

"1867 Central, True Visible, Theses VI-X"

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Proceedings on the book: "That the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the true visible Church of God on earth." *)

*) The reader will only be able to follow these negotiations with benefit if he has at hand: "*Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche: die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden*" etc. St. Louis, 1867, price 50 cts.

After President Walther had given the Synod an overview of the content and context of the theses already discussed earlier, the Synod continued with Thesis VI †) and looked closer particularly at the Scriptural proof.

†) See that Report. pag. 55.

In the passage quoted, 1 John 2:19, the question was asked whether this passage was only talking about schism, and the answer was no. The "going out" does not only happen through a schism, but also through the establishment of false doctrine, and that is a sect; not every division is a sect, but every sect is a schism. We should not be too liberal with the term "riot"; we should stick to the biblical and not to Graebau's usage, which calls every division a sect, even if it is not due to fundamental errors.

The passage Heb. 10:24-25 refers especially to those people who, with contempt for the public worship service, want to edify [126/1] themselves privately by reading the Bible, pretending that the preacher is not pious, not converted, or that the church is not holy enough, that one cannot have devotion there, cannot edify oneself. Such people are the real separatists and schismatics. Schismatics are also those who separate themselves from an orthodox congregation because of particular church practices. The difference between a sect and a "division" was demonstrated by the example of the Chiliasts. If a group of people accept the crude chiliasm, which obviously overturns clear basic doctrines of salvation, then these people form a sect. But if a number of people separate themselves from the church by holding to subtle chiliasm, i.e. an error but not a fundamental one, they create a "division".

In 1 Cor. 11:18, 19, it was pointed out that the intensification of this apostolic statement only becomes more obvious if one pays attention to the exact wording in the Greek, where it says: for there must be (even) sects among you. From this passage it is clear that to raise up a sect or to belong to it is a greater sin than "division" — although both are described as works of the flesh.

When 1 Cor. 1:12 says of the Christians in Corinth that some said, I am of Paul, etc., it does not mean that the apostles taught different doctrines; no, they all taught the same doctrine, but one clung more to this person, the other to another. This passage is wrongly held against us by the union-minded when they demand that we should unite with heterodox fellowships, or when they urge us not to reject false teaching with all seriousness. This passage has nothing at all to do with this, but simply teaches that it is wrong to make divisions for the sake

of certain popular persons. <page 17>

By a sect we do not mean a bunch of worldly nefarious people, but only people who hold to a fundamental error. *Rotte* is synonymous with sect. *Rotte* and *Secte* are the concrete, *Ketzerei* (heresy) and *Häresie* (heresy) the abstract expressions. By the former are meant the people who hold to error, by the latter the false doctrines which they hold.

The distinction must also be made that a communion (*Gemeinschaft*) is called a “church” if there are still children of God among them who hold the truth. The same communion is called a “sect” if it holds one or more fundamental errors.

Now it was asked what the situation is with Unitarians, Arians, Socinians, etc., whether they belong among the sects in the proper sense, which are still in the Church, are among you, or whether they must be regarded as belonging to the [126/2] “synagogue of Satan”, as being entirely outside the Church.

It was pointed out that the Socinians were on the same level as the Arians, but in church history the Arians were listed and described as sects within the church, and then these sects also referred to the Bible and claimed to believe in it. —

On the contrary, it was emphasized that one must distinguish the less strict church-historical use of the word sect from the strictly biblical and dogmatic concept. In the history of the church, all sects that have emerged from the visible church are described as such, even if they have become so devoid of all Christian faith in their persecution that they have retained nothing of Christianity. — The Scriptures, which expressly teach that sects in the proper sense arise in the church, speak more precisely.

As for the Arians, they are to be classified into: the coarse Arians, the actual Photinians, are no longer within the Church, inasmuch as they denied the divine nature of the Lord Jesus; the finer Arians, however, did it differently, spoke of Christ in such deceptive terms that ordinary Christians believed that they were also true Christians, which alone made it possible for this terrible heresy to spread so far that almost all of Christendom was infected by this error. Our present-day Unitarians, Mormons, etc. etc. are to be counted along with the Turks; they are not heretics in the strict sense of the word, but apostates, Mamelukes. They have not been baptized in the name of the Triune God, so they lack the door to the Church. —

The first testimony to this thesis from the Apology was read out:

“Impious teachers are to be deserted [are not to be received or heard], because these do not act any longer in the place of Christ, but are antichrists. And Christ says Matt. 7:15: Beware of false prophets. And Paul, Gal. 1:9: If any man preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed. Moreover, Christ has warned us in His parables concerning the Church, that when offended by the private vices, whether of priests or people, we should not excite schisms, as the Donatists have wickedly done.” (Arts. VII and VIII [*Triglotta* 243, 245])

It was said:

One should depart from heretics and false teachers; one should not separate from preachers who are not right in life, but otherwise teach correctly, otherwise one would create a schism, like the Donatists. Initially, the Donatists only made a schism [127/1] because of certain people whom they considered unfit for office, but in the meantime they also fell into fundamental doctrinal errors. Similarly, even today, awakened people separate themselves from a congregation because

they consider the pastor and the other members of the congregation to be unconverted, although they must admit that God's Word is preached purely. In such separations it often happens that the [<page 18>](#page18) bunch of separatists ultimately becomes a bunch of heretics. —

Now it was asked how true Christians should behave if a preacher preached purely but lived in sins and vices, but the congregation as a whole did not want to dismiss him but wanted to keep him: in such a case, do serious Christians not have the right to renounce the preacher and the congregation?

In the answer it was first pointed out how this question actually concerned a special case, the assessment of which also depended on the circumstances; then the conviction was expressed that if a whole congregation tolerated the dissolute life of a preacher and remained silent, it could well be assumed that there would also be a lack of pure doctrine, and that in time the preacher and congregation would be revealed as a sect.

Then reference was also made to the bad conditions in Germany, where preachers who are not walking properly in life often stand in the congregations. There one should not make a schism, i.e. separate from the church, but rather sue such a preacher before his superintendent or consistory, and also always punish the preacher himself, but because the doctrine is still pure and the administration of the sacraments correct, a Christian should not make a schism and carry his evil living preacher as a cross.

The second testimony from J. Gerhard was read:

"Some regard all schismatics [people causing divisions] as heretics, but when we wish to speak accurately and properly, we must distinguish between heretics and schismatics... Augustine explains [it] thus: 'Heretics,' he says, 'by entertaining false beliefs concerning God violate the very faith, but schismatics by their unlawful divisions err in the matter of brotherly love, for they hold the same beliefs that we have.' Nevertheless it cannot be denied that between a division, especially when it becomes deeply rooted, and a sect there exists a striking relation, for though occasionally there arises a mere division, it rarely spreads, taking on force, so to speak, without heresy. No one is apt to deviate from the purity of the faith unless, finding adherents, he should separate himself from the church, this pillar of truth." (*Locus de ministerio ecclesiastico*, par. 370)

Among other things, how such people are to be regarded who preach wood, hay and stubble [1 Cor. 3:12], but have no fundamental [\[127/2\]](#127/2) errors; their wrong opinions have been proven, but they are not burdened by them.

Answer:

This holding of such opinions is to be regarded as a defect in life, for the lack of conscience with which an error is held does not make it heresy, but an error held against better knowledge and conscience, even if it is not fundamental, casts a man out of grace.

To prove that sects are among us, that they arise from ourselves, namely from the Christian churches, reference was made to the Apostle's way of speaking of the Galatians. He says of them: "You have lost Christ," but this means as much as: "You have become a sect," and yet he also calls them a church or congregation again. Apostates and yet one church! Most of them have fallen away and allowed themselves to be bewitched by the false teachers; only a few have remained faithful. Because of these few, they are called a church or congregation. It is because of the apostasy of the majority that they are called a sect.

It is the same with some Reformed people who believe God's word in simplicity, but their church or community still holds on to error and by holding on to it makes itself into a sect; if it does the latter, it is quite rightly called a sect, but if there are still children of God among this group and basic articles of faith are confessed, it is called a church according to biblical usage. —

When judging such a congregation in terms of orthodoxy, one must be guided by the public teaching. Which doctrine is preached in a congregation and tolerated as a preached doctrine is the doctrine and confession of the congregation. According to the false doctrine that is publicly preached, a congregation is given the name sect, although it always remains certain that God's children are [page 19](#) hidden among them, who may well say in silence: the teaching of our preachers is not right either.

On the other hand, no matter how many errors individuals in a congregation may harbor, if they allow the preacher to preach God's Word purely, the congregation is still a true believing congregation, for the preacher is the mouth of the congregation. As a visible church, the Galatians at that time confessed error, which is why they were a sect. The apostle also says that he must give birth to them anew, which word clearly indicates apostasy.

In Calov's testimony:

"The common distinction between a sect and a division is this: that a sect is a division because of the faith, while a division occurs because of ceremonies, customs, and [Christian] love, or also is one that merely [128/1](#) concerns faith but does not relate to the rule of faith. . . . A sect is something much worse than a division because of ceremonies. . . . (*Biblia illustrata*; cf. 1 Cor. 1:10 and 11:18-19)

A division is thus caused by discord in non-fundamental doctrines. For example, if members of our Synod were to separate because they [no longer believe that the Roman pope is the Antichrist, they would cause a schism](#). For it is not part of the foundation of our faith that the Pope is the Antichrist. We do not believe in the pope, but in Christ. This error would not be a fundamental error, [but a dangerous one](#). We would not therefore declare these dividers to be heretics, but we would not hold ecclesiastical communion with them.

