

T H E D I F F E R E N C E
between
Orthodox and Heterodox Churches
by Dr. F. Pieper

This essay was delivered by Prof. F. Pieper at the 1389 Southern District Convention of the Missouri Synod. In its original German form it may be found on pages 10 to 51 of the District Report. The Rev. H. C. Schwan was the general synodical president at the time and was present at this district convention. (Pastor Schwan prepared the first synodical catechism for the Missourians.)

This present copy is produced in order to have sample copies of this essay in the American language. Our plan is to have it published in printed form. Readers will please let us know how many printed copies they might consider buying for their own congregation. (See accompanying letter.)

The German original contains an introduction to the essay by the convention secretary, the Rev. Aug. Burgdorf, which is a preview of the essay and includes the listing of all six theses in a group. On pages 24 and 25 of the original German, at the end of Thesis II (page 22 of the present translation), there are two paragraphs of convention discussion which are yet to be added to the proposed printed copy. In its original form, the essay has no subheadings. Those appearing hereinafter have been supplied, and there are more ready to be used, all of which may be useful in making an index for the essay.

Since this is a temporary copy, the translation here following is open for possible improvement. - For further information, please write to the mimeographer or to the Rev. Arthur Schulz, 675 Second Street, Tracy, Minnesota. - G.S.

THE DIFFERENCE Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches

Thesis I

Every man's first and principal concern should be that he belong to the communion of saints, that is, to the invisible Church.

All people are by nature under God's wrath because of their sin, and are therefore children of eternal damnation. A terrible condition! But a part of mankind is delivered out of this terrible condition by conversion to Christ. Although they, too, are sinners, they are now no longer under the wrath of God: they have God's grace. And because they have grace--forgiveness of sins--they are also no longer children of wrath, but heirs of eternal life. Who are these fortunate people? They are those who believe in Christ: in one word, the believers, the members of the Christian Church.

This is the Communion, the Church, outside of which there is no salvation. Why? Because without faith in Christ no one can be saved, as it is written: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:36). Also: "He that believeth on Him (God's Son) is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already" (John 3:18).

Whoever would escape the wrath of God and eternal death, which he has incurred by his sin, and become partaker of the grace of God and eternal salvation, which have been gained for him by the incarnate Son of God, --he must let it be his first and principal concern that he belong to the communion of saints, to that blessed class of people who from the heart believe in Christ as their Savior.

◆

This faith is kindled and maintained through the 2
Gospel by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those
who have acknowledged themselves before God as sin-
ners.

These believers are scattered locally over the whole earth; they are found wherever the seed of the Gospel has been sown. There is a great difference among them according to training, civilization, language, and customs. They do not know each other personally. And yet they are most intimately connected with one another: they are more closely related to each other than the closest relatives, for the One Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of them all. All have the same faith: they are saved by God's grace in Christ; all have the same mind: they are altogether subject to Christ. Daily they have the same experiences, namely, that they are lost sinners, and that God for Christ's sake richly and daily forgives them all sins. They will afterwards also in eternity all have the same experiences, for their lot will be the fulness of joy and pleasures forevermore at the right hand of God.

This is the wonderful fellowship of the Christian Church. This Church is invisible in this life. Why? Because we cannot see that which makes a person a member of the Church: faith. That only God, who knows the hearts, can see. Visible this Church will some day be in yonder life, where its members will walk no longer by faith, but by sight; where they will be glorified by such seeing of God; and where they will shine as the brightness of the firmament.

