between us and the Socinians, Arminians, and some of the Calvinists as to whether the outward purpose of Holy Communion consists only in this, to distinguish all those who are called Christians from the heathen (this is what Osterodt in his catechism and the Arminians in their Apology assert); or to distinguish from idolaters all those who actually agree with the foundation of the Christian religion but are mutually separated from one another on their articles by an outward division. This is what the new unionists among the Calvinists (G. Hotton, Moses Anniwald, and Thomas Morton) teach. Our conviction is this: according to the institution of its founder no one is to be admitted to communion fellowship who has been separated from the household by an open confession of faith or by entrance into another, evidently schismatic house, for if he were to be admitted to communion fellowship he would still be considered orthodox and would desire to participate in this table with them. We prove this our position from the institution itself and in the following ways. (1) That external goal which the founder has bound together with Communion fellowship is not to be separated from Communion fellowship. Now the founder has bound this outward purpose with communion fellowship that the communicants by their joining together become one spiritual body and testify that through this fellowship they are one mystical body. Also this purpose is not to be separated from communion fellowship. This conclusion is proven by I Corinthians 10:17, 18: 'There is one bread and so we many are one body because all of us share that one bread. See how the Jews do it. Don't those who share the sacrifices share the altar?' But now, those who confess various contrasting articles of faith through various contrasting public confessions in various contrasting groups are not one mystical body. Also then according to the institution of the founder they may not receive part of the one mystical bread. (2) The understanding among all people, the Jews as well as the heathen, that eating from the sacrifices of the Jews or the heathen had the same meaning as eating, the bread of Holy Communion. This is according to verses 18 and 21: 'Don't those who eat the sacrifice share the altar?... You can't

drink the Lords' cup and the cup of devils. You can't share the Lords' table and the table of devils.' Now all people, the Jews as well as the heathen, held that this was the significance of the eating of the sacrifice that those who ate together were to be considered as fellow members of that particular religion, whose members could be distinguished by their sacrificing at this or that altar. The eating of the bread of communion has the same significance according to its institution, namely that those who eat of this bread are fellow members of the same faith. Therefore, on the other hand, those who are not members of the same faith should not receive one and the same communion bread. (3) It is not permitted to do that which the founder has forbidden. Now the Founder has forbidden that those who confess the faith at various altars should take part in one and the same communion bread. It is then also not permitted for us to do this. This conclusion is proven by verse 21: 'You can't drink the Lord's cup and the cup of devils. You can't share the Lord's table and the table of devils.' We here understand 'you can't' in a moral sense as 'you may not' As the legal maxim says: 'One can do that which one may do in an honorable way; that which one can do rightly.' The Calvinist interpreters themselves also acknowledge that in the New Testament the term 'can't' may very often be taken as 'impermissible' or 'improper' as in Matthew 9:15: 'Can the Bridegrooms friends mourn while the bridegroom is with them?'³⁹

For the past two hundred years the enemies of a correct doctrine and practice on Communion have asserted that the use of the Sacrament should distinguish Christians from the heathen, not the orthodox from the heterodox. But that is false. All unbelief and all false doctrine is a part of heathenism. Communion fellowship with all those who believe differently is forbidden in the institution of Christ. We do not consider the Reformed orthodox and they do not consider us orthodox. Therefore it is a crass contradiction and vile mockery of the institution of Christ if both parts celebrate one Communion in fellowship with one another. Communion is also a sacrificial meal. Christ, offered for us once on the cross, would here be eaten by us. This was prefigured in the Levitical sacrifices which were not totally burned but in part also were to be eaten and in fact also to this end that those who ate also by this action declared themselves to be participants of the same holy religion and congregation.

The theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg wrote the following in 1656 in response to a question as to whether Calvinists ought to be admitted to Holy Communion:

Because this Sacrament is a public witness and confession of the Church, of the faith, doctrine, and religion which an individual confesses, and also holds to be the immutable truth; so the Sacrament is also to be used so that faith may be increased; the faith which believes in the promises that are given in the Sacrament, as Article XIII of the Augsburg Confession reminds us. Such a faith, however, one does not find among those who cannot believe in Christ's words of institution and promise in regard to the oral eating and physical presence. Paul says in I Corinthians 10:17, 'All of us are one body because there is one bread and all of us share that one bread.' But now the kind of Calvinists that we have described are not one body with our church; therefore they do not also belong to the eating of the bread and Holy Communion. If we are not to take those who do not bring the doctrine of Christ into our homes nor greet them, according to St. John's reminder (II John 10-11), so that we do not therefore become participants in the evil things they do, much less can we admit one to Holy Communion who cannot believe in the oral eating and physical

39 *Vindiciae S. Scripturae etc. Lips.* 1679, 660.

presence which Christ has instituted and promised.⁴⁰

George Koenig:

If David did not allow false people in his house (Psalm 101:7) how should a minister in the house of God, which the true church is, allow those, and receive as guests at the heavenly banquet, those who deal falsely in their works and with shameless impudence are as easily inclined to the true and to the false church. Others are inclined to act as Elijah the Tishbite once did. This one, clad in heroism, did not flee from his concern for religion, but openly stepping forth among the people he said, 'How long halt ye between two opinions?' So namely that they practiced diverse divine services and wanted partially to serve both God and Baal. God wants nothing to do with the kind of mixed religion which desires to be a third thing from the combination of the pure and the corrupt. 'If the Lord is God then turn to him' that is if the divine worship prescribed by God through Moses is the true divine worship then they should satisfy him through this alone: 'But if Baal then turn to him.' that is but if they believe the worship of Baal to be true, why do they hesitate to practice Baal worship alone and totally abandon the Mosaic worship of God with all of its holy places and ceremonies? (II Corinthians 18:21). It is undoubtedly certain that God demands not only a part of divine worship but all of it without exception, and those who want to worship him partially through true and partially through false religion neither worship God properly nor hold to the true religion. Every altar on which Holy Communion will be celebrated should have the following dictum inscribed on it:

Cui non mens eadem, cui non confessio simplex,
Hanc mensam vetitam novent esse sibi.

That is, 'those who do not have one and the same faith and confession let them know that this table is forbidden to them.'⁴¹

A rumor once circulated that Count Frederick of Wurtemberg and Mopelgarten permitted French Reformed refugees to participate in a Lutheran communion. The Count clarified the matter with the following denial.

By God's grace we have attained such knowledge of spiritual things in regard to the salvation of our souls that we know well that among many other purposes our Lord's Communion was established for this purpose that as with a battle flag or brand it can be recognized to which faith an individual belongs. Then he who takes part in Communion with a particular church, which presently exists, no matter what it is called, therefore gives it to be understood that he is also a follower of the doctrine of that church. Thus Communion should not be held with those who follow another doctrine but we should openly separate ourselves from them... Therefore we have always held, and still do, that the reception of the Lord's Holy Communion should not be trifled with in that a person would be willing to confess one doctrine by a public reception of the Sacrament while holding to another doctrine in his

⁴⁰ *Consilia Witteberg*, II, 131.

⁴¹ *Casus consc.*, p. 594ff.

heart.⁴²

In support of number two we cite I Corinthians 1:10 and Ephesians 4:3-? (cf. the explanation of Thesis I for comment on both texts). First of all, unity in the faith is also demonstrated in Holy Communion. Secondly the church should be one in faith and doctrine. From those it follows that only those who confess the pure doctrine with us may be admitted to Holy Communion. He who communes with us Lutherans gives the public appearance that he belongs to our household. But are we not misrepresenting the unity of our church if we were to allow a Reformed to display this certificate of citizenship and domicile? Who in our own country would confer citizenship on an immigrant who still declared himself to be a subject of the King of Prussia or some other monarch? Truly a preacher who is willing to admit people who believe whatever they choose to Communion is treacherous, deceptive, and yes even devilish. How Luther, that true man of God, would be amazed if he could see what goes on in the Lutheran Church today! In his own time he wrote:

The significance or effect of this Sacrament is fellowship of all the saints. From this it derives its common name 'synaxis' (Greek) or 'communicare' (commune or communicate), or, as we say in German, 'zum Sacrament gehen' (go to the Sacrament), means to take part in this fellowship. Hence it is that Christ and all the saints are one spiritual body... On the other hand, 'excommunicare*' (excommunicate) means to put out of the community and to sever a member from this body... To receive the Sacrament in bread and wine then is nothing else than to receive a sure sign of this fellowship and incorporation with Christ and all the saints. It is as if a citizen were given a sign, a document, or some other token, to assure him that he is a citizen of the city, a member of that particular community. St. Paul says this very thing in I Corinthians 10:17, 'We are all one bread and one body, for we all partake of one bread and of one cup.'⁴³

If we were to allow ourselves to take such unity then we would have to consent to both parts, namely that where our people would perhaps come to them and desire to receive the Sacrament, or, on the other hand, their people would come to us, and this would involve the intolerable error, that our people would receive mere bread and wine and still believe that it was the body and blood of Christ and their people with us would receive the body and blood of Christ and still believe that it was mere bread and wine, and the outrage much more.⁴⁴

And, in summary, I come to this matter. It is horrible for me to hear that in some churches or at some altars both parts may get and receive the same Sacrament and one part believes that they are receiving the true body and blood of Christ. And I often wonder whether it can be believed that such a preacher or pastor could be so impenitent and spiteful, and in addition to this be silent, and allow both parts to come in, each in their own delusion, that they are receiving one and the same Sacrament, each according to their own belief. If perhaps there is such a one he must have a heart that is harder than any stone, or steel, or even a diamond, who must certainly be an apostle of wrath. Then Turks and Jews are much better for they openly confess that they deny our Sacrament and we therefore remain separate

42 *Colluquium Mopergartensae*, translated from Latin into German, Tübingen: 1587, Preface, ii.

43 *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhood*, AE 35:50-51.

44 *Schrift wider Koenig Heinrich in England*. St. Louis, XIX, p. 430.

from them and do not fall into apostasy. But these comrades must be the true high arch devils, who give to me mere bread and wine and allow me to consider it the body and blood of Christ, and so I am wretchedly cheated. That would be too devilish and too difficult; then God will shortly break all that in pieces. Therefore he who has such a preacher, or who would be inclined to excuse such a thing, let him be warned this as against the devil incarnate himself.⁴⁵

Of course some of our opponents object that a Lutheran certainly cannot go to Communion with a Zwinglian but he can very well do so with a Calvinist because they still teach that the body of Christ is present in the in the Sacrament, although only spiritually. But this pretext is invalid because the Calvinists are deceptive with their confessions. If the body of Christ is in Communion only spiritually it is really not there at all. One should not rely on the fine sounding words of the Calvinists because, especially in reference to the doctrine of Communion, they use their words to disguise their beliefs and conceal their errors. With such people, through questions like; “Is the body of Christ in Communion?”, “Is he truly present?”, “Is he essentially present?”—the fox, as Luther said, has not yet appeared. They will respond to all of them with “yes” but they will always mean only a spiritual body of Christ. Therefore one must go further and ask whether also Judas and all the godless receive the true body of Christ orally. That they will deny and will recoil from it with the greatest horror. And in this way they prove that they make the presence of the body of Christ in the Holy Sacrament dependent of faith and deny the presence of the true body of Christ. But it is wicked and as hypocritical as perjury that the men of the “Church Council”, who still subscribe to the confessions which included the indicated words of Luther, will nonetheless admit those who believe differently to the Sacrament. Although their consciences may take comfort in the position of the Iowa Synod that by subscription to the symbols one does not subscribe to everything, not to the incidentals.

Moreover it should be noted that the church, through holy communion, is divided not only from heretics and errorists, but also from so-called schismatics. A schismatic is particularly one who would separate from the church—not because of a fundamental article—but because of teaching or certain adiaphora. In the same way this kind of person may not be admitted to the Sacrament. Halsemann also certifies this:

The fourth proof is taken from the established practice of the church that fellowship which from the beginning of the church has distinguished heretics and schismatics from the orthodox and pure believers has not been abolished. But from the beginning of the church communion fellowship has distinguished heretics and schismatics from the orthodox and pure believers so that under the punishment of the ban it was not allowed to admit an open schismatic to communion fellowship if he persisted in his separation. The Magdeburg Centuries demonstrates this with great unanimity from Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian—Racius in his catalogue, from the letter of Ignatius to the Smyrneans, Augustine from the practice of his time in the second book of *On Christian Doctrine*, and Chrysostom in his 28th sermon from Matthew, chapter 26, among others.⁴⁶

Our doctrine and practice in regard to communion fellowship is that of the apostolic church until the time of St. Ignatius.⁴⁷ And even today in this regard all other churches teach as we do

45 *Warnungsschrift an die zu Frankfurt*, St. Louis, XVII, p. 2446.