One must also be careful in the use of this term. Just as I do not call every reformed person a heretic, even though I call the reformed church a heretical community, so I may not call everyone who joins a schism a schismatic. If, for example, a schism had arisen in one of our congregations and people who immigrated later joined their relatives who lived there and adhered to the schism; these now adhered to the separation out of ignorance and in weakness of knowledge, I may not call them schismatics, but actually only those who cause the schism.

This distinction is also important for the administration of church discipline, for I may not banish those who are weak and ignorant; in order to banish someone, I must be quite certain that the person to be banned is a complete unchristian.

It is a different matter to dissolve ecclesial communion with someone who has joined a division. I must do this with the declaration that one separates from the orthodox church, but this declaration does not imply that these people are banned or that they are all damned. If someone goes over to the Methodists because their holiness, singing, praying, kneeling, etc., offends him, I do not put him under ban, but simply make the announcement that he has excluded himself from the true orthodox church, but this does not bring judgment on his heart. It is

customary to say that we Lutherans condemn all other people. This comes from the fact that these people believe that a declaration that one has separated oneself from the church is tantamount to being banned and condemned. A condemned heretic is one who persists in error against the best of his knowledge and conscience. —

From what has been discussed it has become quite clear how our Lutheran Church is so resolutely opposed to all union with false doctrine and yet so broad-minded, liberal, moderate [little fanatical] that it [128/2] recognizes children of God everywhere where only basic articles of faith are still known and taught. No true Lutheran rises above any man <page 20> who still confesses that Jesus is his Savior. How finely does not the Lutheran Church distinguish by making a difference between the Roman Church and the papacy, since it understands by the latter name the papist, antichristian sect, but by the former the children of God who still exist under the papacy! As mild as her judgment of the persons is, she is serious in her condemnation of false doctrine.

Leaving communities of false faith is simply obedience to God, who is hostile to religious mania. In doing so, one would not be passing judgment on the hearts of those who remain behind.

The unionistic-minded old General Synod is an example of how wrong conclusions are drawn by such people. They think that because they have to say that there are also true Christians among Methodists, Presbyterians, etc., one must now also be in communion with these communities and otherwise cultivate church fellowship. But that has gone too far. Those who do not confess the pure doctrine with me are not my brothers in faith, but the children of God, whom I do not know because they are hidden among the ruts and sects, I do not condemn by calling the community a rut, for we always maintain that children of God are among it, but we do not know them.

After this testimony by Calov was read out, the question was asked: "What is a just separation?"

Answer: When there is an uproar in a church for and against Christ, one part embraces the pure doctrine, the other rejects it, then the former part, which separated itself from the others, has carried out a just, unrighteous separation. The greatest righteous division that ever took place in the Church is without question the foundation of the Lutheran Church in the Reformation, indeed it was such a blessed division that Gerhard was moved to exclaim: "O what a blessed schism!"

Another testimony by Hollaz was noted:

"A schism presupposes: (1) separation because of less necessary doctrines of the Bible, as that which took place between the Roman and the African church at the time of the Roman bishop Stephanus and the African bishop Cyprian, the latter asserting that heretics, or those baptized by heretics, when returning to the bosom of the church, must be rebaptized, while Stephanus contended that they should be received merely by the laying on of hands; (2) separation because of ceremonies, as the Roman bishop Victor caused a schism between the Roman and the Asiatic church because they differed on the question when Easter was to be observed; (3) a separation because [129/1] of matters pertaining to ecclesiastical government, as that between Pope Julius and the Eastern bishops, who defended their freedom from the arrogance of the pope, who presumptuously asserted control over them." (*Exam, theol.*, Part IV, ch. 1, qu. 17, pp. 1290 f.)

This testimony is important because it states that sometimes a schism arises because of disagreement in the ceremonies. This case often occurs in America. Immigrants from Germany do not always find the ceremonies they are accustomed to at home, and when they see the genuine Lutheran ceremonies of singing at the altar, burning candles, crucifixes, kneeling, etc., they think: that is all papist. If they had sense, they would look at the doctrine and be satisfied if they found it pure.

Those who separate themselves from the congregation because of the ceremonies are committing a great sin. Of course, every congregation has the right to establish ceremonies as it deems good and wholesome for its condition. A synod congregation should therefore not look askance at another sister congregation if it has not yet introduced the ceremonies of the early church. If this were to happen, a schismatic nature would arise. But it would be nice if an ever greater uniformity of ceremonies gradually began to emerge among us.

This wish was not universally agreed to, in that it was said that love must give way and that one must take into account the unfamiliarity that these ceremonies have, especially for southern Germans, to which it was replied that the consciences of individuals must not be bound, <page 21> but a congregation need not allow itself to be prevented by one or two from introducing a beautiful order. The conscience, however, could not feel harmed if those persons were allowed not to take part in the ceremonies — if someone, even with this exemption, still wanted to separate himself from the congregation, he had to answer for it. This is another reason why the desire for greater unity in the ceremonies, i.e. for the general introduction of the early church liturgy, was not universally agreed to, because the opinion was expressed that this ceremony could not be called so badly "more beautiful" than other ceremonies used elsewhere. In such matters, a lot depends on habit and taste. Nor could these ceremonies be described as genuinely Lutheran, since Luther had inherited them from the papacy and left them as harmless.

It was replied:

These [ancient church] ceremonies could certainly be described as more beautiful, but in order to be able to make a judgment about them, the ecclesiastical taste must first be formed. [Lochner's teaching] As to the other objection, it is certain that Luther by no means merely tolerated these ceremonies, [129/2] but retained them as ceremonies of the old universal (*altkatholischen*) church. Now as to the accusation that is usually made that these ceremonies are Catholic, the great and frightful ignorance in which so many in our congregations are still immersed has been lamented, otherwise they would not make such an accusation. If they were less ignorant, they would know that the main real difference between us and the Roman Church is doctrine alone, especially the right main article of the doctrine of justification. It is to be regretted that so many who call themselves Lutherans do not know this right main difference, but seek it in "outward" ceremonies, and still join in the cry of the ignorant that the ceremonies make us Catholic.

By establishing the old Lutheran ceremonies, however, this American current would also be counteracted, which sees in them only the papacy. In fact, it would prove that the ceremonies, as similar as they may be to those of the papist church, do not make our church papist, because we are fundamentally different and separate from the Roman church in doctrine.

Thesis VII.

(*) was read out and noted: (*) See that Report, pag. 39.)

Communion that call themselves Christian but do not recognize the Bible as the Word of God and so deny the Holy Trinity are, according to God's Word, not churches, but synagogues of Satan and temples of idols.

To the Christian church in no respect belong those congregations which completely renounce the Christian faith; not meant here are those congregations of which there were so many in the time of rationalism in Germany, which had rationalistic wolves as preachers. These congregations did not approve of the blasphemies of their clergymen; these clergymen were only tolerated because the authorities protected them; these people were employed by the Lutheran Church, that is, actually by those who ruled the Lutheran Church at that time; what these clergymen therefore "rightly directed" in their office, they did in the name of the Church; but their teaching, which the Lutheran Church had not instructed them to do, they proclaimed contrary to their profession, as Satan's agents. This false teaching, however, never turned the churches into non-Christian [page 22](#) churches.

It is a different matter with the "free" churches, which do not want to have a Christian faith or Baptism. Unitarians, Socinians, Rationalists are all non-Christian assemblies. The Swedenborgians also belong to them, for they also deny the triune God by denying the three persons and only accept the revelations of the one divine person. Their baptism, [130/1] although performed with the formula: in the name of the Father etc., is not a valid baptism, because they understand the words: Father, Son etc. to mean something quite different from the orthodox church.

Now it was asked how it stands with the baptism of a pastor in a Lutheran territorial church who makes the following interpretation of the three persons: he baptizes in the name of the eternal Father, the Wise Man of Nazareth and the power of God, called the Spirit?

[Answer:] This abomination is therefore not a Baptism, because the words of institution have been departed from: it is a blasphemy in a holy place. All these outside-the-church communions, when they speak of the dear God, of the dear heavenly Father, are actually speaking of the devil; when they pray, they are not praying to God, but to an idol, namely to the image of their heart. They are like the heathen, of whom it is said that what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to the devil.

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The passages quoted in the Thesis are also to be noted against the Freemasons. They also want to be religious, but they only have an idol of their own thoughts. If I make anything other than the living God into God, I am worshipping the devil. That the so-called free churches also belong to the non-Christian communions is clearly demonstrated by their public declarations.

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In the same way, the present Jews are also idols because they do not accept the Messiah who has appeared; by rejecting the Son, however, they have not rejected the Father either, but have also rejected him. In order to determine whether a congregation is completely apostate and to be considered unchristian, it is necessary for the congregation to make a specific declaration that it shares the unbelief of its preacher. —

On this occasion, for example, reference was made to a Protestant

congregation in Cincinnati, and the public debates of the preacher, which showed his apostasy from Christianity, were communicated, since he said, for example, of the Trinity, that three is one and one is three, is contrary to all the laws of reason, and is therefore nonsense and folly, since he furthermore blasphemed the doctrine of justification in the most shameful manner, and at the same time declared that his whole congregation agreed with it. Now the question was whether the whole congregation was to be regarded as totally unchristian. The Lutheran congregation in Cincinnati is in need of clarifying its position in this congregation, especially with regard to the Baptism of children who have received a (sham) baptism there.

If the congregation fully agrees with the preacher's confession, the baptism performed there cannot be a true baptism, even if the baptismal formula was used correctly. Examples were also given of blasphemies against baptism in the Protestant congregations of that city, where baptisms had already been performed "in the name of the spirit of the age" or "in the name of the United States". —

The Synod advised the Lutheran [130/2] congregation in Cincinnati and its pastor <page 23> (a) to regard the above statement of the pastor as a public declaration of the congregation and (b) to inform that congregation that it would henceforth be regarded and treated as an entirely non-Christian community, (c) in that the baptisms performed among them would not be regarded as baptisms. — Then we could wait and see what that congregation would answer.

