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Dr. Walther's Book "That the Ev. Luth. Church Is the True Visible Church of God on Earth"

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Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Book
"That the Evangelical Lutheran Church Is the True Visible Church of God on Earth"

(Paper read at the Twenty-second Delegate Synod of the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, assembled June, 1938, in St. Louis, Mo.)

We are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and we glory in that fact. We rejoice that so many of us can meet to consider the welfare, the work, and the needs of this Church, and we are again mapping out our work in this our dear Church in order then to go back and to devote ourselves to the service of this Church which we love and to which we have dedicated our gifts, our labors, our possessions, yea, ourselves. And we do this because we are divinely convinced that our Church, together with all churches and church-bodies agreeing with us in doctrine and practise, is the true visible Church of God on earth. If we did not have this conviction, we should do better to adjourn at once and go home; for how can we devote all that we have and are to a Church if we are not convinced that this Church is the true visible Church? And what blessings can attend our labors if they are performed in doubt?

We are convinced that our Lutheran Church is the true visible Church of God on earth. This conviction is a heritage which by God's grace we have received from our fathers, and this conviction has proved to be a tremendously powerful factor in the building of our Church. There was a time in the early history of the Saxon pilgrims when they were plunged into deepest spiritual gloom because they feared they were no Church at all, at least not the true visible Church. But God had mercy on our fathers and allayed and dispelled their fears through the Scripturally sound and brilliant presentation which Walther made in the debate with Dr. Marbach in Perry County, April, 1841. Later on Dr. Walther discussed this comforting truth and the underlying Scriptural principles in essays based on the proposition "That the Evangelical Lutheran Church Is the True Visible Church of God on Earth," elaborated in twenty-five theses, which he submitted to the synodical convention of 1866, October 31 and the following days. Parts of this essay were also treated in the Eastern, Central, and Western Districts of Synod. This treatise is justly regarded as one of the classic works of Walther. It is one of those simple, yet grand and fundamental statements of principles, facts, and firm convictions which underlie the successful work of future generations and which determine and shape the course of history of men and their labors. We shall do well, therefore, in looking back 100 years, briefly

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to review these theses, because we cannot hope to enter a new century of the history of our Church with the hope of success pleasing to God unless we share the conviction of our fathers "that the Evangelical Lutheran Church Is the True Visible Church of God on Earth."

1

In a discussion of the doctrine of the Church it is necessary first to define the term; and no correct presentation of the subject of visible churches can be made if the doctrine of the one holy Christian Church, the invisible Church, is ignored or not defined Scripturally. Dr. Walther therefore first states what the one holy Christian Church is, namely, the whole number of those who truly believe in Christ and who are sanctified through this faith, or, as the Augsburg Confession has it, "the congregation of all saints and true believers" (Art. VIII). To this Church belong all who sincerely believe in Christ, the Son of God, who has saved us from our sins by His perfect atonement. To this Church belong also those true believers who in ignorance or weakness still dwell in false visible churches. In this Church are all believers, but believers only. No hypocrites belong to this Church, since it consists of believers only. And this is the one Church outside of which there is no salvation. You must belong to this Church to be saved.

Quite naturally, the one holy Christian Church is invisible, since God alone knows all those who truly believe. That does not imply that this Church cannot be found, for it has certain external marks whereby its existence may be known, namely, the pure preaching of God's Word and the unadulterated administration of the Sacraments, as the Apology of the Augsburg Confession states: "which fellowship nevertheless has outward marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ." (Art. VII, *Trigl.*, p. 227.)