46 *Vindicia, etc.* p. 660.

47 For further evidence on this point see W. Elert's *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, translated by Norman Nagel, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966.

with the single exception of the Congregationalist, who unfortunately the defenders of the “Church Council” compare themselves. The former declare in the conclusion of their confession:

The members of churches which have been gathered and converted according to Christ’s will, and may be regarded as true churches, although they are less pure, may on occasion be received into fellowship if they have the faith-worthy marks of piety and lead a life without scandal.⁴⁸

And finally as regards the member of secret societies—the Freemasons, the Oddfellows the Druids, and whatever other titles they may confer upon themselves—we repeat, that we in reference to their reception at our communion make a distinction between those who remain in this bulwark of the devil stubbornly and against better conviction, and those who stay in such an order” or “lodge” to pursue some religious tendency, or who also participate in one or more of the religious acts within the lodge on the one hand, and those for who neither one nor the other of the situations described applies; while we would hold the former far from our altar like other impenitents or heterodox, the latter, however as weak and erring in life, we cannot refuse communion fellowship with us. This proper principle can only find its correct use where one has analyzed and considered the individual situation in the light of the manifold forms and colors of the secret societies here in this land. Now we continue to the proof for number 3.

We cite here Leviticus 19:17: “Don’t hate another Israelite in your heart. Correct him so that you will not be guilty of a sin on account of him.” This is a noteworthy text. Reprimanding is so often presented as lovelessness, but unjustly as we hear here. If you do not love someone you will not reprimand him. To warn your fellowman away from a false or destructive way is certainly true love. A Reformed, for example, follows such a way if he desires our communion. He does not believe in this most holy mystery. Therefore, he is unworthy to eat it. An unworthy participant eats and drinks judgment unto himself as I Corinthians 11:29 proves (cf. Thesis 8). To refuse admittance to a Reformed to our Communion table is certainly a work of true love, and woe to those who will not perform it. Thus saith the Lord: “When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ but you don’t say anything to warn him to give up his wickedness to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for him.”

Luther:

For you people can easily understand that if unity were established between us some of your people would commune in our congregations. Those who would commune with a different faith and with a different attitude of conscience would necessarily on both sides receive something different than that which they believe they are receiving. Thus it would be unavoidable that through the ministry of the Sacrament and our consciences either our faith would be made a mockery through hidden deceit and lies if the communicants were unaware of this difference, or, if they were aware of the difference, then their faith would be destroyed through a public sacrilege. You can see how devout and Christian this would be. For this reason let us select rather the lesser of two evils, if one of the two must be endured at all. Let us also rather put up with this smaller disagreement, together with a limited peace.⁴⁹

48 *Declaratio Fidei atque ordinis ecclesiarum congregationalium*. 1658. cf. J. Hoornbeek, *De Independentismo Ultrajecti* 1661, p. 443.

49 *A Letter to Martin Bucer*, AE 50:8–9.

George Dedekenn:

As little as an orthodox Christian who confesses Luther's doctrine with mouth and heart can desire communion with a clear conscience from a Zwinglian and suspicious teacher; (according to Luther's advice one would withdraw from such throughout his life), just as little can also a Reformed who understands the word and is properly serious about his religion even desire our communion without the highest burden on his conscience.⁵⁰

George König:

If a Calvinist wants a Lutheran preacher to give him communion whether he is a layman or a pastor, is either informed or uninformed. If he is uninformed he is perhaps unaware of the distinction which exists between us and the Calvinists on this part of doctrine, particularly because such an action would also give the appearance, as they teach, that the body and blood of Christ is truly present in the Sacrament. Therefore one must guard with the greatest diligence that the does not admit anyone to communion who does not understand the matter and is still filled up with his error. Much more he must previously be clearly taught how far apart from one another we are in this part of doctrine and clearly instructed as to why one part cannot commune with the other; namely, because also among other purposes the Lord's Supper also has this to be a mark and a sign of the religion which an individual confesses. Then he who takes part in the fellowship of their Sacrament within a particular church in this way publicly confesses that he accepts the doctrine of the church and rejects that which is contrary, and that he will follow this way separated from the others. It is therefore important that he first accepts our confession, reject Calvinism as erring, and therefore separate himself from it, if he desires to participate in our communion.⁵¹

These texts belong to number 4: Romans 14:1, 15: "Welcome a man who is weak in his faith and not just to argue about different opinions.. .But if what you eat hurts your fellow Christian, you are not living according to love anymore. By what you eat don't ruin him for whom Christ died." Matthew 18:6: "If anyone leads into sins one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a big millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the lake where it's deep."

In the year 1568 the theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg gave the following as the first reason why a persistent Calvinist may not be admitted to communion in a Lutheran Church:

First of all, it is undoubtedly true that this command binds all men, but especially ministers and pastors: 'Don't share in the sins of others.' Now it is certain, and will be forever maintained throughout our church, that the belief of the Sacramentarians is a severe and most criminal error and sin from many sources which are unnecessary to mention. Then here again it is certain and undoubtable that such people with this belief and error are finally and irretrievably burdened, and bewitched, as it

⁵⁰ *Thesaur.* 1:2.316.

⁵¹ *Casus consc.*, p. 597.

were; so the minister and pastor cannot allow them to communion and the eating of the Sacrament without sin and burdening his conscience. And how without a doubt all the Sacramentarians would allow no one who was attached and related to the confession and faith of our church to come to their communion for the same reasons. Also pious and reasonable ministers or pastors cannot without noticeable impiety and burdening of their consciences, receive other people who through unbelief and a false understanding of communion's words of institution, which are so clear and bright, are exactly where they want to be, sinning against God and the Lord Christ, musing and dreaming. Then those eat and drink communion to judgment and according to the words of St. Paul, become guilty of the body and blood of Christ who eat it unworthily; how much more must those become participants in also the same judgment and severe sins who administer it to them, knowing of the unbelieving and perverted convictions and therefore the judgment and guilt which will follow and burden their consciences.⁵²

Luther:

They desired from us the brotherhood which we had refused them in Marburg and could not accept. For if we had received them as brothers and sisters we would also have had to consent to their doctrine. Although they did not gladly accept this refusal they asserted that one should nurture love over against them until God brings us together again, because we should also love our enemies. Now whoever wants to construe this badly, let him do so."⁵³

And finally, George Dedekenn:

And the second reason why Lutherans do not admit Calvinists to Communion is the office and the character of a faithful preacher. Because (1) the Sacraments are not only the preachers' but gifts to the whole church. On account of which he must not administer them according to his own pleasure, but because the Sacrament are a common treasure of the whole church, so also these must in every way have knowledge about who takes part with them in the unity of the Sacrament and who does not. (2) Moreover, we preachers are only stewards of the mysteries of God. Now nothing more is required of a steward than that he be found faithful. This faithfulness does not only involve his teaching office in proclaiming the divine truth and reproving the errorists, but also the administration of the Sacraments, that he therein uses good caution and discretion, and does not allow everyone without distinction, but taking heed over the whole flock, and distinguishing between the pure and the impure, and holy and the unholy. Therefore he should not make himself responsible as regards administration for various people, for giving the Sacrament merely on his own responsibility. To such a degree one would be either papist or photinian. Also those whom one knows to be willfully receiving it to judgment can justly be refused since one is not allowed to joke with divine things. And a preacher is appointed to the end that he will be on his guard, and should watch and warn against

52 *Dedekennus, Thesaurus*, I:1.309ff.

