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Dr. Walther's Foreword for Volume XIV of *Lehre und Wehre*, 1888

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Dr. Walther's Foreword for Volume XIV of "Lehre und Wehre," 1868

Translated by ALEX WM. C. GUEBERT

J. Conrad Dannhauer, the venerable theologian of Strassburg and teacher of Spener, wrote the following words a few years before his death in 1666: "Q. Curtius expressed himself correctly when he said: 'You cannot despise any point in an enemy with impunity; for in despising him you neglect him and so strengthen him.' This very neglect in a former era gave birth to the *Antichrist* and, while people slept, enabled him to sow his injurious seeds. Because of indolence, weariness, or an eye that is not sufficiently trained, the same neglect fails to see the tricks of the syncretistic spirit which has lifted up its head in our time and is almost dominating present religious thought. In a short while, perhaps, the world will be surprised to see that it in so short a time has become syncretistic and, as a result, atheistic."¹

No one can deny that Dannhauer, the great theologian, did not utter a mere assumption in the words quoted above, but, enlightened by the Word of God and guided by a deep insight into the history of the Church of all times, interpreted the signs of his era correctly. After two hundred years we see Dannhauer's prophetic words literally fulfilled before our eyes. The world has actually become syncretistic and, as a result, atheistic. At the present time, besides

¹ In the last sentence Dannhauer, no doubt, alludes to the well-known words of Jerome: "The whole world heaved a sigh and was surprised to see that it had become Arianistic." (*Dial. adv. Luctifer*, c. 7.)

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manifest unbelief, syncretism is the chief blight within baptized Christendom.²

We define *syncretism* as every kind of mixing of religion. Without a doubt it is wrong to derive the word "syncretism" from συγκεράννυμι (I mix). Evidently it stems from Cretans (Cretians). Plutarch tells us that the inhabitants of Crete were almost constantly quarreling with one another, but that as often as they were attacked by some external enemy, they made peace with one another and as a unit advanced against the common enemy. "And this," Plutarch concludes, "the Cretans designated as *syncretism*." (Περὶ φιλαδελφ., p. 879.) Especially since the days of Dannhauer and George Calixt the term syncretism has acquired the meaning of mixing of religions, or of an external ecclesiastical union without inner unity in faith, doctrine, and confession.

The manner in which our fathers defined syncretism and evaluated it is expressed in the following words of irenic J. W. Baier: "In the second place, the unity of the Church is disturbed by syncretism, or the religious union of dissenting parties in a brotherly and ecclesiastical fellowship in spite of dissension, so that either the *errors in doctrine* on the part of the dissentients or at least the *erring persons* themselves are tolerated within the communion of the Church and the latter are regarded as brethren in Christ and coheirs of eternal life. Either class of tolerance, however, is sinful." In regard to "persons disagreeing with each other in religion" Baier says: This refers to "the doctrine of Christian faith and morals; however, not exclusively those parts of Christian doctrine are thereby understood which every man must know if he is to retain his faith and salvation, but the whole Christian doctrine in all its parts (which either form the foundation of faith or have a necessary connection therewith) or in all fundamental articles, irrespective of whether their relation to the foundation is positive and direct or, conversely, in-

² We are not thinking in particular of the Papacy in this connection, although it is a festering sore within Christendom and, being the center of all abominations on earth (Rev. 17:5), is filled to the brim with the abomination of syncretism. What else is the Papacy than syncretism? According to Bellarmin (*lib. 4. de notis eccl.*, c. 10) the unity of faith in the Papacy consists in this, that "all (Catholic) people subject their mind to the mind of one and the same supreme shepherd who rules the Church from St. Peter's Chair" (in Rome). Everyone who has only a meager acquaintance with the Papacy knows what a Babel of diverse opinions exists within its boundaries.

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direct and negative. For agreement is necessary in *all* of them, and as long as dissension exists in any one of them, there will be no true peace in the Church. If, however, the dissension arises in regard to *adiaphora* or in regard to *questions* which, while pertaining to faith, are subsidiary (*daneben entstanden*; lit., originated on the side), we must admit that in spite of the existing dissension a true and God-pleasing union can be effected. It may, however, come to pass, and at times does, that one party imposes its ceremonies or opinions upon the other as necessary. In that case it is better to preserve one's Christian liberty than to strengthen the dissenting party in its false opinion by accepting a premature peace." Baier adds this comment to the words "in spite of dissension": "For where religious dissension between the parties has been eliminated and a consensus in pure doctrine has been established, unity, or agreement of the parties, is not syncretism but true, God-pleasing Christian unity. Sometimes, however, it occurs that men are seeking only a so-called '*temperamentum*' in religion (a diminution of the difference in belief and of theological antithesis) and that of both dissenting parties each one yields somewhat in doctrine to the other, and in other points of doctrine which are under dispute they tolerate each other. The book *Interim* of the past century manifestly bore this characteristic. But to enter upon this kind of union which some men call a "temperative" syncretism, although it also is justly considered sinful, is something different from that which we are considering at present." On the words "*erring persons*" Baier comments in the following manner: "From the point of view of syncretism these persons are indeed regarded as weak and erring; yet they are looked upon as brethren and as people who participate in the same divine service. In such cases it is certain that persons who because of their simple-mindedness and unconquerable ignorance have espoused certain errors in such a way that by the grace of God they still retain saving faith would have to be tolerated as weak brethren if they could be pointed out to us.³ But

