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Union Theses, adopted by Breslau Synod and Saxon Free Church

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Union Theses

Adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church
of Old Prussia (Breslau Synod)
and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church
(Free Church of Saxony and Other States)*

I

CONCERNING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

There is an inseparable union between the two bases of the Reformation, in fact, of the true Church of Christ, viz., between the doctrine that lost and condemned mankind can be saved solely by the grace of God for Christ's sake through faith (*sola gratia, sola fide*) and the principle that all teaching must be according to the Holy Scriptures (*sola Scriptura*). There can be no Christian proclamation without the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. There is no Christian proclamation unless the Christian doctrine is determined solely according to the Holy Scriptures and in no wise by human reason. The Law as well as the Gospel must be proclaimed as God's Word. If human judgment is permitted to determine what in the Holy Scriptures constitutes the Word of God, or if doctrine is derived from another source beside Holy Scripture, the authority of the proclamation is vitiated. Such a procedure will also lead to a denial of man's total depravity and to a complete or partial denial of the all-sufficient vicarious sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God, in short, to a denial of grace, and thus to a return to the doctrine of work-

* Immediately after the cessation of hostilities and under the terrific aftermath of the war, representatives of the two largest Lutheran Free Churches met in order to discuss the points of doctrine which had been at issue between these two churches for almost a century and to bring about under God's grace a God-pleasing union. A frank discussion in the fear of God led within the space of two years to a full agreement on all points. A committee consisting of Pastors Gerhard Heinzelmänn (Breslau Synod) and W. M. Oesch (Saxon Free Church) drafted the union theses. These were submitted to all pastors and congregations and unanimously adopted by them. Full fellowship between the two church bodies has been established. At the present time doctrinal discussions between these two bodies and the remaining Lutheran Free Churches are under way.—We hope that the theses in their translated form will be a distinct service to our pastors. F. E. Mayer.

righteousness. We maintain unequivocally both Reformation principles, grace and Scripture. The fact that we discuss the latter first is not to be understood as though this were the manner to save souls, to quicken the spiritually dead, or to remove men's doubts. This can be effected solely when Law and Gospel prove themselves as God's Word upon the hearts of men. The Holy Spirit creates faith in the Scriptures through the written and spoken Word. In speaking of the divine authority of the Scriptures or the doctrine of plenary inspiration, we are not dealing with a theory, but with express statements of the Holy Spirit concerning the Scriptures.

1. *The divinely inspired Scriptures, that is, the original text of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, were written under God's gracious condescension by men endowed with specific gifts and powers at specific times, under specific conditions, and in so far share the same historical experiences as human books (Luke 1:1-4).*

This thesis wishes to state that the holy writers were not *calami* (pencils), as though their own psychic life had been extinguished. The mystery of God's condescension in the Scriptures, who does not use celestial language (2 Cor. 12:4), but speaks through men in human language (Heb. 1:1-2; 1 John 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:21, 25), cannot be explained.

2. *The Holy Scriptures are of divine origin and divine character, because God's Holy Spirit employed the writers and gave them the Scriptures by inspiration according to its content (Realinspiration) and according to its phraseology (Verbalinspiration) (Acts 2:4; 1 Cor. 2:13; Rom. 3:2; Matt. 22:43-45; Gal. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; Trigl., Nicene Creed, p. 31; Augsburg Confession, p. 90, par. 49). The Scriptures not only contain the Word of God, as though men had the prerogative to determine what in the Scriptures is the Word of God and what is not the Word of God, but in its entirety it is God's irrevocable, infallible Word (unverbruechliches Wort) (John 17:17; Tit. 1:2-3; Trigl., 770:76), given for our salvation (John 1:17; 2 Cor. 3:8-9, Law and Gospel; John 5:39; 2 Tim. 3:15-17), the only source of truth (John 17:20; 1 Pet. 4:11 a; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Trigl., 466:15; 850:3), "the only rule and norm according to which all doctrine and life must be judged" (Matt. 4:4, 7; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; Trigl., 776:1; 778:7). If there*

seem to be contradictions or errors in historical, scientific, or other areas, an attempt must be made to find a solution. If this is not possible, we must commit the entire matter to God and accept the authoritative position of the Scriptures even in these statements (John 10:35; Matt. 5:18; 19:4-5). Since God has spoken through Prophets and Apostles, and Scripture, therefore, in all its parts is God's Word, therefore content and form of Scripture, spirit and letter (*Trigl.*, 44:4; 494:3-6), dare never be torn asunder (John 1:14; Acts 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:13; John 6:63; Gal. 3:2).