53 *Erzahlung von der Canzel, seine Reise gen Marburg und das Gespräch, daselbst mit den Sacramentirem gehalten, belangend in Auslegung des 5 B. Mose III*, St. Louis, 2617

eternal shame so that he may not have to give an account with a heavy conscience for the lives he neglected.⁵⁴

Our tenth thesis is also directed against the union, that grave of the Lutheran Church, and specifically also against its adherents and defenders within our church. It is directed against unionistic, syncretistic preachers. We label them all as shameful, unscrupulous belly-servers, who abandon the consciences of their Communion guests, whether and what they believe in and confess on the Sacrament, falsely calling thereby the words, “Let a man then examine himself,” etc., as if this text applied only to the laymen but not, also, to the preacher.* “Then let everyone think of us as ... stewards of God’s mysteries. Now then nothing more is demanded of a steward but that he be found faithful.” (I Corinthians 4:1).

⁵⁴ *Thesaurus*, 1:11:315.

* This wording has been adopted as a clarification to the original translation by permission of the translator. It is more in keeping with the sense of the argument than either what was originally in the translation or in the revision published in the collection *Essays for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 225, Concordia Publishing House, ©1992.

THESIS XI

We do not place members of heterodox fellowships under excommunication or declare them to be heretics or damned by our refusal to allow them to participate in the celebration of communion within the fellowship of the Lutheran Church. Instead, they are merely suspended until such time as by their separation from the false fellowship they are reconciled with the orthodox church.

This is a plausible and powerful charge by our opponents against our doctrine and practice on communion. They say, “How can you be so bold as to excommunicate a child of God from another church through your rejection of him at your communion? You declare him to be heretical and cut off from the body of Christ! Jesus himself would be astonished!” That sounds horrible, and if it were true it would truly be horrible. But this accusation is nothing more than an empty, hollow, false alarm. For, as has already been mentioned above, we do not place those Lutheran Christians under the ban (be he the offended or the offending party) if we, according to Christ’s own words, separate them from holy communion as long as he has not been reconciled with his neighbor. Matthew 5:23, 24: “So if you’re bringing your gift to the altar and remember there that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go. First make up with your brother and then come and offer your gift.” Luke 17:3: “Watch yourselves. If your brother sins correct him, and if he’s sorry forgive him.”

Although he could very well be worthy to receive the Sacrament throughout. Just as little do we excommunicate, disown, declare as heretics, or condemn those Christians erring in faith if we say to them, “We would be glad to allow you to come to holy communion with us. But there is still a barrier in the way. That is the sin of your error in doctrine which you have not recognized up to now. This you must acknowledge and abandon first and become a member of the orthodox church. Then you will be a dear, welcome guest at communion to us.” It is, of course, an entirely different matter with openly impenitent sinner, mockers, and obstinate errorists. We call only the latter heretics. Such people, by the explicit command of Christ, are to be excommunicated. And in this matter we also agree with our orthodox fathers.

The theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg wrote in an opinion in the year 1638:

It is indeed a clear distinction between ‘indignitate intrinseca’ (inner unworthiness) which originates in unrecognized moral sin, and ‘indignitate extrinseca’ or ‘accidentali’ (outward or incidental unworthiness) as is offense against the neighbor, which the penitent frequently does not know.⁵⁵

Luther:

With God as my witness! I would, if it were possible, buy off this disunity with my own body and blood (if I also had more than one body.) But how shall I deal with them? They have perhaps in good conscience been captivated by another understanding. Therefore I will gladly patiently bear with them. But if they wish to remain with their conviction on the presence of the body of Christ with the bread and would ask that we still bear patiently with one another, so I would very happily be patient in the hope that we shortly might come into one fellowship.⁵⁶

55 *Consel. Witebergens*, II:128

56 *Rathschlag und Bedenken über die von den Zwinglianern gesuchte Veraenegung*, XVII, 2489.

St. Augustine:

In fact the apostle Paul has said, ‘A heretic warn once and a second time and then avoid him...he is a sinner who has condemned himself. But those who maintain their own opinion however false and perverted, without obstinate ill will, especially those who have not originated their own error by bold presumption but received it from parents who had been led astray and had lapsed; those who seek truth with careful industry, ready to be corrected when they have found it, are not to be rated among heretics. If I did not believe that they (the Donatists) were such, I would have indeed sent no letter to you. Yes, we are not opposed to seeking the improvement of the heretic himself in every possible way, who has been blown up in hateful arrogance, and rages in stubborn contentiousness; but we are moreover admonished to avoid this kind of person so that he will not lead the weak and the children astray.’⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Ep.162.*

THESIS XII

The heterodox themselves regard and declare it improper for them to commune with those who are orthodox. Would it not then be disgraceful/or those who are last in regard to Christ's own institution and administration of the Sacrament to expose those who have been first?