The Scriptures, and we with them, also speak of visible churches. A congregation in which the Word of God is purely preached and the Sacraments are correctly administered according to the Gospel, to which, however, also hypocrites and godless men can and do attach themselves, may in an improper sense be called a church, since the name properly belonging to a part only, the true believers, is used to designate the whole body. Holy Writ even calls those bodies churches that are guilty of a partial defection from the true doctrine as long as they still have and use the essentials of God's Word. St. Paul calls the congregations of Galatia churches, Gal. 1:2, although he declares that they no longer had the doctrine of the Gospel in its pure state, Gal. 3:1; 5:4. But while associations which still have the essentials of God's Word, yet

obstinately err in fundamental doctrines of the Scriptures are indeed still termed churches in the Scriptures, they are likewise denounced as sects because they create divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrines which ye have learned, etc., Rom. 16:17 f. Such heretics do not only err, but they refuse to be advised, defend their error as correct, and war against the truth which they know and against their own conscience, as Luther says (Walther, p. 27). Neither does the fact that their congregations are called churches justify the course of schismatics, who cause divisions and antagonize the true Church for reasons other than doctrinal, as, e. g., for the sake of ceremonies, etc. And, finally, such bodies as call themselves Christian but deny the Word of God and the Triune God in no sense whatever can be called churches but are temples of idols and of the synagog of Satan. "And we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal Life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols," 1 John 5:20 f. "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagog of Satan," Rev. 2:9.

So the term "church" is used in various ways, and we must be careful to distinguish correctly when speaking of the Church, a church, the Christian Church, etc. And since the name "church" is often applied even to an erring or heretical Church, the question naturally arises: Which is the true visible Church of God on earth? This is not a mere academic question but one of the greatest practical importance for the salvation of our souls, since a false Church errs and may lead men to destruction, but the true visible Church does not err and mislead men. This assertion has been challenged as a bold and arrogant statement; nevertheless, it is true. For what is a true visible Church? It is one that has the same marks as the invisible Church, namely, the pure preaching of God's Word and the administration of the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. Now, the Word of God, which this Church teaches, cannot err, and therefore the true visible Church cannot teach doctrines that differ from God's Word or are doubtful. The true visible Church, functioning as such, while it is such, inasmuch as it teaches God's Word, cannot err. Men may arise in the true Church and teach falsely, but that is not the action of the Church. A true Church may fall into error, but in that case it is no longer a true Church, but a false Church. We must not let unionists and indifferentists shake us in this conviction. If we do, we shall be plunged into the sea of uncertainty. For all certainty and conviction must cease if we admit that one can err when teaching God's Word. (Walther, p. 44, and Pieper, *Vortraege*, 1896, II, p. 60 f.)

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According to God's promise the one holy Christian Church, the invisible Church, will never perish from the earth. That does not apply to the true visible Church. There may be times when there is no true visible Church on earth, and we must not make the mistake at such times of viewing a mere fundamentalist Church or positive Church as the true visible Church, for the true visible Church teaches correctly not only fundamentals but the whole Word of God. Yet we do not claim that the true visible Church is the only saving Church. Contrary to oft-repeated accusations we gladly admit that the invisible Church of God extends far beyond the boundaries of our Church; that there are many true Christians who have never heard of our Church; that even in false churches there are true children of God because of the gracious and powerful operation of those parts of God's Word that are still heard there, but not, of course, because of the error that is preached there. We maintain that, wherever enough of the Gospel is preached that one can come to faith in Christ, there men can be saved. To teach that salvation depends upon anything else than faith in Christ, *e. g.*, upon membership in a true Church, is contrary to the doctrine of justification. This, however, does not mean that it is immaterial whether a man belongs to the true or a false Church. If a Christian in weakness and ignorance remains in a false Church, he is sinning, and this sin requires forgiveness even as all other sins. And if we have opportunity to call his attention to this sin and do not do so, we also sin.

Now we are convinced, confess, and declare that our Church, the true Lutheran Church, is the true visible Church on earth, since we know of no other Church that shares its position. Just what is the true Lutheran Church? It is that Church which unreservedly accepts and professes the doctrines of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the restatement and amplification of these doctrines in the other Lutheran confessions as the pure Word of God. The true Lutheran Church is the Church which stands on the Lutheran Confessions of 1580. That is our Church, and if that Church has the marks that it preaches the pure Word of God and administers the Sacraments according to the Gospel, then it is also the true visible Church. The question is: Has it these marks? This question Walther answers in the affirmative and clearly proves his assertion in the second part of his book *That the Evangelical Lutheran Church Is the True Visible Church of God on Earth*.