Since Scripture is God's Word, it is the foundation of the Church (John 17:20; Eph. 2:20; Rom. 10:6-8) and the light which shines in a dark place (Ps. 119:105; 2 Pet. 1:19; *Trigl.*, 152:107-108).

The rule of faith, according to which Holy Scripture must be understood, are the clear passages of Scripture in which the respective doctrines are discussed (*sedes doctrinae*), not a *humanly devised* "totality of Scripture" (*Trigl.*, 440:60; Matt. 28:20 a; John 8:31-32; Matt. 4:7). Nothing dare be treated as an open question by the Church which has been revealed in clear Scripture passages. On the other hand, all those points on which Scripture has not spoken remain open questions, because the Church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. There is no warrant for the assumption that God has revealed or will reveal doctrines outside Scripture (Matt. 15:9; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8; 5:9; Rev. 22:18-19). At the same time all Christians must search in God's Word and grow in Christian knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18). Difference of opinion in non-doctrinal questions — such as exegetical, historical, or other questions — are not church-divisive, so long as the principle of the inerrancy of Scripture is maintained (*im Glauben grundsatzlich festgehalten wird*). Faith in the doctrine of inspiration does not lead to a bondage of the letter, but prompts the childlike, humble, and confident prayer: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth" (Ps. 119:38, 76, 152).

NOTE. — Thesis 1 definitely repudiates the misunderstanding which is frequently attached to the term "verbal inspiration," as though it were a mechanical dictation. The term "verbal inspiration" has not been used to explain the mystery of divine inspiration. It merely expresses the fact which

both Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions maintain, namely, the Word of the Scriptures is identical with God's Word (*Schriftwort ist gleich Gottes Wort*). The doctrine of inspiration understood in the sense that God not only illuminated the persons and revealed the facts but has also inspired the words, may also be expressed in the term "plenary inspiration." (Compare also *Trigl.*, 38:8; 56:1-2; 270:66; 318:13-17; 382:70-71; 412:89; 464:8; 494—496:3, 9-10; 504:6; 570:11; 850—856:5-19; 964—966:12-14; 1066:12.)

II

CONCERNING CONVERSION AND PREDESTINATION

A. CONCERNING CONVERSION

In the doctrine of conversion the Biblical concept of God's saving grace must be maintained in its full import. The grace of God rests solely upon the universal justification of the entire world in Christ (2 Cor. 5:19-21; Rom. 5:18), is God's gracious disposition toward the sinner for Christ's sake (Rom. 4:5). Scripture permits no one to doubt the earnestness of God's gracious will, for "God will have all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4). The message of God's gracious will is the Gospel, which according to Christ's will is to be proclaimed among all nations (Acts 20:24 c; Matt. 28:19) and is so efficacious that it not only demands faith, but actually works faith (Rom. 1:16; 10:17; Gal. 3:2). And God's universal invitation is so serious that His wrath is provoked against all who do not accept His universal invitation (Luke 14:21; 2 Pet. 2:1 b).

1. *Conversion consists in this, that a sinner who has been smitten by God's Law and has learned to know himself as a condemned sinner, comes to faith in the Gospel, which on account of Christ's vicarious atonement offers to the sinner forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation (Luke 24:47; Acts 26:18; 11:21). Conversion is accomplished in the moment when the Holy Spirit engenders the first spark of faith or a yearning for saving grace (Trigl., 902:54; 884:14; 886:16). According to Scripture, man since the Fall is dead in sin (Eph. 2:1-3), inclined toward all that is evil (Gen. 8:21; Rom. 8:7), considers the Gospel foolishness (1 Cor. 2:14), and is an enemy of God and His Gospel (1 Cor. 1:23; Trigl., 42, Art. II;*

50, Art. XVIII, 1-4; 882:7). *Therefore conversion is in no wise the work of man, but exclusively the work of divine grace and God's "mighty power"* (1 Cor. 12:3 b; Phil. 1:29; Eph. 2:8; 1:19; Phil. 2:13; Jer. 31:18; *Trigl.*, 890:25). *Therefore the Scriptures speak of a "raising from the dead"* (Col. 2:12), a *"being born of God"* (John 1:12-13), *the new birth out of the Gospel* (1 Pet. 1:23), *an act of God similar to the creation of light on the first day of creation* (2 Cor. 4:6; *Trigl.*, 904:60).