This is the Christian Church spoken of in Matt. 16:18, where we read: "Upon this rock" (namely, on the confession of Christ) "I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Furthermore, Eph. 1:22: God "set Him" (Christ) "...to be the Head over all things to the Church,

3 which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." So also in Eph. 2:19-22 the members of this Church are described as "fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

For salvation the simple need is membership in the invisible Church. In this essay we will deal with the difference between the orthodox and heterodox churches, and in connection therewith, also of the need of outwardly affiliating with the orthodox church. But this affiliation is not absolutely necessary; indeed, under circumstances it is not at all possible. Take the case of a man who, just before his end, comes to faith without being able to join a visible church as a member. This circumstance, then, that he did not outwardly as a member belong to a Christian congregation, does not deprive him one bit of his salvation. Also, it can happen that a Christian lives in a locality where no orthodox church is found. To join a heterodox congregation is forbidden him in God's Word; but love hinders him from leaving the locality. A prisoner's situation can also be such that he must forgo orthodox Christian fellowship; and yet, if he is in faith he has God's grace and salvation. Outward membership in a Christian congregation is not necessary, as if through it faith would then first become true, saving faith. But under circumstances outward membership is necessary as a confession of faith.

Gerhard, an old Lutheran dogmatician, distinguishes a twofold entrance into the Church. The one is joining a visible Christian fellowship by the outward confession of faith; the other is joining the invisible Church, which occurs through

faith in Christ. Joining the invisible Church is 4
accomplished by the operation of the Holy Ghost in
that moment in which faith in Christ is kindled in
the heart of man. The latter must occur in every
man who would be saved, the former not.

Yes, without saving faith in Christ, outward fellowship with the church, even with the orthodox church, avails nothing. Moreover, a man is a hypocrite who practices outward fellowship without having faith. Also those who outwardly belong to the orthodox church, who have zeal for it, who with their reason strictly distinguish between orthodox and heterodox fellowship are, if they are not in the state of true faith, an abomination before God; they are outside of the Church of Christ and in the domain of the devil. This, too, we constantly preach; of this we must also constantly remind one another. So also the Apostle Paul exhorts the members of the Corinthian congregation: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5). And when in the following we insist that Christians should stay away from all false churches -- and adhere alone to the orthodox church --, then this also serves a purpose: that we by no means suffer shipwreck concerning our faith and so fall away from the fellowship of that Church outside of which there is no salvation.

Of the one invisible Church it is said in the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession: "Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints" (Trigl., p. 47).

Luther wrote (V:1792) on Psalm 118: "Whoever does not have the right faith and is not holy and righteous, he does not belong in the Holy Christian Church." He who has living faith belongs to this Church; he that does not have living faith, whoever

5, or wherever he may be, does not belong to this Church.

Our Confessions warn us that one must be sure not to regard this Church as an earthly association with religious rites, so that all, then, also the godless, who take part in these services would be members of this Church. The Apology says: "For it is necessary to understand what it is that principally makes us members, and that, living members, of the Church. If we will define the Church as only an outward polity of the good and wicked, men will not understand that the kingdom of Christ is righteousness of heart and the gift of the Holy Ghost [that the kingdom of Christ is spiritual, as nevertheless it is; that therein Christ inwardly rules, strengthens, and comforts hearts, and imparts the Holy Ghost and various spiritual gifts]" (VII, VIII, Trigl., p. 231).

The Large Catechism says in the Explanation of the words I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints: "This is the meaning and substance of this addition: I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms" (Trigl., p. 691).

In this communion of saints there is only one faith, and no schism. All Christians are united by one faith and one love. We not only admit that there are children of God in heterodox church bodies, but we also maintain that these children of God are one with us in faith. They are agreed with us in the central doctrine of Christianity: they believe that they are lost in themselves but are God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore it is said here: "In one faith, one mind,

and understanding." If you ask how, for example, 6
this is possible under the Papacy, then Luther replies that in the Pope's church besides Baptism there remains the text of the Gospels. Whoever in faith grasps and holds the Word of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, he belongs to the children of God. If the priest afterwards comes with his sermon of papistical errors, then the believer does not accept them.

In his commentary on the Letter to the Galatians Luther says: "The Church is everywhere in the world wherever the Gospel and the Sacraments are." And shortly before: "Therefore the Church is everywhere holy, also even in those places where the Enthusiasts and factious spirits rule, insomuch, of course, as they still do not utterly deny and reject Word and Sacrament. For those who altogether deny these things are no church any more. But wherever Word and Sacrament essentially remain, there remains a holy Church" (VIII:1588ff.).