So the Reformed, for example, have often forbidden their own members to receive Holy Communion with us. The Reformed in Zurich, in the year 1539, forbade those studying at the University of Strasbourg to go to communion, and in order to justify themselves wrote to the Strasbourg Church Council:

Those who practice fellowship with us through the Sacrament, confess through that fellowship that they share with us a common faith in the Sacrament; but our youth do not now have the same faith with you.⁵⁸

Calvin:

If you ask my advice, as to whether you are allowed to take the Holy Communion of Christ from the hands of those who consider us to be heretical, because we deny that the flesh of Christ is torn apart by the teeth: I perceive full well that it gives a bad example if anyone were to refrain from Holy Communion. Nevertheless it would be granting an improper, yes a hypocritical pretense (a false and absurd dream), through the reception of the symbol of unity which, even if only implied, subverts the foundation of the faith through pernicious delusion. A clear and public confession of the doctrine under consideration goes out. I therefore consider it best that you clearly and openly witness that you will refrain from your duty to participate in the Sacrament because you will not abandon the pure and proper doctrine of Christ.⁵⁹

Also in the Wittenberg Conference it said:

Herewith our evangelical theologians and preachers certainly agree, thus far, that according to their belief such a preacher must be either a hypocrite or a crypto-Calvinist who would knowingly admit Calvinists to our Supper. It is also the case that one of the Calvinists, named Zacharias Ursinus, in his letter to Andraeas Dudithius in which he deals with unity or fellowship between the orthodox and the erring, specifically advises that no Calvinist can in good conscience go to the Supper with the Lutherans. The Calvinists themselves with their consciences, which fundamentally reject our doctrine, witness that they should not desire to use the Supper with us Lutherans. But how much less could a Lutheran preacher in good conscience administer the holy Supper to the Calvinists? Then although there are also some to be found among the Calvinists who are of the conviction that the articles still in contention between us and them are not those upon which the foundation of salvation depends, there is nevertheless no one among all the honest evangelical preachers who agrees with them in this matter. Yes, everyone who really has the advancement of the glory of God and our Savior in his heart is responsible to disabuse all those who have been falsely persuaded of this of their error. For this it should be

58 Loscherr's *Historia Motuum zwischen den Ev. Lutherischen und Reformerten*, 1:254.

59 *Epistol. et respons.*, editio secunda. Lausannae, 1576, Ep. 292., p. 478.

very evident that in no way could a Calvinist be immediately admitted to holy communion with us if he were willing to comply with our ceremonies and usages. As for example, if he would not perhaps be offended by our round hosts and not insist upon the breaking of the bread. Meanwhile, these on account of the erring doctrine of the Calvinists in which they take part are rightfully to be excluded from the fellowship of our church. In no way, only because of the fact that they are willing to consent to our ceremonies, can they be admitted and accepted again. Also the mere use and acceptance of such adiaphora cannot make them immediately fit for or worthy of this action, which their unbelief in the most important chief articles of faith and the resulting division and separation of inner spiritual unity has already made them objectionable and unworthy. Now to admit those whom we have described would prove them to be nothing other than hypocrites and lukewarm Christians in religion who consider the points remaining in conflict between us and the Reformed to be of poor basis and worth ... When Henry Alting, a Calvinist doctor from Heidelberg and Groningen, diligently investigated whether a Reformed could in good conscience go to the Holy Supper with Lutherans, he specifically required this, that in cases where one would answer yes to this question, a clear and specific confession of the pure doctrine (which he as a Calvinist also called his own doctrine) should come first from the preachers from whose hands one would be receiving the Holy Supper as well as from the others (*Problematica theologica* II 10, 11). And therefore Alting was very doubtful whether this could happen for everyone (even then) without burdening consciences. For how could Lutheran preachers be responsible to their own consciences when they did not require such a confession from their own penitents, especially when they know full well that those who would come to the Holy Supper are not the same doctrine with us, and also would deliberately be allowed to come without inquiry or examination. They would thereby indicate with such an unscrupulous and questionable admission sufficiently and openly that they are anything but sincere Lutherans.