Accordingly we reject gross synergism, which holds that man is only partially corrupt and can make the beginning of his conversion by his own latent powers, as well as all forms of synergism which ascribe to man the ability to prepare himself for grace (*Trigl.*, 882:7), or the ability to desist from his malicious resistance, so that man makes the final decision in his conversion, or the theory that man is able with "imparted gifts" to complete the work which the grace of God had begun in him. Neither Scripture nor the Confessions know of such human capacities. On the contrary, they testify that all glory must be given to God for the conversion of the sinner (Ps. 100:3; Rom. 9:16), and that man, prior to his conversion, has no good spiritual powers whatsoever by means of which he can rightly employ the (alleged) "imparted powers" and give the consenting word to God's grace (Eph. 2:1-6). We, therefore, reject the doctrine that there is an intermediate state between spiritual death and spiritual life; likewise also the distinction between "spiritual awakening," the imparted capacity to believe, and "conversion proper," the self-determination in which the sinner raises potential faith to actual faith (*zum Glauben durchdringt*). It must also be observed that the terms "to be converted" and "to convert one's self" are not two processes separate from one another in fact and in time, but one and the same act, namely, the one work of the Holy Spirit, who makes the unbelieving a believer (*Trigl.*, 890:24).

OBSERVATION: The daily repentance or conversion of the Christian must be distinguished from his first conversion. In his daily conversion the old Adam is drowned with all sins and evil lusts, and the new man comes forth who lives in righteousness and purity before God. In this process there is, of course, co-operation on the part of the regenerate Christian

(John 3:6 b; 15:5; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 8:13-14; Heb. 12:14; Small Catechism, Second Article), but only so that all glory must be ascribed to God, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2; Phil. 2:12 b-13; 1 Cor. 1:29-31; *Trigl.*, 906:65-66).

2. *The Holy Spirit performs His work not immediately, but through means, Word and Sacrament* (2 Cor. 3:6, 8). All men are, therefore, directed to the means of grace (Mark 1:15; Matt. 17:5; John 3:5; 1 Cor. 11:25; *Trigl.*, 908:71-72). Though the call of the Gospel is in every instance serious and efficacious (*voll goettlicher Kraft*) (Rom. 1:16; 1:5), saving grace is not irresistible, nor is there coercion in conversion and preservation. That the majority of those called by the Gospel either do not come to faith or fall away again must be attributed to man's continued and malicious resistance and is man's own fault (Acts 7:51; Luke 13:34; Acts 13:46; *Trigl.*, 834:12), never God's fault.

B. CONCERNING PREDESTINATION

There is an integral relation between the doctrines of predestination and conversion. Both presuppose the universality and all-sufficiency of grace. Though the doctrine of predestination occupies an ancillary position in the entire complex of Christian doctrine, it dare not be treated as a secondary and unimportant doctrine, because the entire comfort of the Gospel is contained in it.

1. *The universal, gracious will of God extends from eternity over all men as certainly as Christ, who bore the sins of the world* (John 1:29), *was foreordained before the foundation of the world* (1 Pet. 1:20) and as certainly as Christ died for all men upon the Cross (1 Tim. 2:6; 2 Pet. 2:1) and God in Christ has forgiven the sins of the world (2 Cor. 5:19; Rom. 5:18) and earnestly desires that through the preaching of the Gospel all men should be saved and brought to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4-6; 2 Pet. 3:9; *Trigl.*, 1070 f.:28-29).

According to this thesis God's gracious will is both universal and serious, and it is therefore blasphemous to teach that Christ did not die for all men and that God passed by the greater part of mankind or even predetermined the majority to damnation, or that His gracious call is serious only in the case of the elect. The reason why many are lost

does not lie in God, but in man "who would not" (Matt. 23: 37; *Trigl.*, 836: 16-21).

2. *God's gracious decree of election deals only with the believers. Based upon the eternal decree of universal redemption and serving it (Rom. 8: 32-24), unconditioned by any act of unregenerate or regenerate man (2 Tim. 1: 9), the gracious decree of election is "a cause of their salvation, which He also provides as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it" (Trigl., 833: 5). Predestination is that act of God by which He in Christ and in sanctification of the Spirit and in faith of the truth has before time elected the believers out of the mass of others (Rom. 8: 26-30; Eph. 1: 3-6; 2 Thess. 2: 13-14; Trigl., 1068: 23).*

Scripture states that those who attain eternal salvation owe this solely to the grace of God in Christ, more specifically, to "His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1: 9), and in no wise to themselves. Like Paul, they ascribe the many spiritual blessings in heavenly places which they now enjoy in faith to the election in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1: 3-4; Acts 13: 48; *Trigl.*, 1064—1072: 9-33). The doctrine of predestination gives me the most certain hope that my salvation does not rest in my weak hands, but in the mighty and faithful hand of God (*Trigl.*, 1070: 25-26; 1078: 45-50).