[The testimonies from the Apology were read:]

"We steadfastly maintain that those who believe otherwise [than in the Trinity] do not belong to the church of Christ but are idolaters and blasphemers." ([Art. I \[par. 2; Triglotta p. 103\]](#))

The same: "The promise of salvation [in Baptism] also applies to little children. It does not apply to those who are outside of Christ's church, where there is neither Word nor Sacrament, because Christ regenerates through Word and Sacrament." ([Art. IX \[par. 2; Triglotta p. 245\]](#))

With regard to the testimonies read out, and first of all to the first, taken from the Apology, it was remarked:

Thank God that the Apology speaks so clearly: that deniers of the Trinity are not only not Christians, but are also outside the visible church.

On second passage, also from the Apology, it was stated:

The kingdom of Christ is not where the gospel and sacrament are not. The word of God here does not mean the printed Bible, but the word of God preached orally, and where it is also accepted as the word of God. The rationalists also have the Bible, but only to blaspheme and distort it, not to believe it, so God's Word is not with them either.

There was a long discussion about the statement: the promises do not concern those who are outside the church.

The initial meaning of the words here is: the promises do not apply to those who do not believe and have therefore rejected the Word. The promises are actually only given to believers; the promise is not given to the Gentiles, but it was given to the Jews. Just as the Jews, by virtue of the promise, could speak with God and, as it were, insist on the promise, the Gentiles could not. A promise was given or entrusted to the Jews because of the Gentiles, but not to the Gentiles themselves, as Gentiles. That is why the Jews could point to God's promise, but not the Gentiles, to whom God could always say: "I have promised

you nothing", because it is another thing to have something good in mind and heart for someone, something else to make a promise to someone because of the good. God also had a gracious will for and over the Gentiles, but he did not make a covenant with the Gentiles, he did not promise the Gentiles anything. Not a single promise can be identified that was given to the Gentiles; they were all [131/1] given to the Jews. But of the Gentiles it is expressly written: they were strangers to the testaments of promise, apart from the citizenship of Israel, without hope in this world.

Even those who are far away and whom God our Lord will call are not to be understood as the Gentiles, but the Jews who live far away. God has not made a covenant with the Gentiles; we must all dwell in the tabernacles of Shem, that is, participate in his promise, be included in the people of promise. We Christians have now become the true sons of Abraham through Baptism, but by pure grace and mercy. The Canaanite woman also sets a fitting example in that she does not insist on "rights, but hopes only for mercy. Of those who have become believers alone it is said: now we are no longer guests and strangers, etc. In order to emphasize the advantage of the people of promise, it says: "He does not do this to Gentiles, nor lets them know His rights." The passage where St. Paul compares the relationship of the Gentiles to the Jews with the grafting <page 24> of the wild olive into the good stock was also cited.

In summary: God has never given a promise to any Gentile. Outside the kingdom of God is no promise of grace; God has never made a commitment to any Gentile. God has promised us nothing unless we have been Baptized. Now we can compel God with his promises; now it is said: your truth is our shield and defense; now we can insist on God's truth. This is the blessing of Baptism, that we can now say to God: You must keep your Word.

It was also told how Luther comforted the challenged Mr. Weller with the one question: Are you not baptized?

The objection was then made that God had given his promise of the woman's seed to all people. —

The reply was given:

That this promise was also only given to believers and that these are nowhere to be found except within the kingdom of God. We baptized Christians are now the true Jews in the New Testament — the so-called Jews are the school of Satan, they have left the people of God through their unbelief. Of the Gentiles it is expressly written that God would have let them go their own way. —

In the question under discussion we must only distinguish between God's counsel of grace, which also concerns the Gentiles, and to whom God has entrusted his promises, what God has in his heart concerning the Gentiles and to whom he has made it known; the latter happened against the Jews and not against the Gentiles. In sum, where the promise is, there is the church, and where the church is not, neither is the promise. Whoever holds to this [131/2] must also be able to understand the statement in the Apology: "Now the promises do not apply to those who are outside the Church of Christ." —

Later, a beautiful passage from Luther's Church Postil, Erl. Vol. VII, pp. 71-74, which also sheds light on this subject.

The following passage from Luther, it was noted that

"Therefore the church is holy, even in such places where enthusiasts and sectarians prevail, if only they do not deny and reject the Word and sacraments; for those who deny these [the means of grace] altogether are no longer a

church.” (*Larger Commentary on Galatians* [1535], VIII, 1591 [[StL IX. 44](#); [LW 26. 25](#)])

One could see that even where there were sects and enthusiasts, there was still the Church, unless they completely denied the Word and Sacrament.

Regarding the quote from Calov:

“We know from Epiphanius that because of their abominable teachings the Samosatines were regarded and condemned by the ancient church as murderers of God and of Christ and as atheists; for they rejected the divine nature of Christ and therefore, as far as they were concerned, they denied and murdered God. . . . “The late Aegidius Hunnius writes in the 41 st Disputation: ‘We say that a Baptism administered by an Antitrinitarian (who denies the Trinity) or by an Arian is not valid in case the minister and the congregation (in whose name the sacrament of Baptism is administered) do not believe the article of the most holy Trinity.’ . . . ” (*Socinismus profligatus* [1668], 4, pp. 33 f.)

It was said that

We are now living in a terrible time. In Germany men are appearing who are high-ranking teachers at Lutheran universities who deny the true divinity of Christ, e.g. Kahnis in his latest writing, which describes the Lord Christ as a being who is in a certain subordination to the Father. What should the external Lutheran professors actually say and do to such a man? They should, with the old Epiphanies, call such men murderers of God, killers of Christ, deniers of God, but instead they associate with them in a fraternal way and go to Holy Communion with them. Communion with them.

On this occasion it was also mentioned how shameful the Iowa Synod was acting: In order to disgrace a righteous Lutheran Synod, it turned to such apostate Lutheran theologians or at least to those who had not a word of condemnation about such procedures within the Lutheran Church, to attack and deny the Lutheran, even the common Christian doctrine in its basic [[132/1](#)] articles — and asked for expert opinions.

The clear statement [<page 25>](#) against the anti-Trinitarians contained in this passage from Calov also clearly refers to the above-mentioned Protestant congregations. They are anti-Trinitarians. But it is important that Calov also points out that preachers and churches must be apostate and deny the Trinity if their baptism is to be invalid. - Such deniers of the Trinity are declared to be pagans, so it follows that participation in their so-called church services is actually participation in idolatry.

Thesis VIII. (*)

While ecclesiastical writers at times call those communions true or real churches that retain God’s Word essentially, in distinction from those that are not churches, nevertheless a true visible church in the full (*uneingeschränkten*) sense of the term, in opposition to heterodox churches or sects, is only that in which God’s Word is proclaimed in its purity and the sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.

The thesis was read, and at the beginning was remarked: (*) p. Ref. etc. 42.)

The word "true" occurring in the Thesis is used in a double sense: 1) in the sense in which it is said that a communion has the nature of a church, that it is real what the word indicates. In this sense I can say of the Reformed and other churches that they are true churches; by this I mean that they are in their essence nothing other than churches, that is, they are such communities which

have in their essence what actually belongs to the essence of a church. — 2) But then the word "true" is also taken in the sense that it denotes all the virtues which a person or object can or should have if it were completely perfect.

Thus, for example, in the first sense I say: Gerhard is a true theologian, that is, he has in himself that which belongs to the nature of a theologian; but in the second sense I say: Luther is a true theologian, that is, a theologian who has in himself all the merits of a theologian, namely, that he not only knows the truth for my salvation, but can also speak to others with power and clarity.

The Thesis VIII uses the word "true" in the latter sense, which means that it speaks of that church as having all the virtues that a visible church should have. It is necessary to point out this difference in the use of the word "true," because recent theologians often speak of the true church in this way, that they take the word only in the latter sense, as embracing all the advantages of a visible church, and therefore do not use it in the former sense; hence they come to deny the name church altogether to all other ecclesiastical communities which do not have all the advantages in themselves. It must be admitted, however, that they are churches, but not as [132/2] they should be; there are many things lacking in them. "True", as it is used in the Thesis, actually means as much as orthodox. The different meanings of the word "true" can be recognized from the following sentences, since I can say: "the Reformed church is a true church", but never: it is the true church.

The sense and understanding in which the expression "in an full (*uneingeschränkten*) sense" stands in the thesis was stated thus: when the other churches, in which false doctrines are prevalent, are described, a restriction must always be made, namely that they can only be called churches in a certain sense, in another sense they cannot be called so, because there are things about them that are of no use, that do not belong to the church. But with the true visible church, which preaches the gospel purely, etc., there is no need for such a restriction. If a congregation (*Gemeinde*) has hitherto been pure in its doctrine, it has been a true church for so long; but if <page 26> its preacher imposes fundamentally false doctrines, which the congregation tolerates and allows to happen, the character of this church, as a true one, is changed; it is no longer a true church in the unrestricted sense of the word. The preacher has robbed his congregation of its crown: Purity of doctrine.

Now the evidence for this thesis was heard.

Concerning John 8:31-32 it was remarked:

It is usually thought that the doctrine that the children of God are to be found everywhere, where only fragments of the divine word are still present, makes people unionistic and causes those who live in communities of false believers to think that they can remain in their church, no matter how much it is corrupted by false doctrine; — but this is not correctly concluded. As little as I may conclude from the fact that I teach according to the Scriptures that every Christian remains a sinner until death and cannot be completely freed from sin, — so it does not follow that, because people can still be saved even in false-believing churches, they may remain in the false fellowship and do not have to leave it.