³ This, no doubt, is the meaning of Baier's words: The true Christians in the sects who indeed are our dear brethren in faith are unknown to us because of the false doctrine of the church body with which they are affiliated. Therefore, it is not possible for us to enter into brotherly relations and church fellowship with them.

here, in speaking of dissenting people, we have reference to the public ministry and the doctrine of faith and morals as it is publicly preached, and the Sacraments as they are administered, namely, in wrong fashion. In other words, the members of such a visible [erring] body are judged in the light of such membership and not in the light of other characteristics they may happen to have." Finally Baier makes this observation on the words "either class of tolerance is sinful": "I. For such toleration of *error* militates, in the first place, against *all those passages in the Bible which command us to keep the whole Christian doctrine free from falsification*: 'Hold the traditions,' Thess. 2:15; 'That good thing that was committed unto thee keep,' i. e., whole, undiminished, unadulterated, 2 Tim. 1:14; 'Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned,' 2 Tim. 3:14. Doctrine, however, is not retained in its purity when opposing falsifications are tolerated at the same time or when men permit them to be mingled with pure doctrine. Such toleration militates, in the second place, against *the office of 'rebuking'* whereby false doctrines are reprovved and condemned, a duty which God has imposed upon all faithful teachers, Titus 1:9, 13; 2 Tim. 4:2; 3:16. Christ in Matt. 5:12 ff.; 16:6 and St. Paul in Gal. 1:6 are outstanding examples in rebuking false doctrine. In the third place, such toleration is very *dangerous*, because when such errors and falsifications are left unchecked, unchallenged, and uncondemned, they spread farther and farther, make true doctrine appear doubtful and suspicious or give it the stamp of an indifferent opinion, strengthen the erring in their errors, and open the way for deceivers to deceive still more men. II. The toleration of *erring persons* on the other hand, since it includes not only more simple-minded individuals but likewise whole organizations, and hence the public ministry and heterodox teachers, militates against the words of Scripture which command us to rebuke false teachers and champions of error and to avoid them, Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 6:14, 17; Gal. 1:8; 5:12; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Tim. 6:3; Titus 3:10." (*Compend. th. posit.*, p. III, c. 13, § 37.)

Our fathers correctly distinguished between a threefold syncretism, i. e., an absorptive, a temperative, and a conservative syncretism. *Absorptive* syncretism obtains when both dissenting parties surrender their distinctive differences

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and on the basis of articles of agreement accept a third position; *temperative* syncretism exists when the dissenting parties on both sides mutually yield some ground in some points but tolerate each other in those points which continue to be in dispute (this goal was aimed at in the well-known Interim); *conservative* syncretism obtains when the dissenting parties unite in one church body in spite of the existing dissension and declare the points of dissension to be *open questions* among them.

In the following paragraphs we shall discuss the third kind of syncretism, because it has a special bearing for us Lutherans in America.

At the present time men commonly call those questions of doctrine *open questions* which a teacher may either affirm or deny without losing his orthodox standing in the Church; therefore, no matter how he may answer an open question, his fellowship relations with respect to his denomination and its individual members (*kirchliche, glaubensbrüderliche, collegialische Gemeinschaft*) will not be affected.

There can be no doubt about the existence of "open questions." God's Word expressly says, "Ye shall add nothing unto the Word," Deut. 4:2; 12:32; cf. Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18. Whatever is not contained in, nor decided by, God's Word, cannot be placed on a level with God's Word nor be added thereto. This, however, would be the case if orthodoxy were made to depend on a doctrine which is not contained in God's Word and denial of that doctrine were to entail separation from church fellowship. Therefore, in the sense of the term just mentioned, open questions are all those doctrines which are not decided in the Word of God either in a positive or negative way, or those questions which can be answered affirmatively or negatively without affirming or denying any-affirmatively or negatively without in one's affirmation or denial rejecting any Scriptural truth.