The election does not take place outside Christ, as though there were two wills in God, a universal gracious will and a special will to save (*Heilswille*). The election has taken place in Christ, that is, Christ's work and merit and man's acceptance of the same according to the order of salvation are included in the decree of election. The acceptance of salvation is wrought by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, to which all men are directed (*Trigl.*, 1082: 65; 1086—1088: 76-77). It is Scriptural to say that election took place "in" or "through faith" (2 Thess. 2: 13); however, the phrase that it occurred "in view of final faith" must be avoided since it creates the impression as though our faith must be viewed as a contributing factor and thus as a cause of God's predestination (2 Tim. 1: 9; John 15: 16; *Trigl.*, 1092: 88).

3. *The question why God, in spite of the total depravity*

of all men and the universality of His grace, creates faith in some and not in others (cur alii, alii non?) remains an insoluble divine mystery. We must abide by the absolute either/or: It is man's own fault if he is lost, and it is God's grace alone if he is saved. (Trigl., 1078—1080: 52-56; 1088: 79-82.)

This thesis emphasizes the fact that our reason must here keep silence. The question will always remain: If salvation is solely God's work, then why does the almighty and gracious God remove the natural hostility over against the Gospel in the one and not in the other? Whoever attempts to solve this problem must either, as the Calvinists, make God the Author of the damnation of the reprobate, ascribe to Him an eternal decree of reprobation, of which Scripture knows nothing, and thereby deny universal grace; or he must ascribe the cause of man's salvation, as the synergists do, at least in part, to man's conduct, and thus deny the *sola gratia*. We must be satisfied with God's revelation both in the Law regarding man's guilt and in the Gospel regarding man's salvation. (Trigl., 1092: 89-90.)

III

CONCERNING THE CHURCH AND THE MINISTRY

A. CONCERNING THE CHURCH

It is of paramount importance that the truly spiritual and evangelical nature and essence of the Church be maintained, which distinguishes Christ's kingdom from all the kingdoms of the world. Unless this is observed, the body of Christ, which has been brought into being by God's Spirit, will be transformed into a human organism with human traditions; the congregation of God will be changed into a society founded, organized, and governed by men; and the people of the Gospel gladly and willingly serving the Lord in the righteousness of faith will be transmuted into a people of the Law which vainly labors with dead works.

1. *The Church in the proper sense, or the one holy Christian Church, to which Christ originally committed all spiritual powers, are the saints or the believers, which have been called out of lost mankind and have been incorporated into Christ by Word and Sacrament (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; Eph. 1:23; 4:3-6; 5:25-27; Heb. 12:23; 1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18;*

Gal. 4:26, 28; 1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Small Catechism, Third Article; *Trigl.*, 498:XII; 230:12, 16; 900:50; 154:119-120; 510:24; 522:67-69).

This thesis emphasizes the truth that though the true Christians are known only to God and the true essence of the Church is hidden and invisible (Luke 17:20-21; 2 Tim. 2:19 a; Small Catechism, Third Article; *Trigl.*, 228—232:9-11, 13-15, 17-20), the Church nevertheless is perceptible by certain marks, namely, Word and Sacrament, by which the Church has been established (Augsburg Confession V). Ordinarily God will not convey faith nor deal with us except through the external Word and Sacrament (*Trigl.*, 494:3, 10). Although the Church is everywhere where the Gospel is still essentially in use, yet we are to seek the Church only there (*wir sollen die Kirche nur bei denen suchen*) where the ministry of the Word has been established, where the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments administered according to Christ's institution.† Wherever this is done, there the Church is truly to be found, since God's Word is never without fruit (Is. 55:10-11; Luke 8:8; 2 Cor. 2:15-16; *Trigl.*, 226:5; 228:7-8; 232:21-22; 314:26-28). The efficacy of the Gospel and the Sacraments is not dependent on the personal faith or piety of those who administer them, but the ascended Christ Himself builds and preserves the Church through the Word (Matt. 28:20 b; Eph. 4:16 a; *Trigl.*, 46:VII, VIII; 234 f.:28).