It is not said to all true Christians standing in heterodox fellowships: just remain calm, you can also be saved there because of the pieces of truth still present; no, the Lord says to them: hear my voice, abide in my speech, flee the voice of the stranger! Those who, having recognized the error of a church, nevertheless remain and persist in it, fall from grace because they sin against

better knowledge and conscience, for Christ commands them to abide in the speech of Christ and not to abide in the voice of the stranger, which he forbids. It is the same with the renunciation of an error as with another sin; it may be that I do not know that something is sin, I [133/1] therefore do it and yet remain in grace. Later I realize that it is sin; if I do it anyway, I fall from grace, sin against conscience and cannot be saved. In the same way, anyone who remains in a community of false believers against his better judgment cannot be saved; this would be willful persistence in error.

Someone might come up with the idea that it would be best if there were no Lutheran church, then let people go there in their simplicity and ignorance, then they would not lose their salvation. But, thank God, we have the Lutheran Church to hold on to, because (1) all false doctrine continues to spread, penetrates deeper and deeper into the heart and may well end up depriving us of grace as error ensnares us more and more. False teaching is poison that penetrates more and more into those who do not purify and free themselves from it. (2) How good it is that our Lutheran Church is there with its pure doctrine, with its rigid adherence to the Word, and raises its voice like a trumpet! This intimidates the sects and enthusiasts not to go any further with their erroneous opinions. How many Methodists will thank us Lutherans in heaven that we were always immediately at hand with the Word of God to rebuke their enthusiasms, and thus did so much to prevent them from going any deeper! Yes, apart from gathering individual souls around the truth, this is certainly also the <page 27> main vocation of the Lutheran Church, to raise its voice as a witness. Whoever wants to be a true disciple of Jesus must remain true to his speech.

In this connection it was remarked that one must be careful in judging such people who have been reproached for their error and asked to make room for the right doctrine if they want to remain disciples of Jesus. It is not enough for me to think that I have taught clearly and distinctly, no, the other person must also have recognized it; if he has not recognized it now, I must not be quick to judge: because he does not immediately let go of his error when I reproach him, he is not a true disciple of Jesus.

Now it was sought to clarify the expression "true disciple" and it was a question of whether those were also "true" disciples who lived in communities of false believers, adhered to the truth and yet still held on to this or that error, but without recognizing it as such, or whether "true" disciples were only those who followed the truth alone in such communities without any admixture of error.

The explanation was given:

The expression "true disciple" is the same as "true church" explained above. Here it should probably mean as much, whoever wants to be a disciple as he should be, whoever wants to be a disciple in truth, endowed with all [133/2] the privileges, abides in all the words of Christ, in his whole discourse.

But to this the objection was made that it would then seem as if those disciples who were among the false believers were not true disciples, and that it would then seem as if there were two kinds of disciples, true and false.

But it was replied:

It is just stated in the passage how the true disciples are to be, the mark of the true disciples, and thus also the mark of the true church; for although it cannot be said that this saying, because the plural "ye" is used, refers only to the totality of the disciples, to the church, but rather it must be admitted that what is said of all is also true of the individual, yet surely in this saying not only a mark of

the individual Christians and disciples is given, but also of the true church, so that it is thus said: This is the true church, which in its doctrine adheres exactly to the teaching of Christ. We must never forget that the visible Church has the name Church only because of the invisible Church hidden within it.

Since adherence to the teaching of Christ is the best characteristic of true Christians, it is also the best characteristic of the true church. By the same mark by which a true disciple of Jesus is to be tested, I can also test a church. When we sing in faith: "All Christendom on earth keeps one mind" [cf. *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 251], this is said of true Christians, of all true Christians, even among the communities of false believers.

The heterodox communions do have the marks of being churches, but they have their infirmities, which the Lutheran Church does not have; in the heterodox churches the marks are not so clear and pure. The clearest, brightest mark of a true church is its adherence to its whole discourse, its adherence to its whole word; here it is the case that the Roman church goes beyond the discourse of Christ through superstitious additions, while the Reformed church falls short of the words of Christ through unbelief, and only the Lutheran church remains in all simplicity and strictly with the words of Christ.

The following remark was made concerning the proof text of 1 Cor. 1:10:

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

It is becoming fashionable nowadays to profess and subscribe to the symbolic books without any reservation, but then one reserves the right to understand and interpret [134/1] this one way and that differently. Nothing good, nothing other than Babylonian confusion arises from this approach. The signature is completely useless in such cases.

An explanation was also given about the two expressions in this saying: one meaning and one opinion.

The expressions are not synonymous, but "mind" refers to the attitude, namely that in our speech and actions, including the confession of our faith, everything is directed to the glory of God. A single mind therefore means that every believing confessor must have the same right intention. "Opinion", on the other hand, is the understanding of the words with which the doctrine is confessed; it means that one speaks of all doctrines in the same way, has the same understanding of the words.

In the first testimony taken from the Augsburg Confession, which

“Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.” [Article VII. 1; [Triglotta p. 47](#)]

This was accompanied by an explanation by Carpzov:

“Though elsewhere the expressions ‘true church’ and ‘pure church’ may not be synonymous, the one embracing more than the other (since a communion may be true and yet not pure), yet in . . . the Augsburg Confession both terms are used as synonymous, because those that properly constitute the church are such members as adhere to the divine Word and to Christ, and because the church, inasmuch as it is im pure, is not a church, though the true and pure church may exist there, since there may be concealed in it [true] members known only to God.” (*Isagoge in libros symbolicos*, pp. 876 ff.)

It was noted: “Pure church” is here taken to mean true church. In the 7th article of the Augsburg Confession, therefore, it is not the visible church in general, where the doctrine is not pure everywhere, but the orthodox, true church, which is the Lutheran church with its pure confession and its proper administration of the holy sacraments.

The following passage from the Formula of Concord was read out:

“Thus [According to this doctrine] the churches will not condemn one another because of dissimilarity of ceremonies when, in Christian liberty, one has less or more of them, provided they are otherwise agreed with one another in the doctrine and all its articles, also in the right use of the holy Sacraments.” [Article X. 31; [Triglotta p. 1063](#)]

Attention was drawn to the importance of the same, since nowadays it is demanded from certain quarters that it should be admitted that [134/2] such a communion is truly Lutheran which claims that it is not necessary to be united in all articles of faith and doctrine. The true visible church must have this unity, otherwise it is not a church but a sect. The passage quoted does not say: in all the main articles or the most important, essential articles, but in all of them.

However, they must be articles of faith, i.e. members that belong to the

context of the doctrine, the omission of which would disturb the context of the whole and violate the entire faith. This requirement of unity in all articles does not refer to those parts of doctrine and divine revelation which do not affect the Christian faith. Nor does it refer to certain questions on which God's Word has not given a decision. For example, if I say that it is possible that the thousand years of revelation may still lie in the future, but do not take the liberty of specifying the nature of the years, this assumption does not affect the Christian faith. This also includes the question of whether the soul comes into being through procreation or through infusion at conception, since God has revealed nothing about this in his words. I must always look to see what influence a doctrine has on my coming to faith and being preserved in it; what has no influence on it is not an article.

Crude chiliasm, with its assumption that it is absolutely certain that the thousand years are still future and solar years, certainly injures faith, for it leads me to think with certainty that Christ will not come for a long time yet, and [page 29](#) has such an effect on the heart that I do not expect Christ at any moment. If the doctrine of the double resurrection is added to this, the violation of the Christian faith is even stronger. —

Now the following question was put to the Synod:

Since not all doctrines were in the symbolic books and had been decided, how could we know which of such questions and points of doctrine, the decision of which is not in those books, is Lutheran doctrine and not Lutheran doctrine, especially if the Lutheran theologians do not declare themselves uniformly and unanimously.

Answer:

Lutheran doctrine is everything that is clearly stated in the Bible. In its confessional writings, the Lutheran Church confessed the Holy Scriptures from the very beginning. It is sometimes said that the Church has not yet decided on this or that point, that nothing has yet been decided, — such talk is quite papist. The Church has decided on everything, because she accepts everything that is written in the Bible.

For example, the doctrine of inspiration is not actually formulated in the Symbolical Books, which is why today's Lutheran theologians believe that they can have free thoughts on this [\[135/1\]](#) point as they see fit until the matter has been decided in a church assembly, to which they, as distinguished members of the church, would in any case belong: for then the church would have spoken.

When the objection was pointed out:

Since our old Lutheran theologians were also not in agreement on some points, how could one decide what was Lutheran?

It was first pointed out:

If there were points on which the Bible spoke, then what the clear words of the Bible taught was Lutheran; if two Lutheran theologians spoke differently on this, then one of them must be in error. Even in those better days of the Lutheran Church it never happened that Lutheran theologians tolerated the repugnant opinion or error of other theologians and thus declared the matter to be an open question, but they seriously attacked those who were in error. The matter must never be allowed to stand in such a way that I say: the Lutheran theologians do not agree on this, therefore two repugnant opinions can be equally right, therefore both must be tolerated. But if there are points about which the Bible says nothing, i.e. God has revealed nothing, then the question does not belong to

the Christian faith.

When the objection was raised:

Everyone refers to the Bible, only some understand it this way and interpret it that way, while others interpret it differently,

The reply was:

And yet nothing is valid but the Bible, God's clear Word. After all, our faith is not really a gloss or interpretation of the Bible, but a simple reference to what is clearly written. What counts is not that this or that famous Lutheran theologian has interpreted something in this or that way, but that the words of the Bible are clear.