According to the limits which have just been outlined, open questions (in the first place) are all the so-called theological *problems*, or questions which force themselves upon the student as he studies the Christian articles of faith, but for which there is no solution in the Word of God. Rechenberg offers this definition for theological problems: "Theological problems are questions which arise in almost all ar-

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ticles of theology, in the thetical as well as in the polemical, in the exegetical as well as in the moral. Since they do not touch the substance of the Christian faith and of the way of salvation revealed in Holy Writ, it is customary to consider without decision the pros and cons of these problems in the lecture halls; and because they have not yet been decided by a general consensus of the orthodox Church, no one can be accused of heresy if he answers these questions affirmatively or negatively. (*Hierolexicon*, sub tit. "*Problemata th.*") Some of the questions which our older orthodox theologians considered as theological problems are the following: (a) Did Mary give birth to other children besides Christ, or did she continue to be a virgin? (b) Is the soul transmitted to the child by the parents through natural propagation as flame from flame (*per traducem*, traducianism), or is each soul the result of a new creative act (creationism)? (c) Will the visible world be destroyed on Judgment Day according to its essence and substance, or only according to its characteristics and quality? (d) In which season of the year was the world created? (e) In which year and on which day was Christ born? (f) What will be the size of the bodies of those who died as children when they rise from the dead? (g) Are there according to Gen. 1:6 bodies of water above the firmament (*aquae supracoelestes*) as well as under the firmament? (h) Where is the Paradise in which Enoch and Elijah are now? (i) On which day of creation week were the angels created? (j) What was the sin by which some of the angels fell away from God? Etc. These and similar theological problems are placed under *non-fundamental articles of faith* by some of our orthodox dogmaticians (e. g., by Baier, Hollaz, and others). It is a grievous mistake, however, to draw the conclusion that these dogmaticians reduce all nonfundamental articles to problems. For although all so-called theological problems may be counted among the *aequivoce* so-called nonfundamental articles, you cannot reverse this order and consider all nonfundamental articles problems. This reversal would be a mistaking of the species for the genus.⁴ Therefore, Dannhauer, who is always

⁴ Confusion easily arises from the fact that some of the older theologians place theological problems which have not been decided by Scripture among the nonfundamental articles of faith. Even the sagacious Reusch (a follower of Wolf) wrote the following in his

precise, writes the following words: "An article of faith is not every gloss, assertion, opinion, which is not clearly and decisively expressed in Scripture, as questions concerning the time when the world was created, whether in spring or in fall, . . . and other similar questions on which the intellectually minded may exercise their powers but which they may not prescribe to the Church as divine mysteries (*sacramenta*). We find a large number of such excrescences in scholastic theology where one man is milking a billy goat while another man is holding a sieve to catch the milk." (*Hodosoph. Phaen. XI.*, p. 667.) *Balduin* also writes: "The *theological matters* which are under dispute cannot all be placed on the same level. Some are not points which must be believed without a doubt, but are points open to questioning, or they do not pertain directly to an article of faith, but only to a certain circumstance thereof. Such points are the dispute concerning the time when the world was created, the time when the world will be destroyed, whether the world would be destroyed according to its substance or in some other manner, etc. Because there is no definite revelation in Scripture concerning these and similar questions, a decision which seems plausible to reason may be accepted without any danger; yes, in regard to these things we may be ignorant on a number of points without jeopard-

remarks on *Baier's Compendium*: "One can easily see that *nonfundamental articles* cannot have their foundation in any clear testimony of Holy Writ. For if such testimony should be assumed and yet nonfundamental articles be denied, the divinity of Holy Writ would be repudiated and the knowledge concerning the foundation of faith, which can be drawn only from Holy Writ, would be shattered. Some theologians call nonfundamental articles theological problems." (*Annotat. in Baieri Compend.*, p. 52). *Reusch* is in error. *Baier* maintains that one may dispute pro and con on nonfundamental articles, but his assumption is not that nonfundamental articles have no "clear testimony in Holy Writ"; he holds that it is possible to obtain, have, and keep saving faith while one opposes a nonfundamental article, provided one *does not realize* that the contested article rests on clear Scriptural ground; for whosoever knows that a nonfundamental article rests on Scriptural ground and yet contests such an article attacks Scripture itself, that is, not indeed the dogmatic, but the *organic foundation*, and cannot therefore be the possessor of saving faith. In his presentation of the doctrine concerning the articles of faith *Baier* is interested not so much in showing what those articles are about which an orthodox teacher may dispute pro and con without losing the character of orthodoxy as in showing, following the leadership of *Hunnius*, which churches disagree with us in the fundamentals and which errors are of such a nature as to destroy saving faith and which are not necessarily of such a deadly character.