2 a. *In an improper sense the totality of the called may be designated as Church* (visible church, local congregation = *ecclesia simplex*, Matt. 18:17; Acts 8:1; 11:22; denominational bodies = *ecclesiae compositae*, 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 8:1, 19, 23), *among whom also such will be found as use the means of grace only externally, without coming to faith* (Matt. 13:47-48).

† The meaning of the phrase "die Kirche suchen" is not clear. Does the thesis wish to state that we must seek fellowship only where the Gospel is purely taught? Then the statement should be transferred to Paragraph 3. Or is the statement based on a false interpretation of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, which states that in the *una sancta* "the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered"? A careful analysis of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession shows that no more is meant than that the Gospel must be "essentially in use," and not, that the Church is to be found only where the Gospel is preached in all its truth and purity. The sentence placed into this thesis is apt to lead to a confusion of the *una sancta* and the so-called visible Church. (F. E. M.)

This thesis indicates that hypocrites and nominal Christians cannot claim membership in the true Church on the basis of their external membership (Eph. 2:19-22; 1:1; Col. 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:19; 1 Cor. 5:13). Though Scripture frequently includes them under the term "church," yet this is done figuratively, inasmuch as synecdochically the whole bears the name of the essential part, because a clear-cut distinction between believers and hypocrites is impossible here on earth (Matt. 13:27-30; *Trigl.*, 226-228:3, 5-7; 230:12-13; 230-232:16-19; 232:20-21).

2 b. *The office of the keys, namely, the power to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments and exercise pastoral discipline* (Matt. 28:18-20) *has been given originally and immediately to the Church in the proper sense* (Gal. 4:26, 28; 1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 16:15-19; 18:15-20; *Trigl.*, 510:24; 522:67-69). *Of course, this power can be exercised only within the so-called visible Church* (Matt. 18:17; *Trigl.*, 692:54-55). *At the same time it delimits (umgrenzt) the scope of the Church's commission* (John 18:36-37; 20:21-23; 1 Tim. 3:15; Small Catechism, Office of the Keys I; *Trigl.*, 84:5-29).

This thesis is to set forth that the visible Church (*Gemeinde der Berufenen*) has no other function but the aforementioned truly ecclesiastical functions, viz., to preach the Law and Gospel for the salvation of immortal souls (Matt. 28:18-20; John 18:36-37; 20:21-23; 1 Tim. 3:15; Small Catechism, Office of the Keys I) and to establish truly Christian congregations (Romans 12; Revelation 2 and 3).

2 c. *Since Christ is the only Head of His one Church* (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:3-16; Large Catechism, Third Article; *Trigl.*, 690:51-53; 470:IV, 1), *therefore the organized Church must see to it that all ordinances and activities are subject to the sole authority of Christ in His Word* (John 18:37; Matt. 28:20; Eph. 2:20; John 17:20; 1 Pet. 4:11 a; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Matt. 15:9; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8; 5:9; Rev. 22:18-19; *Trigl.*, 776:1; 778:7; 46:2-4; 472:9). *All Church activities (Lebensaeusserung) of the visible Church must emanate from the confession and must manifest themselves as the immediate or mediate effect of Word and Sacraments* (Matt. 16:13-19; John 6:67-69; Heb. 10:23-25; Acts 2:42; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9; *Trigl.*, 510:25-27; 1054-1056:10-12).

The proper form of the historical Church, therefore, is that confessional Church which in unity of mind and unswerving loyalty preserves and continues the saving truth in the power of the Holy Spirit (Rev. 3:7-11; 1 Tim. 6:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:2; *Trigl.*, 42:I, 1). For that reason truly Christian congregations subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580 as the correct interpretation and presentation of the 'divine Word' (*Trigl.*, 776:3; 850:5). They are not a rule of faith outside and beyond Holy Scripture, but a confession of Scripture doctrine in the face of heresies. The doctrinal positions are binding upon the conscience, because they are doctrinal statements of Holy Scripture itself (*Trigl.*, 778:7). All who desire the public ministry in an orthodox church must subscribe the Confessions with *quia*, not with *quatenus* (*Trigl.*, 854:10). This doctrinal pledge covers all doctrines in the symbols, because they are taken from the Scriptures and therefore constitute an integrated whole. However, they do not cover such historical statements or purely exegetical questions (*auslegungswissenschaftlich*) and other matters as have no bearing on the doctrinal content (*Trigl.*, 1062:31).