But what should we really call such people? Without a doubt open hypocrites, syncretists, and Samaritans who hold as much to one religion as to another. The early Christians were accustomed to close the doors of the church whenever the Holy Supper was held, so that no one could come in who was a part of another foreign religion; how much less then would they have knowingly and deliberately admitted such people who have belittled this great divine mystery and condemned those within the Christian church who believe this high mystery properly and well? They were not such hypocrites.

THESIS XIII

The more unionism and syncretism is the sin and corruption of our time, the more the loyalty of the orthodox church now demands that the Lord's Supper not be misused as a means of external union without internal unity of faith.

The holy prophet Jeremiah called to faithless Israel: "Go over to the coasts of Cyprus and see, and send to Kedar and examine carefully. See if there has been anything like this: Has a nation ever changed its gods? And they are not even gods? Yet my people have given up their Glory for something that can't help them! Let this amaze you heavens, shudder and wither away, says the Lord," Jer. 2:10-12.

If the blind heathen themselves will not change their false religion, is it not truly terrible if this would happen to Christians today if they, as it clearly happens at the communion practice of the unionists, were to unite the truth of the Christian religion with the lie, and would justify this as much as that within the church. We for our part, would hold fast to that which the Formula of Concord says over against this unionistic abomination:

Namely, when under the title and pretext of external adiaphora such things are proposed as are in principle contrary to God's Word (although painted another color), these are not to be regarded as adiaphora but must be avoided as things prohibited by God. In like manner, too, such ceremonies should not be reckoned among the genuine free adiaphora, or matters of indifference, as make a show or feign the appearance, as though our religion and that of the papists (or the Calvinists)⁶⁰ were not far apart, or that at least the latter were not highly offensive to us; or when such ceremonies are designed for the purpose, and required and received in this sense as though by and through them both contrary religions were reconciled and become one body ... We believe, teach, and confess also that at the time of confession, when the enemies of God's Word desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel, the entire congregation of God, yes, every Christian, but especially the ministers of the Word, as the leaders of the congregation of God, are bound by God's Word to confess freely and openly the doctrine and what belongs to the whole religion, not only in words but also with works and with deeds.⁶¹

J. C. Daunhauer encourages us to this confessional faithfulness and vigilance against the evil foe. He writes:

Sleepy security is the mother of carelessness. If one would therefore be on his guard against this enemy there is nothing more evil about which one could be concerned. Quintus Curtius has correctly said, 'No one can despise his enemy without danger, for if one is not careful his enemy is strengthened through his own carelessness.' Through exactly this carelessness the anti-christ was firstborn, and while the

⁶⁰ Editor's note: Walther, quoting the FC provides a fascinating gloss with his little addition, *oder Calvinischen*, "or Calvinists." In our American environment, the Lutheran church faces a far greater danger from a generalized "Protestantism," with roots in Calvinism and Reformed theology, than it does from the the type of Romanism against which FC X was written. It is obvious from the Walther gloss that he too recognized this danger. American Lutheran churches which embrace Calvinistic or Reformed forms of worship or polity or practice, in any area of church life are on very shaky ground. Liturgical worship, in the form the Church has used for thousands of years, becomes far more than adiaphoristic in a context of confession, as Walther notes above .

⁶¹ *FC SD X. On Church Rites.*

people slept he was allowed to sow his weeds. This same carelessness, looking on with lazy, dim eyes that were not suspicious enough has allowed the machinations of the syncretistic spirits (the mixers of religion) which has raised its head in our time and some in fact feel that it already rules. Perhaps the world will shortly be surprised at how quickly it has become syncretistic, and consequently, atheistic.⁶²

The Antichrist first succeeded in seating himself in the midst of God's temple through security and carelessness in the church. Later on through the security and carelessness of the church false unionism also crept in. Now it is up to us to fight against this enemy and to disentangle ourselves from the webs and the bindings of the syncretistic spirit of the time. May the faithful and merciful God aid us and fill our hearts with a hatred for the lying spirit and an inner true love for the Word of God and the truth.

⁶² *Liber consc.*, 1:139.