Our Augsburg Confession does not contain many doctrines, and our forefathers deliberately did not include a number of doctrines in the Confession. They did not do this as if they did not believe anything firm about it, or did not know what Lutheran faith was, but because when the Augsburg Confession was handed down it was important to give a round, clear confession in the particularly controversial doctrines; in all other points it was precisely through their confession [<page 30>](#) of Scripture that they decided what they believed. The word is a two-edged sword, we must not let this sword out of our hands.

The Jesuits spoke so contemptuously of the Bible, they said to the Lutherans: look, you cannot deal with the Bible, everyone can interpret it as he likes; you must therefore have a pope and our Catholic Church, what is then "decided" is to be assumed as certain.

But no, this sword of the divine Word is good enough to fight against all false opinions; for it [\[135/2\]](#) also bears witness in the heart to what is Biblical. The heretics and false spirits know and feel quite well: yes, if we wanted to follow the wording of the Bible, we would have to abandon our error. But they prefer their glosses to the Biblical truth. —

The following summary was made: 1. Everything that is taught in the Symbols, whether intentionally or only accidentally, is Lutheran doctrine, because the symbolic doctrine is the doctrine of the divine Word. 2. Everything that is clearly stated in the Bible is Lutheran, even if the symbols do not yet contain any decisions about it.

We now moved on to the next passage from Luther:

"The holy church cannot suffer lies or false doctrines, but must teach only that which is holy and true, and that means God's Word; and if it teaches only one lie, then it is already idolatrous... .

"But here someone who is good-natured (as people say) may reply: What harm would it do if we would adhere to God's Word but would retain all these things (papistic abuses and errors) or also some others that are tolerable? I reply: Such persons may be called good-natured, but they are wrong-hearted and susceptible to seducement; for, as you hear, the church must not teach anything else than God's Word, serve anyone else than God, place another light beside the [true] Light placed by God in the darkness. It is indeed a will-o'-the-wisp and error even though it were only a single untruth, for the church should not and cannot teach any lies or error, not even a single one. If it teaches a single lie, it is already altogether wrong... ." (*Against Jack Sausage* [[StL XVII. 1341 ff.](#); cf. [LW 41. 214 ff.](#)])

It was mentioned that this passage had been chosen because it contains a strong testimony against the newer theory of open questions. It is thought that some points, which have not yet been symbolically fixed, must be left open until

the ecclesiastical decision has been made; in the meantime, no one should condemn and attack the other, but both opinions must be regarded as equally valid.

No, a Lutheran does not know open questions in matters of faith and nothing other than the truth has any right in the Lutheran church; nothing but the truth should be taught.

This theory of open questions may well have had its foundation in a misunderstanding of the doctrine that one should not immediately condemn the erring: they now also want to create toleration for error itself until agreement is finally reached. But although the erring person should be tolerated, no place should be opened for error itself in the Lutheran church. Nothing should be treated as an open question to which God has already given an answer in His Word. Whether a doctrinal question is dealt with in the symbolic books is ultimately not the point, but whether the answer is clearly stated in the [136/1] Bible. Things that are not in the Bible do not belong in the church.

On the point that the church cannot err, it was first mentioned that the church is often only understood to be the assembly of the so-called clergy, but these are only the speaking church when they speak and confess God's Word. For example, at the time of the Reformation, the Church did not speak from the Roman bishops, but Dr. Luther's word was the voice of the Church, because his word agreed with Scripture. The voice of the church is always only a confession of the doctrine of Scripture. To the extent that individual members of the Church speak or teach something false or erroneous here and there, the Church does not speak through them. Someone who belongs to the Church may well err, but not if he belongs to the Church. For example, if Luther wrote something that is not correct according to Scripture, it was not the church that spoke. If we err, it is our old man and not the new man who allows himself to be guided and governed by God's Word and the Holy Spirit. <page 31>

What does it mean to admit "open questions" other than, with the permission of the Church, to speak error? May the Church do this? She is well aware that from time to time Christians, according to their flesh, utter erroneous things, for which she also asks forgiveness, as she does for other sins which Christians still commit out of the flesh; but she cannot and must never give permission to sin, nor permission to err and to utter and confess erroneous things. As an example of how members of the Church speak error according to the flesh and how the voice of the Church is often only heard in a single person, reference is made to the Council when all the bishops present decided to forbid the marriage of priests: only one Paphnutius spoke according to the Scriptures; in this case he was the voice of the Church. —

With what conscience can our opponents, who consider their opinion to be right, allow the other opinion, which they themselves consider to be wrong, to be considered equally valid, for example until the matter is debated at a church congress! Their conscience must already be completely dulled.

The testimony of Gerhard was read out:

"As the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments are the marks of the church in an absolute and strict sense, so the pure preaching of the divine Word and the proper administration of the sacraments are the marks of the pure and uncorrupt church. As the church distinguishes itself from secular communions, which are outside of the church, by the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, so it distinguishes itself from the heterodox

communions, which are within the church, by the pure Word and legitimate administration of the sacraments.” [136/2] (*Locus de ecclesia*, par. 131; cf. Baier: *Compendium*, part III, ch. XIII, p. 654)

It was mentioned that this testimony had been chosen because many say and claim that the 7th article of the Augsburg Confession teaches that only the orthodox church is the church. This passage of Gerhard's teaches the right opinion.

In Article VII it is said 1. what the church is, namely the congregation of saints or believers. Then 2. what the marks of the church are.

Now it depends on whether these marks are present as purely and clearly as they should be. In the case of false churches, the marks are such that one can see that the church is indeed there, but not as it should be, not in a completely pure state. The old Lutherans were not concerned to show where the church was at all, they never denied that the church had been and was in a corrupt state with the papists, but for them it was a matter of showing what the church should look like in its pure state.

The following passage from Gerhard was quoted:

“By what the true teacher of the church distinguishes himself from a false prophet, by that also the true church distinguishes itself from the false. The reason for this is that as the doctrine is constituted which is proclaimed by the public ministry of the church, so also that church is regarded. If the catholic doctrine is heard in a church, so also we regard that church as catholic, and call it so. If a heretical doctrine is preached in a church, we regard it as heretical and call it so. The true teacher of a church distinguishes himself from a false prophet by pure, unperverted doctrine; so also the true church distinguishes itself from the false by pure and unperverted doctrine.” (ibid., par. 136; cf. Baier, part III, ch. XIII, p. 640)

It was noted:

This passage contained a testimony for yesterday's discussion, namely that a church is to be judged according to the teaching of the preacher, which he leads with the approval of his congregation.

The following was also mentioned about false preachers: that they do not always preach falsehood, but also truth; if they do the latter, they are not false prophets and wolves, they are only such if they preach falsehood. How many false prophets among the Methodists convert some souls. They do not do this by error, but by truth, in that, having previously preached the law, they now also preach Christ in the gospel; in this respect they are not wolves.

Bechmann's passage was read:

“If the church is divided into the true and false, we must consider that we may speak of a true and a false church in a twofold sense: (1) A true church is that which has the essence of the church, though it may not be pure or its ministry may not be pure and uncorrupt. Thus (in contrast to a true church in this sense) [137/1] a church is false which seems to be a church but is none in reality. (2) The expression ‘true church’ may mean as much as a ‘pure church’ in the sense that its public ministry is pure and uncorrupt. In this sense the Lutheran church is a true church and the papistic a false church.” (*Annotationes in Compendium Hutteri* [1703], 4, p. 669)”

The following comment was made on Bechmann's passage:

According to what is stated in the passage, the societies of Unitarians, free congregations, etc. are not to be regarded as true, i.e. real churches, but only as

sham churches.

The passage by Baier now read

[“A church is pure] When the public ministry of the Word and the sacraments is [preserved] pure and uncorrupt, and in the assemblies of the church the Word of God is taught according to the norm of Scripture purely and without corruptions which oppose the Christian faith and sound morals, as true believers have it fixed in their hearts, so that the unsanctified who err in the faith are compelled either to conceal their errors or to abandon them, unless they want to be excluded from the communion of the church.” (*Compendium*, part III, ch. 13, par. 22, p. 638)

[The essayist commented:]

This passage has been included among these testimonies because the teaching of good morals also belongs to pure doctrine. Not only right dogmatics, but also right morals should be taught in the church. <page 32> A church in which this does not happen is not a pure church.

It was further remarked:

Even that church is still regarded as a pure church where error is not allowed to raise its head, even though there are many in the church who have erroneous opinions: but they must not let them be heard; if they do, they are punished, and if they are found to be stiff-necked, they are put out. It is said of the true visible church that it is pure, not of the opinion that error can never arise in it: but as soon as it arises and makes itself heard, it is punished. Only those who bring pure doctrine are recognized as the voice of the true church.

Concerning the last passage by Bechmann referred to in this eighth thesis:

“By the expression ‘the preaching of the Word’ we here mean the public preaching of the faith as set forth in God’s Word. Whether, however, this faith is pure or not must be judged from the symbols and public [official] confessions which have been published in the name of the whole church or else have been approved by the whole church. Whether therefore a church is pure or not must not be judged from the opinion of this or that private author, but, as just said, from the public symbols; for it may happen that a heterodox teacher creeps into a congregation, although the church does not approve his false doctrine, but remains true and [137/2] pure. The first mark of a true and pure church therefore is the pure doctrine of the [divine] Word that is [taught] without any such corruptions which, either directly or indirectly, subvert the foundation of the faith....

“To this may be added that the second mark of the church is the legitimate administration of the sacraments, which means that no corruption is added to it which destroys their very essence.” (*Theol. polem.* [1702], 4, p. 769)

It was said:

This passage also provides information that a church does not lose its character of purity and orthodoxy by the fact that preachers in their sermons or theologians in general in their private writings bring forward erroneous teachings, if only the congregation itself does not want and approve of the false teaching. The fact that a preacher preaches something false in the pulpit once on Sunday does not make the congregation false. Only by agreeing to false doctrine, which it thereby accepts as its public teaching, does it become a false believer.