The true confessional spirit implies that (on the one hand) the Church of Christ will not surrender the cause of Christ and her liberty as the bride of Christ to any secular encroachment, nor (on the other hand) does the Church usurp purely civic or political functions. While according to the will of God the Church must exert a wholesome moral influence on society — also through proclaiming the revealed Law, which is applicable to all vocations — nevertheless it would be wrong to argue that the Church is a segment of the world and therefore as a Church has civic duties, rights, and functions. This is a distorted notion of the essence and purpose of Christ's Church on earth similar to the Roman and Calvinistic errors. (Matt. 20:25-28; Luke 12:13-14; 1 Cor. 2:2; 5:9-13; Small Catechism, Third Article; *Trigl.*, 50:4-7; 330—332:58-60.)

3. *The Word of God and the holy Sacraments — the seed and foundation* (1 Pet. 1:23; Eph. 2:20) *and only commission of the Church — are the marks of the Holy Christian (Kirche ueberhaupt) Church and, when preached in their truth and purity, the marks of the true visible or orthodox Church* (John 8:31; 1 Tim. 3:15; *Trigl.*, 46:VII).

This thesis states that the Church is to be found wherever Word and Sacrament are essentially present (Is. 55:10-11; Luke 8:8; 2 Cor. 2:15-16; 1 Cor. 3:11-13; Rom. 9:6 a; 11:4-6). It, however, also emphasizes that we can adhere to it [the *una sancta*? F. E. M.] with a good conscience only there (*dass ich mich aber nur da mit gutem Gewissen zu ihr halten kann, wo*) where Word and Sacrament are used in their truth and purity (John 8:31-32; 1 Cor. 1:10; John 17:20; 1 Pet. 4:11 a; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Matt. 15:9; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:8; 5:9; Rev. 22:18-19; *Trigl.*, 46:VII; 1062:31); that we must co-operate in word and deed with an orthodox communion (Phil. 1:5; Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 15:58) and avoid all heterodox communions (Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17; 2 John 10-11; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; *Trigl.*, 86:22-28; 242:47-48; 828-830:6-7; 42:5-6; 102:2 b; 514-516:38, 41-42; 518-520:52, 57-59; 474:10-14; 512-518:31-53; 520:57-59; 226:4; 318:18-19; 46:X; 804:11; 806-808:1-5; 814-816:25-39; 816:1-3; 822:23-26; 824-826:30-39; Augsburg Confession XVI, XVII; 838-842:XII). The orthodoxy of a church is not determined by its name nor the external and nominal subscription to an orthodox confession, but by the doctrine which is *de facto* proclaimed in the pulpit, in the theological schools, in the publications (Second Commandment, First Petition). At the same time it must be observed that a church does not lose its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of heresy, as long as the church opposes and removes such heresy by doctrinal discipline (Acts 20:30; 1 Tim. 1:3; Tit. 1:9-11; *Trigl.*, 24).—Every form of unionism, that is, every church fellowship with errorists as well as interdenominational unionism, that is, a church fellowship between orthodox and heterodox churches, is contrary to Scripture and the Confessions (Tit. 3:10; John 8:31-32; 1 Cor. 1:10; Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17; 2 John 10-11; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; *Trigl.*, 854-56:14-16; 1094:95; 1094-96:4:6), disrupts the Church of Christ, and exposes to the ever-present danger of losing the Word of God completely (1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:17-21; Gal. 5:9). By strict adherence to the Word we must foster the unity of the Church here on earth until we behold it in eternity (John 17:14, 17, 20-21).†

† Does not the last part of v. 21 indicate that the unity is to be visible also in this world? (F. E. M.)

B. CONCERNING THE PUBLIC MINISTRY

1. *The holy ministry is an office instituted by Christ and is a ministry of service. The Lord has commanded the Church to establish this office, to which the Church is bound until the end of days* (Luke 6:13; Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Tit. 1:5; Trigl., 504:10).

On the one hand, the office of the ministry is not a peculiar state, one distinct from, and superior to, the state of all Christians, nor a self-perpetuating state (Trigl., 522—524:69). On the other hand, the office of the ministry is not a mere human ordinance subject to human caprice (*menschlicher Willkuer unterworfen*).