2

No man can or does know the saving truth of himself, neither can he acquire it by human means, speculations, philosophizing, research, etc. God, however, in His mercy has given man a full

and sufficient revelation of the truth in the Scriptures, the divinely inspired and written word of the holy prophets and apostles. Furthermore, God has now bound all men strictly to this revealed Word and its doctrines, and He not only forbids but condemns and curses all other doctrine and men teaching otherwise. Therefore the true Lutheran Church, in obedience to God's command, acknowledges the written word of the apostles and prophets as the only and complete source, rule, norm, and judge of all doctrine, and in so doing, it proves itself to be the true visible Church. It does not admit human reason as a secondary principle, or as a principle in any sense, in theology. It does not grant to tradition or to new revelations a place beside the Scriptures as the source of saving truth. It acknowledges the Scriptures, and the Scriptures only, as the infallible, true, and valid source of truth and norm of Christian faith and life. And well may it do so, for this fountain is pure and clear. Luther says: "On earth no clearer book has been written than the Scriptures; compared with all other books, it is as the sun compared with all lights." True, there are passages in Holy Writ which are dark, but this is due to the fact that they are prophecies not yet fulfilled, or to our insufficient knowledge of the original languages, or to other human weaknesses; but all doctrines of Holy Writ are clearly and adequately stated, so that even a child may learn and know them, and no so-called dark passage of the Scriptures contains a doctrine which is not clearly set forth in other passages. It is of the utmost importance to insist on the perfect clarity of Holy Writ, for unionism proceeds from the premise that the Scriptures are not sufficiently clear and that therefore we must tolerate what is called different doctrinal "views." But if the Scriptures themselves are not clear, then there can be no true visible Church; which is exactly what unionists claim. Since the Scriptures are clear, we need not and do not acknowledge any other authority than that of the Scriptures. In spiritual matters we do not bow to the authority of a special priesthood nor to the decrees of councils nor to the pronouncement of a whole Church. We accept their word gladly if it is the Word of God; we reject it sternly if they tell us we can and do not understand the Scriptures themselves and must therefore accept their interpretations of Holy Writ. The Bible needs no human interpreter; it is its own sole and infallible interpreter, since it is the Word of God.

We do not despise the work of pious and learned men who interpret the Scriptures; we rather value it highly, but only if this interpretation proceeds along the well-known Scriptural rules of interpretation, *e. g.*, that the literal sense of a passage can be one only, etc., and if these interpreters interpret and explain the Scriptures from the Scriptures and with the Scriptures.

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It follows, then, that the true Lutheran Church accepts the whole Bible as God's Word in all its parts and words, considers all its contents necessary and important, and confesses all its doctrines, not only the so-called fundamental doctrines, while it is true, of course, that it makes distinctions and accords each doctrine its proper Biblical place. Thus it places the doctrine of justification in the center and at the head of all doctrines, as the Augsburg Confession declares: "First, the doctrine of grace and of the righteousness of faith has been obscured by it, which is the chief part of the Gospel and ought to stand out as the most prominent in the Church." Art. XXVI. It distinguishes between Law and Gospel, Old Testament and New Testament, Ceremonial Law and Moral Law, matters prescribed and matters left to the wisdom and discretion of the Christians, as, *e. g.*, liturgical orders. But it does not distinguish in the sense that one is God's Word and the other not, that one is sure and the other uncertain. It is all the Word of God. Our Church also speaks of fundamental, secondary fundamental, and non-fundamental doctrines. Fundamental doctrines are such as a person must know to be saved, *e. g.*, the doctrine of Christ, of atonement, etc. Secondary fundamental doctrines are such as also support the Christian faith but of which a man may be ignorant, yes, which because of weakness he may deny, and yet be saved, *e. g.*, the doctrine of the Sacraments and others. Non-fundamental doctrines are such as neither constitute the foundation of faith nor support it, *e. g.*, the doctrine of the angels, of the anti-Christ, *et al.* But whether these doctrines be fundamental or non-fundamental, the true visible Church insists on acceptance of all of them, because they are revealed in God's Word. It can not and does not set any of these doctrines aside, and if it did, it would cease to be the true visible Church. It can bear with a man who in weakness and ignorance errs in a doctrine, but it cannot tolerate wilful denial of doctrines, even of secondary fundamental, and of non-fundamental doctrines. Wilfully and knowingly to deny these doctrines is a wilful denial of God's Word and will result in the fall from faith.