Since the passage quoted states that it is not the private statements of individuals that determine whether a church is to be considered pure or not, but the symbols and public confessional writings approved by the whole church, it

was asked how things stood with the German regional churches during the reign of rationalism and where there was no doctrinal discipline at all? whether these churches were still to be regarded as pure churches, since the Lutheran confession still rightly existed.

The answer to this was:

On the one hand, that in the present thesis it does not matter what one or the other preaches; it is enough that the Lutheran church is to be judged by its confessional writings; where that which the symbols confess is valid and believed, there is the Lutheran church or the true visible church of God on earth.

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On the other hand, since one must also ask: what about the individual parts of the church? can they still be regarded as orthodox according to the known state during the reign of rationalism, although the symbols on paper are still valid and thus the Lutheran doctrine was justified?

The answer to this was that such territorial churches could no longer be regarded as pure parts of the Lutheran Church.

But it was repeatedly declared that the apostasy must be a general one; otherwise it might well happen that a false spirit would creep into the congregation, while the congregation would not accept its false teaching. —

In Bechmann's testimony it is taught that such false teachers corrupt the church and stamp it impure, who either directly or indirectly overturn the foundation of faith. Directly means, for example, when the deity of Christ is denied; indirectly [138/1] means that the foundation is overturned, for example, by a false doctrine of the last things, as when someone teaches a double resurrection. — Such a person also shakes the foundation of faith, but only indirectly.

Finally, it should be noted that a falsification that affects the nature of the sacraments also makes the Church impure.

Thesis IX *) *) See the Report p. 47.)

While, according to the divine promises, it is impossible for the one holy Christian church ever to perish, it is indeed possible, and it has actually happened at times, that in the full sense of the term there was no true visible church, namely one in which the preaching of the pure Word of God and the administration of the uncorrupted sacraments was carried on by an uncorrupted public ministry.

The reason why this thesis was placed here was that we Lutherans confess to the Romans, as our ancestors did at the time of the Reformation: "your Roman church is in a state of ruin, in the deepest decay, you are no longer the true church. We must start from this corrupt church."

The Romans reply to this accusation: "Where was the true church [before Luther], if that is the case, as you claim?" [See [August Pfeiffer's book](#)] If we were not and are not the true church, then there was no church at all for a long time. But how can you claim this, for in doing so you are giving the lie to your Lord Christ, who expressly promised that the Church should not perish, that the gates of hell should not prevail against it. Then you further deny the Apostles' Creed, which confesses: One, holy, universal church.

A Grabau cannot counter such objections with anything valid according to his doctrine, since he believes that only the pure teaching church is the true church. As often as there has not been a pure teaching communion, there must not have been a church, and our Lord Christ would not have kept His word. For if the orthodox true church alone had been the church, it would often have perished.

We Lutherans are quite at ease, for we say that the true, universal, Catholic Church has never perished and, according to Christ's promises, cannot perish. To the Romans we say: We do not deny that the Church has remained at all, nor do we deny that it was hidden among you, we admit that we went out from you, but we deny that you are the true Church, you are only a corrupt Church. We know that the church in general has never perished, but a true church has often not existed. Nor did our Lord promise that the Church would always be in a flourishing state. It is precisely of the last times that we have been given such a picture by the Lord Himself that it will then look as if there were no longer any church at all. —

The proofs of this thesis [138/2] were read out, and then they stopped at the example of the prophet Elijah. [1 Kings 19:10-18]

The citation of this example was taken up in so far as it could be proved that the Church in the kingdom of Israel had been completely corrupted, indeed, according to the opinion of Elijah, had ceased altogether; but it could not be proved that the whole Church had perished in all the countries where it then existed, for it was to be assumed, according to the Scriptures, that the Church, at the time of its decay in Israel, had flourished in Judah. It was also said of Elijah that he had just been depressed; he should have believed that a holy church, a holy seed, would always remain. But since he could see nothing of the church, his faith failed him. —

Luke 18:8 and Matt. 24:24:

"When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?...For there

shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

It has been said of the two passages Luke 18:8 and Matt. 24:24 that they are the strongest and most striking passages for the general apostasy, where the public preaching ministry will also be completely destroyed. — Word and Sacrament <page 34> will remain, but there will be no pure public ministry of preaching.

This doctrine that the universal church will not perish is very important. For only a sect says that one can be saved in it alone, that there is no salvation apart from its fellowship. Grabau did the same, partly in his writings, but even more strongly in his sermons and in his dealings with his parishioners, some of whom confessed that they had been persuaded by Grabau that if they separated from him, they would no longer be in the church at all, otherwise there would be no church. The Roman Church does the same.

The evidence collected for this thesis was read out and the beginning was made with a passage from the Apology,

"We set forth this doctrine for a very comforting and necessary reason. We see the infinite dangers that threaten the church with ruin... . For this reason the true teaching and the church are often so utterly oppressed and disappear as if there were no church, which has happened under the papacy; it often seems that the church has completely perished. Nevertheless the church will abide until the end of the world; it exists despite the great multitude of the wicked, and Christ supplies it with the gifts He has promised— the forgiveness of sins, answer to prayer, and the gift of the Holy Spirit... . It is . . . made up of men scattered throughout the world who agree on the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether they have the same human traditions or not." (Art. VII and VIII [par. 9, 10])" [139/1]

Whereby it was remarked:

It is completely against the symbolic doctrine to say that the Church in its purity and bloom is the Catholic Church, apart from which there is no salvation. This article, that the Church still exists even where it is completely suppressed, is very comforting. It is an article of faith, for one must believe the word that the Church will not perish. If you look at the people who belong to the Church, who are called the Church, you might think that they can never be the Church. Yet the church is everywhere where those who are called the church are, but you cannot see the church, you must believe it.

Grabau also cites this passage in the Apology, where at the end it says: the true churches are those . . . who truly believe in Christ, who have one faith. Here he means that only the members of the pure Lutheran church have faith, i.e. those who profess it are the church. The cunning or blindness of this man consists in the fact that he takes "having the right faith" and "having a correct knowledge of the pure doctrine" to be synonymous. Now, all believers in the whole world have One Faith; but the degree of knowledge is, of course, very different. There are thousands of people whose knowledge is very poor, mixed with many errors, and yet they can stand in the right faith. But those who stand in the right One Faith are the Church, however outwardly the society called Church may look. It would be a bad thing for us if we could not be saved until we had a completely pure, correct knowledge. The distinction must be made between true faith and dogmatic faith.

Concerning the second passage from the Apology,

"A false idea about sacrifices clung to the wicked priests of Judah, and in Israel the worship of Baal continued: yet the church of God was there condemning wicked services. So in the papal realm the worship of Baal clings.. . Meanwhile all those who truly believe the Gospel should reject those wicked services." (Art. XXIV [par. 98])

It was noted

Even if only a few saints remain, the church is there, so no special organization, no public preaching office is necessary, only a few saints; where these are, Christ's promise is fulfilled.

In the passage from J. Gerhard:

"We say that not only this or that particular church, but that indeed all particular churches, and [139/2] therefore the whole visible church may be darkened by clouds of corruptions, errors, offenses, heresies, persecutions, and the like, and may be placed into such a situation that its outward glory and appearance may cease and no known and visible multitude may remain that rejoices in a pastoral ministry, publicly proclaiming the pure Word. Nevertheless there always remain some who hold to the fundamentals of the faith, for God begets Himself sons and daughters even where a corrupt ministry prevails, and these belong to the invisible Christian church. We thus differentiate between the inward glory of the church, consisting in faith, hope, love, and inward spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the outward glory, consisting in large numbers of church members, in freedom from persecutions, in purity and integrity of the publicly proclaimed doctrine, in the uncorrupt public ministry, and the like. The inward glory of the church is essential to it and continuous while the outward glory is accidental and temporary. The invisible Christian church never ceases and never loses its inward glory in the sight of God. But the particular or visible churches may cease.. . .

"We want to stress this point: The church of the Old and the New Testament may cease to exist in this way that, because of the increasing corruptions, the public ministry no longer remains pure so that in a given place where there used to be a large and pretentious church, such a congregation no longer appears, yet the true church of God is concealed and preserved in those who no longer form a visible, pretentious communion. . . .

"Although at times persecutions may pervert the whole visible church and the public ministry in all particular churches everywhere, so that there remains nowhere a pure and uncorrupted public ministry, nevertheless the whole church never errs in such a way that there would not be persons who, following the simple guidance of the Word, are so sanctified by the guidance and mighty power of the Holy Spirit in the truth and the faith that they hold to the fundamentals of salvation, remain free from errors destroying the foundation of faith, and are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.. . . (*Locus de ecclesia*, pars. 86, 89, 104)

It was said:

Pure doctrine, pure preaching is counted among the outward splendor of the church. Chiliasts should therefore also remember this passage in order to learn that the external splendor of the church includes quite other things than those listed. Furthermore, the invisible church is **the** church; everything that is otherwise called the church is only called so because the invisible church is underneath, the saints and believers. This church does not perish, it remains. But then it is said that the visible church has perished when the gospel is no longer

preached purely, [140/1] and thus there is no pure, uncorrupted preaching ministry left anywhere. —

Thesis X.*) *) See the Report. p. 50.)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the sum total of all who without reservation profess as the pure doctrine of the divine Word the doctrine which was restored by Luther's Reformation and was in summary submitted in writing to the emperor and the realm at Augsburg in 1530 and was repeated and expounded in the other so-called Lutheran symbols.

After the reading of the same, the following was brought in to open the discussion.