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izing our Christian faith and may err here and there without being accused of heresy." (*Disp. de cap. 2. ep. ad Col. B. 1.*) Together with Luther and all orthodox theologians of the Reformation period, M. Chemnitz places also the question concerning the authority of the antilegomena of the New Testament among the theological *problems*. After Chemnitz had cited the decree of the Council of Trent on the authority of the antilegomena of the New Testament (including the Apocrypha of the Old Testament) and the testimony of Eusebius and Jerome on the negative view of some people in the early Church concerning the deuterocanonical books of the New Testament, he wrote: "The whole dispute turns around this question: Is it certain and beyond all doubt that those books which are in dispute are divinely inspired Scripture, either published or approved by the Prophets and Apostles who possessed the respective divine authority? All antiquity answers that on account of frequent dissent not certainty, but doubt envelops this question. The Council of Trent, however, threatens any one with an anathema if he refuses to accord those books in question the same certainty and authority as those books which have never been doubted. Need we wonder, therefore, when certain papal parasites advance the argument that the Pope can set up new articles of faith since he is so bold as to fabricate a new canonical Scripture? There can be no doubt any more as to who he is who seats himself in the temple of God and places himself above all that is called God, 2 Thess. 2:4." (*Exam. Concil. Trid. P. I, loc. 1, s. 6. fol. 75.*)

Nothing, then, that is undecided in God's Word can be placed on the same level with God's Word and so be "added" to God's Word. In like manner not only every so-called problem, but everything that is of a problematical nature must be classified as an "open question,"⁵ e. g., (a) the solutions of academic and secondary questions which admit of improve-

⁵ Rechenberg, the well-known editor of the Symbolic Books, places academic and secondary questions among the problems. He writes: "Theological questions are either primary, which have a bearing on the foundation of the Christian faith, or secondary, which do not touch the foundation of faith. Such questions (historic, chronological, critical, and similar ones) are quite numerous in exegetical and polemical theology, and theologians may entertain divergent opinions on them without injuring the foundation of faith. Therefore they are commonly called theological problems." (*Hierolexicon, sub tit. Quaest.*)

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ment without militating against faith; (b) the solution of difficult questions of casuistry and cases where opinions differ;⁶ (c) interpretations of difficult passages of Scripture which may not fully reproduce the true sense of the passages in question and yet do not clash with the analogy of faith; (d) technical terms, drawn partly from the field of philosophy, which are used to express certain theological concepts with greater precision, but which, since they have not been prescribed by Scripture nor necessarily flow from Scripture, cannot be bound absolutely on any man's conscience; (e) presentations of, and proofs for, certain doctrines of faith of which the one may be more accurate and more profound than the other, although neither one may contradict the Word of God; (f) in short, everything that belongs to the *τρόπος παιδείας*, or the mere method of teaching, etc.⁷

theol., p. 1352.) It is self-evident that those idle questions are not under consideration here about which Erasmus expressed himself in the following words: "*Doctius nesciuntur, quam sciuntur, ridicule quaeruntur, temere definiuntur*" (*Ad 1 Tim. 1, 6*), i. e., a man reveals more knowledge when he knows that he does not know the answer to idle questions than when he pretends to know the answer. In the latter case he makes himself ridiculous in searching for a solution and shows lack of sobriety in attempting to render a decision.

⁶ In the printed *Report of the Northern District of the Synod of Missouri* of last year we read: "The question whether a synod which accepts the principles of the Prussian Union has the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, was answered in the following way: Where the synod is assembled as synod and administers the Lord's Supper, it does not have Christ's body and blood. But if a pastor in a local congregation definitely teaches that Christ's body and blood are present in the Lord's Supper and that Christ's body and blood are received with the mouth by the unworthy as well as by the worthy, that congregation has Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, even though the pastor may sin in other respects." The *Gemeindeblatt* of the Wisconsin Synod (November 15, 1867) attacks this solution of a difficult question of casuistry as heresy. This is the characteristic of those who stigmatize exactness in doctrine as fanaticism. These same persons, when they think they have discovered a weakness in doctrine in those who are strict, will attack it with great vehemence as a horrid heresy like an *Inquisitor haereticae pravitatis*. Thus they make themselves guilty of that which they so vehemently condemn in those who take a decided stand. Similarly, a number of years ago, when a member of our Synod accepted Luther's opinion on the deuterocanonical Apocalypse as his own, a Chiliast stigmatized this acceptance publicly as an attack on the divine canon. However, we are ready to admit that the words cited from the report mentioned above are liable to misinterpretation and that an orthodox teacher may answer the respective difficult question of casuistry differently from the way in which the report answers it.