John Gerhard says of the necessity of joining a visible church body: "If such a time comes, when the outward glory of the church disappears, then it is not absolutely necessary for salvation to join a visible local congregation; but it suffices that by true faith a person is a member of the universal Church, for of this Church alone it is properly said that outside of it there is no salvation" (L. de ecclesia, par. 101).

If one claims that for salvation more is necessary than faith in Christ, then the central doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of justification by grace, is denied. For to be righteous and gain salvation by grace, what does this mean? This means to become righteous and gain salvation through no work done by man, no matter what it is called. Whoever therefore says that the outward joining of a visible church body is unconditionally necessary

7 for salvation, he says thereby: Man becomes righteous and gains salvation not only by grace through faith, but also through this work. So the Pope ties up salvation with belonging to his realm. Similarly, they err who think that for salvation more is necessary than this, that one by faith belongs to the communion of saints.

Convention Discussion and Secretarial Notes

This first thesis, it was added, is of the highest importance. When it is not properly taken to heart, everything else in the other theses will do no good. Indeed, then a man will apply what follows to cause harm. For this we have shocking examples. At a colloquy in Buffalo the Grabau people were confronted with the charge, which was also admitted, that they always proclaimed an unconditional necessity of belonging to the orthodox church. To make the matter clear, Dr. Walther said to a Buffaloian colloquist: If I heard correctly, you hail from the United Church [a union church in Germany]. You assert that already therein you came to faith. The person addressed affirmed this. Then, Dr. Walther continued, if you had died at that time, would you not certainly have been saved? The answer was: "No." Most terrible! According to this, faith in Christ would avail nothing before a man would have outwardly joined the orthodox church.

"We not only admit that there are children of God in heterodox church bodies, but we also maintain that these children of God are one with us in faith. They are agreed with us in the central doctrine of Christianity: they believe that they are lost in themselves but are God's children through faith in Christ Jesus." The foregoing is quoted from the first section of this essay which deals with the communion of saints. And of this section it is also said that its truths must be taken to heart, lest what follows is applied to cause harm.

Thesis II

The divinely ordained external form of the church is its orthodoxy. Heterodox church bodies have their existence only by God's permission.

If a man has become a Christian, and if God does not take him immediately from earth into heaven, he should then not remain apart by himself, but should seek the outward fellowship of other Christians. This is God's will. Consider the time of the Apostles. Wherever they preached, those who had come to faith by the preaching of the Apostles entered into an outward fellowship with one another. And these communions which formed in the various localities, the Holy Scriptures call churches or congregations. Thus Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 16:19 of the "churches of Asia"; 2 Cor. 8:1 of the "churches of Macedonia"; 1 Cor. 1:2 of the "church of God at Corinth"; Acts 8:1 of the "church at Jerusalem"; yes, Rom. 16:5 of a "church in the house" of Priscilla and Aquilla. These are the so-called local congregations.

They are not something alongside or outside the universal Christian Church; but these local congregations, together with the individual believing souls who are cut off from all outward fellowship with others, make up the universal Christian Church. These local congregations are of Christ's founding.

And to every local church Christ has given all spiritual rights and treasures [not because of external organization, but because its members are believers], as we see plainly, for example, from Matt. 18:17-20: "Tell it unto the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on

9 earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Here the universal Christian Church is not meant, for you cannot call it together; rather it is the local congregation, as Christ expressly says: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

Every Christian should, if he has the opportunity, join such a local congregation. Concerning the local congregation, Heb. 10:25 says very expressly: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." Regarding fellowship in the local congregation, Acts 2:42 speaks with praise: "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship." And verse 44: "And all that believed were together." That Christian sins most grievously who does not join a Christian congregation when he has the opportunity to do so, for such affiliation is God's will. He who will not join a Christian fellowship, although he could, opposes God's will. After intensive and continued instruction he must finally be told: "It is all a lie when you say that you have faith." Yes, the refusal to join a Christian congregation can under circumstances just as clearly reveal unbelief as when a man is a drunkard, an adulterer, or the like.