As true as it is that the Lutheran Church is founded on the whole Word of God, only those who accept the doctrine contained in the symbolic books can certainly claim to be Lutherans. The name "Evangelical Lutheran" has a historical meaning. There was only one Luther. So if I want to know: what is Lutheran? I only need to read Luther's writings to find out what Luther taught. But even then the Lutherans had to answer for their faith. So they summed up their doctrine and in their confessional writings they have recently emphasized what they believe. So anyone who wants to believe Lutheran must adhere to the confessional writings with his faith and confession; otherwise he is not a Lutheran. The General Synod neo-Lutherans always say: "We are also Lutheran, but not German Lutherans, but American Lutherans." But they lie when they call themselves Lutheran and yet do not stick to the old Lutheran doctrine, when they do not believe what that old German, not American, Luther taught Christendom from God's Word 350 years ago. —

It is true that some clear teachings of Holy Scripture are not explicitly discussed and treated in the Symbolical Books. These doctrines are Lutheran because they are Biblical, for the Lutheran Church has expressly confessed the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Other doctrines, and certainly the most necessary and important ones, the Lutheran Church has publicly confessed, partly by accepting the old general ones, partly by making new confessions. What we believe of these doctrines as Lutheran Christians according to Scripture is, as it were, recorded in the confessional writings.

For example, if we want to be Lutherans [140/2] otherwise, we may no longer argue about the justification of a poor sinner through faith in Christ. Anyone who still wanted to argue about this and still call himself Lutheran would simply have to be told: you are not a Lutheran, because the Lutherans have already stated in the symbols that they are justified by grace alone through faith alone for the sake of Christ. The same is the case with all the other teachings of the symbolic books.

On other doctrines the Lutheran Church has not yet had or taken the opportunity to pronounce itself, e.g. the doctrine of inspiration, apart from the general confession that it recognizes the books of Holy Scripture as God's word, inspired by God Himself to the prophets and apostles. It may well still happen that the Lutheran Church will have to make a public confession on this point if the world is to stand still for long. But this does not mean that the Lutheran Church has not yet had any faith and confession on this point; no, it has long since declared the right faith, i.e. the doctrine of Scripture, on this point as well, only not yet publicly. For if such a confession were made, it would not first be necessary to consult and discuss it - no, what the Lutheran Church has always believed would be put in writing.

Now it was asked how it stood with such doctrines that were not in the Confessions and about which there were two different opinions among Lutherans. <page 36> The questioner said that what was not yet in the symbols could not be passed off as Lutheran doctrine, although he confessed that he did not know what necessary doctrine of salvation was not known in the symbolic books.

In reply, the counter-question was raised: if only what is known in the existing symbols is church doctrine, how did things stand in the first three centuries, when the Nicene and Athanasian symbols and the later detailed confessions of the Lutheran church were still missing? Did the Church then really have no common belief on all the doctrines not contained in the symbols, were these points all regarded as open questions? No, it never occurred to the church to be uncertain about a point or to leave freedom. All that mattered was that a point of doctrine was clearly stated in Scripture. —

It was also asked who could decide which books were canonical, since the Lutheran Church had nothing about this in its Confessions.

Answer: With regard to the disputed books, no one can. We cannot make a disputed book into an undisputed one. We must accept the books with the testimony that the old church, which could give testimony, has given.

It was further alleged that Dr. Luther, [141/1] however, by his saying that he called the Epistle of James a straw epistle, took it upon himself to describe this book as not containing the Word of God.

Answer: No, Luther does not do that, he just does not believe that it was written by the Apostle James and belongs in the canon. By the expression "straw" he does not mean to reject the epistle as not containing God's Word, but only to say, as it were: Oh, that's all Law, I don't like it, I'd rather turn back to my Paul. So we must also say of our sermons: we preach God's Word, but they are not canonical.

The previous questioner also pointed out how one cannot claim that you are not a Lutheran if someone is mistaken on a point of doctrine that is not already in the public confessions, because the Lutheran Church has not yet publicly declared itself on this point.

Answer:

I can certainly say to someone who denies, for example, the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Communion: Then you are not a Lutheran; if, on the other hand, someone is mistaken on such a point, which has not yet been publicly confessed, I must not come right away with it, but first show him his error from Holy Scripture. But if he does not want to listen to the clear Word of God, I will of course tell him in the end: "Well, then you are not a Lutheran, because the Lutheran Church believes what is clearly written in the Bible." We Lutherans belong to the universal (catholic) church, we have the doctrine of the universal church; the doctrine of the universal church is the doctrine of the Bible, everything, everything belongs to Lutheranism, what is written in the Bible. We would be a sect if we only wanted to accept some of the doctrines in the Lutheran confessional writings, but did not know anything about other doctrines or wanted to consider them open questions, even though God's Word clearly states them. We would not be a sect in the sense that we taught something false, but in so far as we left certain truths of God's Word <page 37> free.

Reference has now been made to the origin of the creeds of the early

church.

There false doctrines arose. Did the Church now say to the congregations troubled by heresies: "Now just calm down for the time being; when we hold our council, then we want to investigate the matter and determine. No, the Church already knew beforehand what she had to believe, but she rejects the emerging error, and at the same time she declares herself at length about her own scriptural faith. The councils merely bore witness, merely stated what the Church has always believed. This is how all confessions, including our Lutheran confessions, came into being, and it is worth noting [141/2] that the so-called truths that are only casually known truths [i.e. Inspiration] are considered to be quite firm, established truths, because the church did not consider it necessary to make a special declaration about them.

A further objection in this matter was formulated as follows: How did the Lutheran Church regard those who aroused disputes after Luther's death and are themselves called Augsburg Confessors in the Formula of Concord? Before the confession [Formula of Concord] was made, these people would not have been called un-Lutheran. The Formula of Concord itself points out the difference between disputes outside the Lutheran Church and among the confessors of the Augsburg Confession.

Answer:

They are called confessors of the Augsburg Confession precisely because they have risen from the Lutheran Church; but the opinion of true Lutherans has never been that they should remain in the Lutheran Church. Flacius, for example, when he himself was still right, would have liked to have them out, but things turned out so that he had to leave. One also called these errorists by their proper name once the dispute had really flared up: Crypto-Calvinists, Majorists, Adiaphorists, Interimists, etc. These people remained in the Lutheran church with the same right, or wrong, as the rationalists remained in the church later. In sum: the confession of the Lutheran Church is in the symbols, but the whole, full, all-embracing confession is in the Bible.

In addition to the doctrine of inspiration, the following were identified as points that might require a further confession by the Lutheran Church: the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament, the relationship between reason and revelation, between religion and philosophy, and of the Last Things (eschatology). [That further confession was made: The "Brief Statement of 1932"] But even if the Church made a public confession on these points, one would still have to say that this has always been the teaching of the Church.

To show the impropriety of this opinion, that what is not yet in the Confession should not be passed off as Lutheran doctrine, the example was used of a Methodist coming into one of our [142/1] churches and hearing something preached which was obviously false according to Scripture, but which concerned a point not yet included in the Symbol; he would then come to us and ask us about it. What should we say? Should we say: this doctrine is certainly not biblical, but it is neither Lutheran nor un-Lutheran, because there is nothing about it in the symbols; or should we not rather say: what is taught or preached is un-Lutheran, because it is unbiblical. - In answer to the question why in this thesis the confession made both in our confessional writings themselves and in the ordination <page 38> of all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, as God's words, the author of the thesis explained that when he wrote this thesis he had thought to mention only what was specifically Lutheran

(since other denominations also have this confession according to the wording that the Old and New Testaments are God's revealed word), but he could see that it would have been very good to put Thesis X. in this way: The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the totality of all those who confess all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the revealed Word of God, and the doctrine brought to light again by Luther's Reformation and summarily presented in writing to the emperor and empire in Augsburg in 1530, and repeated and elaborated in the other so-called Lutheran symbols, as the pure doctrine of the divine Word without reserve. —

With regard to the testimony given in the Formula of Concord:

“...the ancient Church always had for this use its fixed symbols; 2] moreover, since this [comprehensive form of doctrine] should not be based on private writings, but on such books as have been composed, approved, and received in the name of the churches which pledge themselves to one doctrine and religion, we have declared to one another with heart and mouth that we will not make or receive a separate or new confession of our faith, but confess the public common writings which always and everywhere were held and used as such symbols or common confessions in all the churches of the Augsburg Confession before the dissensions arose among those who accept the Augsburg Confession, and as long as in all articles there was on all sides a unanimous adherence to [and maintenance and use of] the pure doctrine of the divine Word, as the sainted Dr. Luther explained it. ...

For that we embodied the above-mentioned writing, namely, the Augsburg Confession, Apology, Smalcald Articles, Luther's Large and Small Catechisms, in the oft-mentioned Sum of our Christian doctrine, [142/2] was done for the reason that these have always and everywhere been regarded as the common, unanimously accepted meaning of our churches, and, moreover, have been subscribed at that time by the chief and most enlightened theologians, and have held sway in all evangelical churches and schools. 12] So also, as before mentioned, they were all written and sent forth before the divisions among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession arose; therefore, since they are held to be impartial, and neither can nor should be rejected by either part of those who have entered into controversy, and no one who without guile is an adherent of the Augsburg Confession will complain of these writings, but will cheerfully accept and tolerate them as witnesses [of the truth].” ([Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, pars. 1-2, 11-12; Triglotta p. 851](#))

It was noted:

Whoever therefore does not confess the Symbolical Books contradicts the Lutheran Church and, if he persists in this error, loses his right to the name of a Lutheran, for a Lutheran is only he who has come to the certain conviction that in the symbolic books of the Lutheran Church stands the pure truth of the divine Word, therefore he also confesses the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church not conditionally and with restrictions, but with an unconditional because [they agree with Scripture]. Other writings which go under the “Lutheran” name are then to be judged and accepted according to the confessional writings, provided they agree with these recognized confessions.