⁷ In the first part of his theological annals Loescher advises theological students to make a compilation "of the different methods of instruction which those theologians who agree in the fundamentals

Therefore J. Musaeus wrote the following words: "There is quite a marked difference if a *dissensus* arises among theologians over necessary doctrines of faith, on the one hand, and over *academic* and *secondary* questions, on the other.⁸ For in the second case it is possible to tolerate a dissension, but not in the first case. When the clear, true Lutheran doctrine of faith is attacked, contradicted, and falsified, we are bound by virtue of our office to refute false doctrine, convict the gainsayers, stop their mouths (Titus 1:11), and must finally heed the words of St. Paul: 'A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject' (Titus 3:10). Although it is most desirable to compose differences also on academic and secondary questions in a friendly manner and to strive to set up a bond of perfect unity between orthodox and pure theologians, so that, in accordance with Paul's admonition, 1 Cor. 1:10, all may speak the same language and in all questions be joined together perfectly in the same mind and in the same judgment, yet in this present imperfect state it is easier to wish for this situation than to hope to see it realized. . . . Concerning clear and thorough *explanations* of necessary doctrines of faith, *interpretations of difficult passages* of Holy Writ, *philosophical questions* that have a certain relationship with some articles of faith and that must be discussed in order to obtain a better understanding of the necessary doctrines of faith" (e. g., the origin of the soul), "the best way of refuting gainsayers and of defending the necessary doctrines of faith—concerning these points orthodox, sound theologians will not always be of one mind, especially those who occupy chairs in our faculties or those

have used for this or that dogmatical, moral, pastoral, and hierarchical (pertaining to church government) point. Then examine them all critically, choose the best, and do not forget the false (allegedly 'mere') *methods of instruction*." (P. 55.) The same Loescher is right when in the *Unschuldige Nachrichten* of 1717 he says: "In general, theological studies as well as the methods of deducing theology have their special character in every generation, so that the first Reformers, if they were alive in our day, would not censure everything which might not conform in every respect to every method of teaching used in their day, although one certainly ought to follow their footsteps more closely (*pressius*) in a number of points." (P. 163 f.) We, too, do not entertain the idea of insisting on the restoration of the *τρόπος παιδείας* of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, although we are often accused of such insistence.

⁸ Quenstedt and others call them also *quaestiones adnatae*, secondary questions, because they have a certain relationship with the real questions of faith. (*Theol. did.-pol.* I, 355.)

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who have been entrusted with other responsible positions in the Church. They have not been appointed to present without personal study to their auditors or students or dictate to them what they heard from their own professors or read in the writings of other theologians, but to weigh everything very carefully and, as much as lies in their power, strive to clarify difficulties in true scholarly fashion. . . . Consequently, at times there will arise *dissensiones in modo docendi, declarandi ac defendendi doctrinam*" (dissensions about the method of presenting, explaining, and defending the doctrine of faith) "between theologians who in other respects are orthodox and sound. For the gifts of God differ. . . . Now, it comes to pass that theologians who are united with one another in the true doctrine of faith and are joined together by the bond of unity and peace, as far as the *unitas fundamentalis* (Gerhard) is concerned, differ in disposition, in mental endowment, and in the depth to which they have penetrated in Biblical knowledge. When one theologian comes closer to the heart of a question than another in explaining and defending the true doctrine of faith, and when one, because all theologians are human and subject to human weaknesses, overlooks a point and gives occasion for the rise of dissensions among theologians, it is not proper immediately to operate with *Rejectionibus* and *Condemnationibus* and tear the bond of unity asunder. . . . If someone has secretly informed your Electoral Highness about *such questions which belong "ad profectum religionis" and to continued growth in comprehending the Christian religion and the doctrine of faith* and has suggested that we entertain an opinion differing in this or that point from the views contained in the *Consensu Repetito*, it may indeed be true that we do differ in this or that point. In the days of our sainted forefathers such dissensions existed between them and the theologians of the Electorate of Saxony, yea, even among the theologians of the Electorate of Saxony themselves. Yet no one attacked the other on that account, but each one permitted the other to express his own opinion, and in other respects they continued steadfastly side by side in harmony, correspondence, and unity, even at the time. For example, when the controversy *de peccato originis*" (concerning original sin): "*an formaliter aliquid positivum sit*" (whether original

sin is something positive according to its essence), "between the sainted Dr. Meisner of Wittenberg and Cornelius Martini of Helmstaedt had begun and Meisner had already maintained that *peccatum originis formaliter sumtum*" (original sin considered according to its essence) "was an *ens positivum*, our sainted forefathers Grauer and Gerhard" (in Jena) "taught that *peccatum originis abstractivae et formaliter sumtum*" (original sin considered apart from man in whom it inheres and according to that which makes original sin what it is) "is not *aliquid positivum*, but *tantum privativum*" (only a deficiency). . . . "It is undeniably true that such dissensions existed in time past between the theologians of the Electorate of Saxony and the theologians of this neighborhood, yea, even among the theologians of the Electorate of Saxony themselves, just as there may be some dissensions among us and them now. Yet in spite of the differing opinions the bond of unity and peace was left undisturbed among them in all other points." (Opinion on *Consensus repetitus* by the Theological Faculty at Jena. 1680. Cf. Calov's *Hist. Syncretismi*, p. 1,008 ff.)