2. *Although the office to remit and to retain sin, to preach Law and Gospel, was originally and immediately given all Christians by the Lord of the Church* (Matt. 16:15-19; John 20:19-23; Luke 24:33-36; Trigl., 510:24), nevertheless, in order properly to exercise this office publicly, the congregation calls a qualified person for this purpose (Rom. 10:15; Acts 1:23-26; 6:3-6; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Augsburg Confession XIV). *The person so called feeds the congregation with and rules it through Word and Sacrament* (John 20:22-23; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; Heb. 13:12), not only by human authority, but at the same time — and therefore mediately — by the command of the Lord (Matt. 28:20; Luke 10:16; 1 Cor. 4:1). Ordination is the solemn confirmation before the congregation of the call into the holy ministry (Acts 13:3; 6:6; Trigl., 522—524:67-70).

3. *Since the Church is one under its Head, Christ, it is the solemn duty of the congregation, though each congregation is the Church* (Matt. 18:17, 20; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Trigl., 501:24; 522:66-67; 828:4), to foster the unity of the Spirit with the entire orthodox Church (Eph. 4:3-16; Rom. 15:5-7) and wherever possible to build jointly with other congregations the entire Church of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-13, 26-28; Acts 11:21-23; 2 Cor. 11:8; Amos 6:6). Such co-operation presupposes proper guidance and direction (*gemeinschaftliche Leitung*) because the Lord has commanded that everything be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40; 2 Cor. 8:18-21; 9:5). But in such joint activity the spiritual feeding and guiding must always remain the function of the public ministry as the real (*eigentliches*) and highest office in the Church (2 Cor. 5:18;

Trigl., 326:44; 472:9). Regulations for the offices necessary to carry out the joint functions may vary from time to time. All external arrangements in congregations and in church bodies and all ranking of the ministers are purely of human right (Matt. 23:8; 1 Cor. 3:21-23).

IV. OF THE LAST THINGS

Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession, in condemning "certain Jewish opinions," indicates the type of eschatology which dare not have a place in the Lutheran Church. It is essential that our Christian hope be not corrupted and that we do not lose sight of our goal by false human concepts of the eternal kingdom of Christ, as was the case in the Messianic hopes of the Jews. In the final analysis the question concerns the spiritual character of Christ's kingdom in distinction from all secular kingdoms (Gal. 4:31) and the Gospel, which does not promise earthly joy and honor before the world, but spiritual, heavenly, and eternal blessings (1 Cor. 15:19; Eph. 1:3).

1. *We subscribe without qualification Article XVII, 1-3, of the Augsburg Confession (Trigl., 50). According to this thesis, Chiliasm is rejected, that is, the teaching of a twofold return of Christ, a twofold physical resurrection, and the view that prior to the resurrection the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world. This is contrary to Matt. 24:29-30; etc. (Cp. also 2 Tim. 4:1; John 6:39-40; Luke 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 13:9-12; Col. 3:1-4; Luke 9:22-24; John 15:18-19; John 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:1.)*

Revelation 20 cannot be adduced as an independent source for Christian doctrine, because it uses figurative language. It dare not be misused to darken other clear passages dealing with eschatology or the kingdom of Christ. Revelation 20 must be explained according to the clear passages with careful consideration of text and context. Though some would place the "thousand years" into the future and not into the past, yet they dare not find in the "thousand years" a teaching which is contrary to the analogy of faith and the consensus of Christian doctrine or which would fix the date of Judgment Day.

2. *The hope that Israel as a nation will return in the*

"latter days" to Palestine and be reinstated as the chosen people of the Old Testament is crass Chiliasm. This error must be repudiated, not because of racial or political anti-Semitism, but because it is contrary to Scripture and the correct doctrine of Christ's kingdom (Luke 17:20-21; 1 Thess. 2:16; Rom. 11:7). The hope that before Judgment all Jews will be converted is based on misinterpretation of Scripture, especially of the Old Testament, and on carnal views concerning conversion and Christ's kingdom (Rom. 11:25-28; Jer. 31:31-34; cp. Matt. 26:28 and Heb. 8:6-13; 10:14-18; 2 Thess. 3:2 b; cp. 2 Cor. 2:15-16). The view held by many that a large number of Jews will be converted during the last times is in itself not contrary to Scripture, but cannot be supported by clear Scripture passages. — It must always be maintained that a nation is never accepted of God because of its ancestry or national characteristics or by means of an external mass revivalism (mittelst äusserlicher Masseneinwirkung), because this is contrary to the Gospel, i. e., the doctrine of justification by faith through grace, and in accord with the legalistic character of all heresy, which externalizes the kingdom of Christ (das Reich Christi an das Wesen dieser Welt bindet) (Gal. 4:26).