So it is God's will that a Christian should join a Christian congregation. But if we now look at congregations which call themselves Christians, we see that they do not all agree in faith. Then the question confronts the Christian: Which visible church should he join? or, if he already is a member of a church, as is often the case, whether he should remain in this fellowship or look for

another one. A Christian should and will govern 1C
himself in all things according to God's Word. In
order to answer this question, we present, in ac-
cordance with God's Word, the general proposition:
The divinely ordained external form of the church
is its orthodoxy. Heterodox church bodies have
their existence only by God's permission.

God desires to have only an orthodox church;
or, in other words, it is God's will that all
Christians should belong to only an orthodox church.
This truth is flatly denied nowadays. This ac-
counts for the fact that even Lutherans speak of
sectarian churches as "sister congregations." They
say that as God desires to save people out of all
nations, so He desires also to have various churches
with various faiths. False reasoning is em-
ployed also for the purpose of calling the truth of
our thesis into question. For example, they argue:
If there are true children of God in heterodox
churches, as you yourself concede, then it cannot
be true that only the orthodoxy of the church is
pleasing to God. However, the Holy Scriptures ev-
erywhere testify to the truth of our thesis. Let
us here present just a few basic reasons.

(Only One True Faith)

That God desires only the orthodox church is
already manifest from the fact that God has given
to us the Holy Scriptures and in them has revealed
all articles of Christian doctrine. Now as surely
as God has revealed all doctrines for the purpose
that they be accepted in faith, yes, under threat
of His wrath has forbidden to add or diminish ought
from them, so surely God wants only an orthodox
church. For an orthodox church is such a one as
believes and confesses all of the doctrines reveal-
ed in Holy Scripture. The correctness of our the-
sis is further proved by all passages of Scripture
in which it is said that all Christians, no matter

11 of what nation, shall have only one faith, the one revealed in God's Word. In the well-known words of 1 Cor. 1:10 it is said: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." In other matters there are many differences among Christians: in those things which belong to the natural life, in culture, manner of living, etc. The Christians may also establish different external forms of church liturgy. But in one thing there shall be no difference among Christians, whether they are white or black, schooled or unschooled, but the most complete uniformity, namely, in faith, in doctrine. Also Eph. 4:3-6 proves this: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." Accordingly, as certainly as all Christians shall have only the one faith as revealed in Scripture, so certainly God would have the church to be only orthodox. In Eph. 4:11-14 the Apostle says that Christ gave some to be Apostles, some to be prophets, etc. For what purpose? That all might come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

(Only One Thing to Preach)

That God wants the church to be orthodox in its external form is evident also from the commission to the divinely ordained office of the ministry. For every command of God in Scripture to preach the Word refers only to the preaching of the pure Word. When Christ the Lord says: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), He expressly adds, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"

(Matt. 28:20). In Jer. 23:28 the Lord speaks to 12 the preachers: "He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." The praise of a true preacher according to Scripture is therefore this, that he preaches God's Word purely, that is, without admixture of his own thoughts. In 2 Cor. 2:17 St. Paul confesses of himself: "For we are not as many, which corrupt the Word of God." But those preachers who depart from God's Word, who mix the truth with error, are threatened in Scripture with God's wrath. This is said in Jer. 23:31,32: "Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their lightness; yet I sent them not nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord."

(Hear God's Word Only)

That God wants the church to be orthodox is evident also from the description which Scripture gives of the Christians. Christ says of them: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me" (John 10:27). According to the Scriptures it belongs to the make-up of a Christian that he hears only the voice of Christ, by faith adheres solely to God's Word. Insofar as the Christians depart from the Word of Christ, they follow another and deny Christ. In praise of the Jerusalem congregation it is said: "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

(Avoid False Teachers)

Furthermore, all Christians are expressly warned to guard themselves carefully against false prophets. "Beware of false prophets," Christ exhorts them in Matt. 7:15. And St. John enjoins upon

13 them, 2 John 10: "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine" --the doctrine of Christ-- "receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed"--as a brother in the faith.