Therefore Luther counts also this point, whether a theologian is ready to say with him that the body of Christ is "in, with, and under" the consecrated bread among the so-called open questions. He wrote: "If the fathers and we sometimes say: 'Christ's body is *in* the bread,' we do so in order to express in simple language what our faith wants to confess, namely, that Christ's body is present" (in the Sacrament). "As long as this truth is retained, we are ready to tolerate these or similar words: 'Christ's body is *in* the bread'; 'Christ's body is *the* bread'; 'Christ's body is present wherever the bread is.' *We do not want to contend about words. However, this truth must remain that in the Lord's Supper we do not eat mere bread, but the body of Christ.*" (*Dasz diese Worte Christi: Das ist mein Leib, noch feste stehen.* St. L., XX: 811.)

If we speak about open questions today and should have nothing else in mind than the so-called theological problems and everything that may be of some problematical nature in theology, such as agitated the minds of our old unrepachable theologians, we should be constrained to admit that there are open questions about which we may dispute pro and con without harming the unity of the Church. Who-

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ever should want to deny this truth would contradict the Word of God and add something to it and commit the same sin that the person commits who eliminates something from the Word of God. But, alas, the situation is quite different! In our day too many questions that God has clearly and definitely decided in His Word long ago are declared to be open questions. In the following we shall show why we must protest against such a declaration.

Which are the doctrinal points that at the present time are declared to be open questions? If we should want to enumerate all that is put into this category by many present "believing" theologians of our former fatherland, we should find that these modern believers have more open questions than assured beliefs. A catalog of them would fill pages. For the time being we shall enumerate only those points of doctrine which have been expressly designated as open questions in our Lutheran Church in America by men who claim to be faithful adherents of our confessional writings. Above everything else they place among the open questions the doctrines of the Church, the ministry, the Office of the Keys, a future millennium, a future twofold visible coming of Christ, a twofold resurrection of the body, Sunday, and similar matters. The Iowa Synod is the chief representative of this theory in America. In referring to former declarations, it admits in its *Synodical Report of 1861* that "it designated and still designates the doctrines of the Church, the ministry, and eschatology, on which diverse opinions have been expressed for a number of years, as open questions" (p.15). After this same synod in the year 1858 had unanimously and solemnly passed a resolution that it believed in chiliasm, it published in the same way at least this declaration in its *Report for 1864*: "We consider and treat the doctrine . . . of chiliasm . . . as exegetical controversial questions and as theological problems, on which theologians may entertain varying opinions without disturbing church fellowship." Pastor Wilhelm Loehe criticized the synod for this declaration because he did not want to see chiliasm looked upon as a mere theological problem. In 1866 the synod asked a number of prominent Lutheran theologians in Germany and Russia for an opinion on these points: whether it was right in declaring (a) "the controversial doctrines of the ministry and escha-

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tology as *open*, not Church-divisive questions"; (b) "that a doctrine concerning the last things in which a personal Antichrist . . . a millennium, is taught, is *justified within the Lutheran Church* as long as the lines drawn in Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession are not ignored and the excesses of the enthusiasts are avoided" (Opinion of the Faculty at Dorpat, p. 1). But the synod, among other things, designates the chiliastic doctrines of a future twofold visible coming of Christ and a twofold resurrection of the body as doctrines that do not ignore that line.

It is apparent from the foregoing that not only theological problems and points which at least are of a problematical nature but also such doctrines are declared to be open questions as, either positively or negatively, are indisputably decided in the Word of God; the position is taken that it is permissible within the Lutheran Church to answer these points either yes or no.

We can in no wise accept this theory. We reject it decidedly because it is syncretistic, unionistic, indifferentistic, and violates the majesty of the Word of God. *We cannot consider nor treat any doctrine that is clearly taught in God's Word or that contradicts some clear Word of God as an open question, even though it may seem to be or actually is only a subordinate doctrine or one that may lie on the periphery, far removed from the heart of the doctrine of salvation.*

In the first place, however, we do not wish to maintain that church fellowship must terminate with a *member* of the Church as soon as it is evident that he is entertaining an error which contradicts a clear Word of God. It is hardly possible to imagine a more horrible fanaticism, definitely destroying the unity of the Church which it seeks to maintain. The Church has never reached a higher degree of unity in doctrine than a fundamental unity.* Only an enthusiastic chiliast could entertain the hope that the Church ever can reach a higher degree. As long as the Church lives in the flesh, it will be just as impossible for her to reach this high degree as it is for her to attain perfect holiness in Christian living and in Christian love. Luther therefore is right when he says: "If the saints were not subject to error in faith and truth,

* The last phrase has been translated also "unity in fundamentals." The German original is *fundamentale (Einigkeit)*. — Ed. NORZ.