So we insist on acceptance of all the clearly revealed doctrines of Scripture, on the doctrines that are certain and sure because they are irrefutably written in God's Word. Standing on this foundation, we have the sure conviction that we are the true visible Church. This conviction is necessary, for the heart of the stricken sinner is not comforted with views and opinions, but it demands certainty, and this certainty comes only from God's Word, which is clear, infallible, and sufficient. It cannot be conveyed by a Church which is not convinced that it has the divine truth, but which holds that the divine truth is an indefinite concept, to be determined

by men in keeping with changing times and conditions and religious views. We agree with Luther when he says: "Of what use or need in the world would a Church of God be if it would waver and be uncertain in its words and propose something new every day, now give, now take?" (*Wider Hans Wurst*, XVII:1680-86.) "Now give, now take" — how characteristic of unionism! We will have none of this destructive uncertainty but join Luther in his classic declaration to the skeptic Erasmus: "The Holy Spirit is no skeptic; He has not written an uncertain illusion in our hearts but a strong, great conviction that does not let us waver and (God willing) will not let us waver in the future, but which (God be praised) makes us as certain as we are convinced that we are now living in our natural life or that two and three are five." (*De Servo Arbitrio*, XVIII: 2058-66.)

Of this divine conviction our Church gives evidence in its official Confessions and its attitude toward them. We have our splendid Lutheran Confessions and our Church pledges itself to them, stands firmly on them, and accepts them unreservedly and whole-heartedly. Our Church is a confessional Church. "But," our opponents cry, "how does that agree with your sonorous declaration that you stand on the Scriptures only, that you reject man-made doctrines and forms? Are you not, after all, also accepting the Scriptures in the sense in which certain men view and interpret them? Your Pope is the Lutheran Confession." Not at all. We do not accept the Confessions because we acknowledge the superior wisdom and learning of Luther and the others who formulated them, but again because the doctrines taught in the Confessions are the pure Word of God, because the Confessions agree in all points with the Word of God. We need no confessions for our salvation. We have the Word of God. But the Confessions serve our faith only because they confess God's Word. And it is well to have a banner, a declaration of faith by which all men may know us, and a comprehensive statement whereby we may try and test doctrines. Therefore the Formula of Concord says: "But what has thus far been said concerning the summary of our Christian doctrine is intended to mean only this, that we should have a unanimously accepted, definite, common form of doctrine, which all our evangelical churches together and in common confess, from and according to which, because it has been derived from God's Word, all other writings should be judged and adjusted as to how far they are to be approved and accepted." (F. of C., p. 855, § 10.) This statement clearly indicates also that confessions have become necessary because of false teachers, against whom it is well to have a unanimously accepted, definite, common form of doctrine.

To these Confessions we subscribe. We require of our con-

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gregations to subscribe to them. Our congregations require of their pastors and teachers that they subscribe to them and that they do so without reservation. We are not satisfied with a so-called *quatenus* subscription, *i. e.*, with the promise of a person to teach according to these Confessions *in so far* as they contain divine truths. That means exactly nothing. In that sense one can also subscribe to the Koran, since it also teaches, *e. g.*, that there is a God. We demand a *quia* subscription, *i. e.*, a man must subscribe to the Confessions *because* the doctrines there taught are the Word of God. Such a declaration on the part of the preacher binds him, as is proper, to the Word of God, and gives the congregation the assurance that he will teach the pure Word of God and not, under cover of a qualified subscription, error and rank Modernism. And so our stand on the Confessions again is evidence of the conviction that we are the true visible Church, because we publicly and privately confess His Word only. This being the case, we must of course refuse fellowship to such churches as reject our Confessions, because in so doing, they are rejecting the Word of God.