At the end of this passage it is said that one professes the Augsburg Confession because this confession, as having been drawn up before the times of controversy, states quite impartially what the Lutherans believed. At the same time, one can also see here again how incidentally expressed doctrines in earlier

confessions are cited in later confessions, e.g. in the Formula of Concord, as grounds of proof in a controversial doctrine. Thus a Formula of Concord remark about free will in the Augsburg Confession's article on faith and good works is cited as a ground of proof in the Formula of Concord's arguments about synergism. —

It cannot be said that someone professes the Symbolical Books honestly if they refuse to be convinced by incidental statements made in the Confessions. The Iowans do not profess the Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession [Of Christ's Return to Judgment] without falsity, because they do not want to believe that their chiliasm is rejected by the incidental statement that on the Last Day all the dead will rise again. [[Triglotta p. 51](#)] —

The following passage from Luther was read:

"We must confess that the doctrine which was declared and submitted at Augsburg is the true and pure Word of God, and that all who believe and keep it are children of God and will be saved whether they already believe it or will be illuminated later. For this Confession will endure to the end of the world on Judgment Day. It is indeed written that whosoever believeth [[143/1](#)] on Him and shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom. 10:11, 13). And we must take note not only of those who will be added in the future, but also of the Christian church, which preaches the Word, and of our own people, according to the word: "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), which passage excludes none; therefore all who believe and live according to the teaching of the [Augsburg] Confession and its Apology are our brethren, and their peril concerns us as much as does our own. As members of the true church we dare not forsake them, regardless of when they join us, whether they do so secretly or openly, whether they live among us or in the diaspora. This we say and confess." (*Opinion on the Recess of the Imperial Diet* [1530], XVI [[StL XVI. 1538](#)])

It was noted:

"The Augsburg Confession is the fundamental Confession of the Lutheran Church; whichever church professes it without falsehood is a dear sister church to us — in a much more sincere way it is a sister church to us than such a community, which professes all symbolic books, [page 39](#) but only conditionally. For if a church accepts the Augsburg Confession without any reservation, it also accepts in effect everything contained in the other later confessions. If a confession of the confessional writings is made with reservations, then such a confession has no value at all. In order to avoid misunderstanding, it was pointed out that when the name "Apology" was used in Luther's writings before 1531, it always meant the Augsburg Confession. This is also the case in the present testimony.

In order to understand this passage correctly, the following historical facts were provided: The Imperial Diet had conceded to the Lutherans of that time that they should be allowed to remain Lutheran by sticking to their confession, but they were denied the right to accept new adherents. To this Luther replied: "No, our brothers are all those who profess our doctrine, whether publicly or in private."

How many righteous men are there even today, partly in the united church, partly in synods that call themselves Lutheran but hold false doctrine, but who profess the pure Lutheran doctrine for themselves! It is either a weakness that they have not yet realized how they must now also leave such fellowship, or it is

other circumstances that compel them to stay. But they are still our brothers in faith.

Reference was made to the double sense in which the word "Lutheran" is used. First, in the proper common sense and understanding, this word designates a member of the visible Lutheran Church, as it stands before us as an external [143/2] society, in a particular organization. According to this, all those are Lutheran who call themselves so and profess the Lutheran symbols without falsehood. Secondly, however, all those who hold the Lutheran faith as the right, truly biblical faith are understood to be Lutherans, and all those are now called Lutherans who, even among other, false-believing communities, nevertheless subscribe to the Lutheran faith in their hearts.

Luther simply says that the doctrine delivered at Augsburg is the true and pure word of God. The Iowans, etc., on the other hand, say that it does contain God's word, but there are also many inaccuracies and errors in it. Shame on a Lutheran to say that! Shame to pass off such a writing as a confession of the Lutheran Church, if the accusation of the opponents were true!

Concerning the following passage by Arcularius:

"Dannhauer writes: 'We by no means exclude all the legitimate consequences and conclusions which may be drawn from our Confessions, and we regard them as our confessions as if they were expressed in them clearly and lucidly in so many letters; and this all the more since such consequences and conclusions are not contrary to the Holy Scriptures so that even our Lord Christ and His apostles have hallowed and honored them with the name of Scripture, Matt. 22:29-32' (Reformiertes Salve, p. 231). If the words of the Confession are true in their right proper, and profound sense and I sincerely accept the truth of such words, I need not fear any conclusion, even if 20 or 30 of them were made one after another; for the rule always stands firm: *Ex veris non nisi verum*. Out of the truth emerge no lies, 1 John 2:21." (*Das willige Glaubensbekenntnis oder Ermahnung zur Verwahrung der Lehre der Augsbургischen Confession* [Frankfurt am Main, 1692], pp. 136 f.)

[The essayist commented:]

Far from confessing only what is "casually known" in the symbols, we rather confess many other doctrines which do not stand according to the letter, but which necessarily follow from clear scriptural sayings. The false spirits among the Lutherans do not even want to confess the letter of the symbols; a true Lutheran also confesses everything that is strongly and succinctly concluded from the Confession. That it is right to accept all compelling conclusions with the confession is taught by the example of Christ Matt. 22: 30-32, where from the proposition that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and from the general proposition that God is not and must not be a God of the dead, but of the living, he draws the conclusion that all the dead will rise again. The matter stands in such a way that whoever rejects a necessary conclusion rejects the Confession <page 40> itself.

Because the later Confessions contain almost exclusively conclusions of earlier known doctrines, [144/1] those who accept the Augsburg Confession but reject the other symbols are not Lutheran synods.

The old General Synod does this, for example, and has thus sufficiently demonstrated its apostasy from the Lutheran Church. So it is with chiliasm, which is decisively rejected in our confessional writings, although the word chiliasm does not appear in them; but there are many passages that do not suffer from

chiliasm, they are incompatible with it, from which one rightly concludes its rejection.

But it was also remembered that it must be a correct consequence. But it is not a correct consequence if I take a single passage by itself in a sense that conflicts with the context and with the other clear passages of Scripture. For example, if I say: Christ is a man, therefore he is a sinner, this is a false conclusion, because the whole of Scripture describes Christ as a true man, but not as a sinner; or if I say: Christ is a man, therefore he cannot be omnipresent. But Scripture teaches that Christ is also true God and therefore God and man in one person, and therefore he is also omnipresent according to his human nature.

I must take each passage in the sense which I do not give it according to my own interpretation, but which the Holy Spirit gives it, as the right interpreter, since Scripture is interpreted by Scripture. The whole doctrine of the communication of attributes is based on pure inference, but it is as certain as any clear word of Scripture.

The testimony of Gerhard was referenced:

"We may ascribe to our churches a threefold unity. The first is the canonical [unity], according to which our doctrines which we confess agree with the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in all their parts; for so far we could not be convinced from the Holy Scriptures by any papist of any error in [any] articles of faith; indeed the foremost papistic writers have been forced to admit that our Confession could by no means be confuted from Holy Scripture. The second is the ecclesiastical [unity], according to which our doctrines agree with the ecclesiastical authors, who are known as the [church] fathers, especially with those who were closest to the times of the apostles. . . . The third is the symbolical books of our churches, as in the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, the two Catechisms of Luther, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord; and if anyone refuses to give the consent to it [the doctrine], we by no means acknowledge him as a brother in the matter of faith and confession." (*Locus de ecclesia*, par. 246)

[The essayist commented:]

Gerhard states a threefold agreement of our Lutheran church. The first is canonical, since our [144/2] doctrine agrees in everything with the canonical writings of the Old and New Covenants. — They now say that it is enough to have fundamental unity. Of course, it often does not get any further, but the goal should be unity in everything.

Now there has been a clear debate about what is "fundamental" and "non-fundamental". Fundamental is everything that serves to plant or maintain faith. However, anything that, although revealed in Scripture, does not affect or violate faith is not fundamental. One of the non-fundamental articles is, for example, the question of by which sin the devil fell. This question does not affect faith in the slightest. Furthermore, about the Antichrist and who the Antichrist is, whether it is the Roman pope? and whether the devil will also be saved?

But whether a doctrine is fundamental or not fundamental, a Christian who recognizes that a doctrine is contained in Scripture is bound to believe it. A Christian can only plant the Christian faith in others if he himself knows the fundamental doctrines; whether he also acts on those points of doctrine by which faith is not generated and maintained does not depend at all on the origin and existence of the Church. —

As far as the doctrine of Antichrist is concerned, the correct knowledge of this

doctrine in itself contributes nothing to the salvation of the individual; but a Lutheran Christian and a Lutheran preacher in particular should have recognized that the confession of the Lutheran Church is also correct in this point. As far as the preaching of this doctrine is concerned, it depends on whether the circumstances make it necessary to [page 41](#) preach this doctrine a lot. Circumstances make it necessary when the Church and individuals are in great danger from the Antichrist. Here in America, where papism and communism, etc., are the chief evils gnawing at the tree of our republic, it is certainly necessary that the confession be made, so that we may beware of popery.

The extent to which our church is also in agreement with the Church Fathers can be seen most easily from Gerhard in his *Loci*, since he always presents the Church Fathers as supporting witnesses in all doctrinal points after presenting the scriptural evidence. Indeed, in a separate tome, the *Confessio catholica*, Gerhard has even collected testimonies from all the Roman writers who speak in favor of the pure doctrine. In the writings of the Church Fathers, of course, many errors are taught, but it can be proven from the Church Fathers that all our Lutheran doctrines were taught by the Church Fathers.