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why does St. Peter teach that they must grow in faith and in the knowledge of Christ? 1 Pet. 2:2. St. Paul also taught that we should grow in Christ so that we would not, like little children, be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, Eph. 4:12, 14. But as faith decreases in us, error and unbelief will increase." (St. L., XIX:1131.)

In the second place, we do not wish to maintain that a *Church* has lost the true character of a Church which an orthodox Christian may fellowship if she still harbors an error which, while not destroying the foundation of faith, nevertheless militates against the clear Word of God. To admit that *every true member of the Church* may err and to deny at the same time that the *entire true Church* may err is a most despicable contradiction, of which only a Papist could be guilty. As long as a Church has not hardened herself in her error, that error, even though it may be of a rather serious nature, does not necessitate a separation, least of all if she has begun to strive for unity on the basis of the truth. Luther's words therefore are right: "*The holy Church* sins and stumbles or *even errs* at times as the Lord's Prayer teaches, *but she does not defend nor excuse herself*. She humbly prays for forgiveness and improves herself as much as she can. Therefore she has forgiveness, and her sin is no longer counted against her." (St. L., XIX:1294.) Again he says: "They (the Papists) do not distinguish between *erring* and *continuing* in error. It does not harm the Church to *err*, but it is impossible for her to *continue* in error." (St. L., XIX:1243.) Finally, Luther wrote: "It is true that Christendom is holy and cannot err (for the Third Article says: 'I believe in the *holy* Christian Church'). But this is true in so far as it pertains to the Spirit. The Church is entirely holy in Christ and not in herself. But in as far as she is still in the *flesh*, she has sin, can err and be deceived. For the sake of the Spirit, however, her sin and failings are forgiven. . . . Thus all Christendom erred in the beginning in Jerusalem when it insisted on circumcision for the heathen and commanded that the law of Moses had to be kept, otherwise there could be no salvation. This insistence was contrary to the chief doctrine on which Christianity rests, namely, that we are saved alone through Christ and His grace without the Law and without circumcision, a doctrine that St. Paul

maintained only with great difficulty. It is not surprising that the Christian Church later on, when she was not so rich in spirit, erred and missed the mark at times; yet she remained holy through forgiveness of sins, just as the Apostolic Church." (St. L., XVI:1410 f.)

Finally, we do not wish to maintain that there is no difference between the members of the Church and that all must share the same correct opinion on those points of Biblical doctrine which do not belong to the dogmatical foundation. It may happen that a simple Christian will deny a secondary *fundamental* doctrine all his life because he cannot grasp the correctness and the necessity of the deduction which is involved. If it is improper to exclude such a man from the communion of the Church as a heretic because he persists in his denial or clings to an error concerning a secondary fundamental doctrine, it all the more is not right to exclude a man because of an error in a point of doctrine which does not belong to the fundamental articles of the Christian faith. Kroymayer therefore is right when he says: "The varying degrees of certainty with respect to conclusions drawn from the clear Word of God do not change the authority of the divine Word, but they constitute an excuse for many weak Christians (since they cannot all grasp these conclusions immediately) and demand that those who are able to understand these conclusions because of deeper insight tolerate the weak Christians."

When we deny that something else besides the so-called theological problems and such points as are of a problematical character may be counted among the open questions within the Lutheran Church, and hence that there really are open questions in the sense of modern theology, we rather merely want to establish these truths: (a) No error, nothing that is contradictory to the Word of God, may be granted the right of existence in the orthodox Church; (b) no one in the orthodox Church has any permission to depart from the Word of God even in the smallest point, whether he does so negatively or positively, directly or indirectly; (c) every departure from the clear Word of God within the Lutheran Church, even though it should consist in nothing more than denying that Balaam's ass spoke, demands that steps be taken to correct such departure; (d) finally, when all instruction,

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admonition, warning, threatening, and manifested patience are fruitless and ineffective and the respective person or communion refuses to renounce the contradiction of the clear Word of God, expulsion or a schism will have to follow.