It might seem superfluous to state that our Church is the true visible Church not only because it has, but also because it teaches, preaches, and publicly confesses the true Word and administers the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. Yet that is not as superfluous as it might seem, because there are churches that publicly and officially profess adherence to God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions, but whose practises do not agree with their professions. Such a Church is naturally not a true Lutheran Church or a true visible Church. But we thank God that He has given us the courage also steadfastly to teach and practise according to our principles. We demand that all of our churches not only have but also confess the truth, the whole divine truth, and that our professors, pastors, and teachers preach and teach it; and if they fall into error, we deal with them in a brotherly, yet firm way, and if they persist in their error, our fellowship with them ceases. That is Scriptural, charitable, and consistent with our conviction that we are the true visible Church because we have the whole saving truth. But truth cannot tolerate error. If we acted otherwise, we ourselves should cease to be the true visible Church.

About one hundred years have passed since our Saxon fathers came to this country. They were convinced that the true Lutheran Church is the true visible Church of God on earth. They did not arrive at this conviction lightly or presumptuously but only after they had passed through deep waters of spiritual affliction and after having made a painstaking study of the matter. It was

only then that they, under the capable leadership of Dr. Walther, in deep humility but with sure confidence and holy joy, arrived at the assurance that they and all those who agreed with them did indeed constitute the true visible Church. And this is one of the precious heritages they have left us, and by the wonderful and unmerited grace of God we still have it and humbly but gratefully glory in it.

Surely it behooves us, looking back one hundred years and then considering our present times and Church, to draw some conclusions and to make practical applications of this conviction. In the first place and above all things, our hearts are lifted up in praise and thanksgiving to God, the Father of all grace and mercy, and to the Son, who has redeemed us with His blood, and to the Holy Spirit, who guides us into all truth, for having kept us and our dear Church in purity of faith and doctrine throughout all these years. Looking upon ourselves, we find nothing but weaknesses and, alas, so many failings and shortcomings, for which we ask forgiveness in true repentance. But we do not ask forgiveness for the doctrines we hold and confess, nor need we; for that doctrine is God's own Word. Yet because we are weak, we ask the great Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, to continue to grant us His Holy Spirit that He may preserve us as what we are, the true visible Church of God on earth, not to our glory but to the glory of His holy name. It follows further that we will always cherish this possession and holy conviction and daily confirm it by diligent study of God's Word. For only if we continue in His Word, shall we be His disciples indeed. Rejoicing in our Christian liberty, we will defend and maintain it with the full power of God's Word; for it is a precious blessing which Christ procured for us. We have heard the voices which claim that a papal system is more unified and efficient; but we maintain stoutly the glorious freedom of the Christian man, since the Biblical democracy of all true believers, if we wish to use that term, is the only system compatible with the grand status of all Christians as the royal priesthood.

In our church-work and life we will also continue to place first things first, to emphasize true doctrine and the resulting correct Christian practise. Especially in our day we must guard against according social work, organizations, charitable endeavors, etc., undue importance. Our grand task of surpassing importance is, and must ever remain, the confession of the true, the whole, the pure Word of God, the divine foundation of our faith.

In the confession of our faith we must retain as the grand cardinal doctrine the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, without the deeds of the Law, solely by faith. That, and not the doctrine of sanctification, is the central doctrine of the Scrip-

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tures, since sanctification, as important as it is, especially also in the work of the Church, can and does proceed only from justification. In this we will follow the great master Martin Luther. Readers of Luther will have noted that, no matter what doctrine or phase of Christian life he treats, somehow he always arrives at the doctrine of justification; and he does so purposely, for he declares: "Within my heart there reigns alone, and ever shall reign, this one article, namely, the faith in my dear Lord Jesus Christ, which of all the spiritual and godly thoughts which I may ever have, is the sole beginning, middle, and end." If this doctrine is safely kept in its dominant place, all will be well with us. If it is surrendered, or even moved out of the center, all will be lost.