On the basis of Acts 15:15-28, compared with Amos 9:11, we agree with Luther that Rom. 11:25-28 and similar passages are fulfilled if "at all times some Jews are converted." In spite of the judgment of obduracy resting upon the majority of Israel, the number of those Jews who are to come to true faith and be won for Christ will be accomplished, even as the "fullness of the Gentiles shall come in." "All Israel" may mean the total number of the elect in Israel or the total number of all elect, "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), not, however, all Israel according to the flesh (Luther's commentary on Isaiah 59:20-21; 44:5).

3. We subscribe to the statement in the Smalcald Articles (Trigl., 472—474), that the Pope is the very Antichrist, because he sits in the temple of God and acts as though he were God (2 Thessalonians 2), because he has condemned the heart of the Gospel, namely, the doctrine of the forgiveness of sin by grace alone for Christ's sake through faith without any merit or worthiness on our part, and because he recognizes as servants of the Christian Church only those who uncon-

ditionally subject themselves to him (Trigl., 474:10-14; 512—518:31-53; 520:57-59; 226:4; 318—320:18-19).

This thesis does not deny that there are many antichrists outside of the Papacy (1 John 2:18), nor that among the members of the Church of the Papacy there are true Christians. Nor is this thesis directed against the Pope as an individual person, but against the Papacy as an institution, and therefore against its representatives. Scripture teaches that the "man of sin" (*grosse Antichrist*) will remain until Judgment Day (2 Thess. 2:8) and for that reason all Christians must constantly be on their guard against his heresies (2 Thess. 2:9-12). In what manner the Papacy as the prototype and spearhead (*Vormacht*), in whom all the anti-Christian elements are typified and concentrated, will unite himself with other antichrists prior to Judgment Day is not revealed in clear Scripture passages. Speculations on this point do not affect the unity of Christian doctrine. For the teaching that the Pope is the Antichrist does not belong to the fundamental articles necessary to salvation.

The Christian doctrine of eschatology is closely related to the doctrines of Law and Gospel and is therefore of great significance for the Christians, as is apparent from Matthew 25 and 1 Corinthians 15. It is imperative that in eschatology we adhere closely to the words of Scripture over against all fantastic interpretations of prophetic passages, particularly prophecies of the Old Testament and of Revelation. We must deal only with clear Scripture passages, interpret Scripture with Scripture, read the Old Testament in the light of the New, and take to heart the clear words of warning and comfort (2 Pet. 3:11; Rev. 3:11). We must keep in mind the limitations imposed upon us, because many things are still hidden concerning the specific exposition and application of prophecy, types, and events which are still in the process of development or lie in the future. Likewise, there is no binding exegesis of all parts of the prophecies in Revelation. In the interpretation of Revelation special care and patience must be exercised, yes, even the weak must be borne, provided, of course, that they will accept the infallible authority of Holy Scripture and the doctrines clearly revealed therein and recognize the centrality of the doctrine of justification. In the interest of these two Reformation principles they must

also be ready to wield the weapons of the Spirit against all corruption or alteration and thus serve the true peace of the Church.

Enthusiasm is always legalistic, is in the last instance a this-worldly religion (*zielt zuletzt auf Diesseitsanbetung*) (Col. 2:8), and therefore opposed to the true Gospel, for the Scriptural doctrine of man's total depravity admits no this-worldly foundation for the hope of salvation (Gal. 1:4; 6:14). The Gospel, on the other hand, elevates the hearts, directs poor sinners through the offer of free grace to their eternal home (*das die armen Suender durch gewisse, freie Gnade in der Ewigkeit beheimatet*), and thus makes them joyful in service while in this world (Tit. 2:1—3:8).

The Scriptural and confessional doctrine on eschatology engenders true ecclesiastical activity (Acts 1:1-11). Such ecclesiastical activity realizes that the warfare between the true Church and the ungodly world will continue, that it must reckon with the possibility of temptation and tribulation in the end (Matt. 24:9-14, 22), and therefore looks forward with patience and joy to the Day of Judgment, the returning Lord, the resurrection of the body, and the perfect life in eternal communion with God and His people (Luke 21:28; *Trigl.*, 458:14). Therefore the purpose of preaching the pure Gospel is to prepare, in the power of God, for eternal life (Mark 16:15-16; Rev. 22:17, 20-21).

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