It is the Word of God which compels us to cling to this position, for it is written: "Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, *neither shall ye diminish ought from it*, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I command you," Deut. 4:2; 12:32. "*To the Law and to the Testimony*; if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them," Is. 8:20. "And if *any man shall take away* from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life and out of the Holy City and from the things which are written in this book," Rev. 22:19. "*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*," Gal. 5:9. "*The Scripture cannot be broken*," John 10:35. "O fools and slow of heart to believe *all* that the Prophets have spoken," Luke 24:25. "*All Scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is *profitable* for doctrine, for *reproof*" (for refuting error), "for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works," 2 Tim. 3:16-17. Finally, Christ the Lord utters these great words: "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, *one jot or one tittle* shall in no wise pass from the Law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven," Matt. 5:18-19.⁹

⁹ In this connection Huelsemann makes this observation: "If anyone (stubbornly) 1. denies even the smallest point of that which is revealed in Holy Writ and 2. teaches others to accept such denial (both points must be taken together), I deny that such a man is a member of the universal Church. Now, when church organizations have such teachers as leaders and not only agree with their teaching because they do not know any better, but also help to propagate some teaching that is contradictory to Holy Writ, I deny that these church organizations (as such) share the inner communion of the same sanctifying Spirit with the churches of the patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles. For the one Spirit does not contradict Himself. Wherever a contradiction arises against the Holy Spirit, communion with the Church Militant and Triumphant dies out according to the clear Word of our Savior, Matt. 5:19: 'Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven,' that is, in the Kingdom of Grace as well as in the Kingdom of Glory." (*Praelect. Form. Conc.*, Art. XV, s. 5, § 9, 812.)

Who can read these Bible passages without realizing that Holy Writ clearly rejects the modern theory of open questions? If such doctrines as are clearly contained in the Word of God may be classified as open questions, what else is this position than an attempt to say that one may indeed "diminish" something from the Word of God; that one need not always follow "the Law and the Testimony"; that "a little leaven" of false doctrine will do no harm and may therefore be tolerated; that Scripture may be "broken" now and then; that one need not "believe all that the Prophets have spoken"; that all Scripture is not necessary and not "profitable"; and that it is permissible to "break" some things in Scripture? What else is the recognition of open questions in the sense of the new theology than a flagrant contradiction of the words of the Holy Spirit? Again, supposing it were not possible to find all these Bible passages which have been quoted above and similar ones in Holy Writ, who would not be obliged to reject that theory if he really held God's Word to be God's Word? For if the Bible is God's Word, then all judgments expressed therein are decisions of the great majestic God Himself. But is it not a terrible thing to declare that what the great God has decided is still undecided? to grant man freedom to contradict when the great God has spoken? to assign to any creature the right to differ when the great God has rendered His definite verdict? to undertake to sift what eternal Wisdom and eternal Love has revealed for the salvation of men and to say: "*This you must believe, confess, and teach; that you may reject*"?—Yes, this is truly terrible! Hear the words of the holy Apostle Paul: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any *other* gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, *let him be accursed*. As we have said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any *other* gospel unto you than that ye have received, *let him be accursed*," Gal. 1:8-9. When Isaiah begins to proclaim to the world the Word of God that has been laid in his mouth, he utters these words: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth," Is. 1: 2. And Habakkuk exclaims: "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him," Hab. 2:20. Woe unto him, therefore, who does not speak with Samuel in deep humility and willingness when the Word of God is held before him: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth"! 1 Sam. 3:9.

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This is the material which we felt we ought to present to our readers in the foreword of our periodical for the current year. In these closing words we bear testimony to the fact that nothing in the most recent theological writings, discussions, and events has changed our position. We still uphold the principle that whatever God has clearly and definitely decided in His holy Word dare not be accepted as an open question in the sense of modern theology. We vow that in the future too, in the editing of this journal, we shall let ourselves be guided by this principle.

In a special article* in the next issue we shall show how untenable those reasons are by which men try to justify themselves in declaring those portions of divine revelation which have been presented to be open questions.

* This article is found in translation in several numbers of this journal for 1939 under the heading: "The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions."—ED. NOTE.

St. Louis, Mo.

The Author of Hebrews A Fresh Approach

By E. L. LUEKER

The mystery surrounding the origin of the Letter to the Hebrews has led to endless speculation.¹ The addresses have been sought in Jewish congregations in Italy, in Jerusalem, in Palestine as a whole, in Antioch, in Asia Minor, in Alexandria, or even in some unknown hamlet between the Pillars of Hercules and Damascus. Scholars have also maintained that the congregation was not a Jewish congregation at all, but a Gentile-Jewish congregation probably located in Rome. Farthest from the traditions of the fathers are those who hold that the Letter was sent to a Gentile church.

Theories regarding the author are equally numerous and can be divided into three classes: 1) those which follow the

¹ It is unnecessary to repeat the voluminous bibliography for the various theories. If the reader is interested in the full presentation of any particular theory, he can find the bibliography in James Moffatt: *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*. The theories regarding the author have also been analyzed in a Concordia Seminary B. D. dissertation by R. H. Thies, 1944.