This conviction will also make us zealous and bold confessors of the truth we have. It will not do to put up a sign stating that our Church officially accepts the Confessions and all the doctrines of Holy Writ and to let it go at that. It will not do to permit men in the house behind that sign to do something else than the sign states, to preach another doctrine, to add to, or to detract from, the Word, or to set up any other authority beside the Scriptures or in place of them. In that case the sign would be a fraud and a lie. We must teach and confess the truth we have not only in our own churches but also to others. We are sincere in our conviction that we are the true visible Church, and if the tremendous import of this conviction struck us with its full force and filled our hearts at all times, our Church would experience such a wonderful missionary activity as would carry us far beyond our fondest hopes and expectations. And should it not be so? Are we not a holy priesthood that we should show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light? But in order to do this we must have conviction. A soldier who is not convinced that his cause is right will fight but half-heartedly. The conviction that we are the true visible Church will prove an impelling force that will drive us forward and onward in the holy war of the Lord, onward to victory.

Another natural consequence of this conviction is, as Dr. Walther says in his 24th thesis, that our Evangelical Lutheran Church will hold communion of confession and love with all who are of one faith with us. Yes, we will not only hold such communion, we will seek it. The truth draws its adherents together, unites them under one banner, and binds them together with bonds of love. These others need not live in our country, speak our language, or belong to our Synod. It is enough if they confess the same faith in the whole Word of God and all its doctrines and teach accordingly. Then we gladly embrace them as brethren, as our own flesh and blood. That explains, *e. g.*, why we right now have

sent a representative to our brethren in far-off Australia. The true Church is not narrow and clannish but rejoices whenever and wherever it can receive men as brethren.

But the true visible Church does draw a line at uniting with anybody and everybody regardless of faith and doctrine. We know very well that it is God's will that there should be only one true visible Church on earth, for in the Church as He wants it only His Word should be preached; the Christians are told to hear only those who preach His pure Word; all Christians should be united in one faith. That is as God would have it. However, that has not been realized. There are many erring churches. These, however, are not of God, and He suffers them to exist even as other sinful things and organizations are suffered to exist. We also know, and are glad to confess, that there are true children of God even in these false churches as long as they teach so much of the Gospel that a person may be saved thereby. But neither the fact that God would have but one visible Church nor the fact that men can be saved although they are connected with a false Church can move us now to inaugurate a movement, or to join in a movement, to unite with churches that do not share our confessional position; no, not even though they may call themselves Fundamentalists or Lutherans. If we are convinced that we are the true visible Church, we cannot do otherwise. Then the only correct and consistent action is to reject error and to refuse fellowship. We teach that God's Word alone must rule and reign in the Church; the unionist holds that human reason, Christian experience, the religious thought as developed through the ages from heathenism down, must also be recognized as an authority, even though only a secondary authority. We teach that a Church can be convinced that it is the true visible Church because God's Word is clear; the unionist teaches that no Church can make such a claim because the Scriptures are not sufficiently clear. We teach that God's Word is its own sole authoritative and infallible interpreter; the unionist demands room in the Church for human views, which may change with changing times and conditions. We teach that the true Church must accept all the doctrines of Holy Writ; the unionist finds it sufficient if the fundamental doctrines are taught, and at that he is not sure which are fundamental doctrines. We teach that certain passages clearly teach a certain doctrine, that and nothing else; the unionists say, "Certainly, we are agreed with you; we only have a somewhat different interpretation of those passages," ignoring the fact that these passages do not admit of a different interpretation. We teach that the whole Bible, word for word, is inspired by God the Holy Ghost; the unionist frequently merely admits that the Bible as a whole is inspired or that the Bible contains God's

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Word. We teach that we must be united in one faith; the unionist holds that differences in faith and doctrine can well be ignored and that we can still fellowship and work with others despite such differences. To all such invitations we answer with a determined "No! Never!" If we took the opposite course, we should no longer be a true Church but a false one, because we should then have fallen away from God's Word. O we know we shall be characterized as being narrow and as not entering into the broad and tolerant spirit of the times. But we will nevertheless continue to be as broad and as narrow as God's Word is. We refuse to become so broad that we eventually become flat. We are described as being so rigidly orthodox as to lean over backwards. That is not true. We do not believe in leaning one way or the other. We believe in standing upright.

What, then, should be our attitude towards heterodox churches? We cannot fellowship with them. That would be fellowshipping with error and would destroy us as the true visible Church. But we can and should testify to the truth to them as long as they will hear us. This we have consistently done, and the gratifying fact that some of the other Lutheran churches today occupy a more satisfactory confessional position than formerly is due, as they admit, largely to our testimony. That also proves that our position in this matter is the only charitable one. It is true charity to show a man the error of his way, whereas it is spiritual callousness and cruelty to permit him to continue in his wrong way or to gloss over his errors or to confirm him in them by uniting with him regardless of his errors.

Nor should we unite with erring churches in fellowship or worship because they have in their midst members of the invisible Church. In order to arrive at a clear understanding in this matter, it is of the utmost importance that we distinguish, according to God's Word, between the one holy Christian Church, the visible Church, the true and false visible churches, and the local church, or congregation, as Dr. Walther very carefully does in his theses. Time will not permit us to conduct such a study now, but our plain duty as members of the true visible Church is to avoid false doctrines and false churches and to testify to the truth. And so we must remain strictly separate from those who are in error. That may not be pleasant, but that is the only consistent and God-pleasing attitude of the true visible Church. The Smalcald Articles say: "To dissent from the agreement of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a grave matter. But divine authority commands all not to be allies and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty." (Smalcald Articles, p. 517, § 42.) And let it be remem-

bered, as we look back upon a hundred glorious years of the history of our Church, that this strict confessionalism has made us what we are today and that it certainly would be foolish and fatal to exchange something that has made us strong for something that will make us weak, yea, destroy us as the true visible Church.

One hundred years lie behind us. They have been years of joyful work and rich blessings; years in which our fathers and we were borne up and carried onward by the conviction that we are the true visible Church of God, standing firmly on God's Word, relying solely on the all-sufficient merits of our blessed Savior Jesus Christ. A new century opens before us. What will it bring? Trials and battles? Undoubtedly, because, while on earth, we shall be and remain the Church Militant. Will it bring victories? Most certainly, because of the great Champion of our cause, who sits at the right hand of God. Will it bring continued marvelous growth? We do not know. That is in the hands of God. We pray Him to keep us in His Word and work as the true visible Church, faithful unto death; and come what may, we know the end will be victorious and glorious.*

Springfield, Ill.

PAUL SCHULZ

Predigtentwürfe über die Thomafius-Evangelienreihe

Neujahr

Lut. 13, 6—9

Jahre und Zeiten find wohl menfchliche Ordnungen, aber doch auch folche, die nach Gottes Willen von uns beachtet werden, 1 Mof. 1, 14 ff. Treten wir daher wieder in ein neues Jahr ein, und zwar nach Chriftensbrauch mit einem feierlichen Gottesdienft, fo darf uns das nicht gleichgültig fein. Gott will, daß uns die Jahre dazu dienen, daß wir bedenken, was zu unfrem Frieden dient, Pf. 90, 9—12; fie find gleichfam Kirchenglocken, die uns zur ernften Betrachtung feines Wortes einladen. Unfer Text bietet uns einen äußerst ernften Mahnruf zum neuen Jahr. Betrachten wir daher,

Wie wichtig es ift, daß wir im neuen Jahr reiche Glaubensfrucht bringen

1. Solche Frucht fordert Gott mit Recht von uns
2. Wer solche Frucht nicht zeitigt, verfällt dem göttlichen Gericht

* The Luther quotations are taken from Walther's *Die ev.-luth. Kirche die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden, 1867.*