Yes, the orthodoxy of the church is such a serious thing with God that in the Old Testament, when He employed bodily punishments in the church, He commanded His believers to stone the false prophets which led the people away from the Lord's commands, even if that false prophet was the nearest relative. Thus we read in that noteworthy passage of Deut. 13:6ff.: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly saying, Let us go and serve other gods which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers: namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not consent unto him nor hearken unto him, neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him; but thou shalt surely kill him; thy hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die." So God had ordained it in the Old Testament. In the New Testament this bodily punishment is expressly done away with. But by this law in the Old Testament God has shown what a most serious matter the orthodoxy of the church is to Him. In the New Testament Paul declares something similar when in Gal. 1:9 he pronounces the curse upon all who stubbornly falsify God's Word.

(Names of the Church)

That God desires only an orthodox church is evident also from the names which are given to the church in the Holy Scriptures. In 1 Tim. 3:15 it

is called the house of God--a spiritual house that 14
God has built for Himself, and in which God alone
is Master. As otherwise in an orderly house, the
master's word prevails, so also in the church,
God's house, God's Word alone should rule, and that
in every sense of the term. The preachers must
therefore preach the Word of God only. He that
sets God's Word aside deposes God from being Master
of the house. The preachers, as stewards in God's
spiritual house, must demonstrate their faithful-
ness by preaching, not their own wisdom, but the
pure Word of God. Therefore we read in 1 Pet. 4:11:
"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of
God" if any man minister, let him do it as of the
ability which God giveth; that God in all things
may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be
praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The church, moreover, is called God's and
Christ's kingdom (John 18:36). As in the domain of
an earthly king, his word rules, so also in the
spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, Christ's
Word alone should rule. For Christ has made His
Word the law in His kingdom. He says in John 8:31,
32: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My dis-
ciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the
truth shall make you free." In Is. 8:20 we read:
"To the Law and to the testimony! If they speak
not according to this Word, it is because there is
no light in them." Furthermore, the church is
called the bride of Christ. It should therefore
cleave solely to Him. This is done first and fore-
most in this way, that it gives heed to the Word of
Christ alone, in faith adheres to His Word alone,
and permits nothing to lead it away from that Word.

Insofar as the church listens to the Word of
another, it becomes unfaithful to Christ; hence the
Israelitic church, insofar as it fell away from
God, is often called an adulteress. Therefore the
church is exhorted in Ps. 45:10,11: "Hearken, O

15 daughter, and consider and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him." And St. Paul warns the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 11:2,3, against false doctrines in such a manner that he reminds them how the church as the bride of Christ should not allow herself to be led away from God's Word and in that way be defiled.

In short, wherever you look in Scripture and whatever side of the church you may consider, this always springs before our eyes: God wants the church to be orthodox in its external form. This truth must really become a living part of us. Then we have the right foundation for orthodox and heterodox church bodies.

Luther always comes back to this, that in the church only the true doctrine should be proclaimed, that the church should thus be orthodox. On 1 Pet. 4:11 he writes: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; that is very necessary doctrine in the church. And if it had been maintained until now, the world would not have been filled with Antichrist's lies and deception....For in Christendom, affairs are not so conducted as in earthly government and in those things which concern external matters and goods. In the latter, men rule as they understand it and as their reason teaches. They have the right to establish law and order and, in accordance with them, command, punish, receive, and give. But here in the church we have a spiritual ruling over consciences before God, and what is spoken, taught, commanded, or done in it must so proceed that one knows it to be valid and approved in God's sight; yes, that it proceeds and moves before Him, so that you can say: God Himself has said and done that. For in this house where He lives and rules, He should and will as the rightful Master also say and do everything Himself, even though

He uses the mouth and hand of men to accomplish it. 16

"Therefore, first and above all things, both preachers and hearers must here see to it that in matters of doctrine there be clear and sure proof that the teaching really is the true Word of God, revealed from heaven to the holy Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, confirmed by Christ Himself and commanded by Him to be preached. For it cannot by any means be tolerated that the doctrine is handled as each individual pleases; or to suit his own fancy and to harmonize it with his human reason and understanding; or to toy and juggle with Scripture, God's Word, so that it is explained, directed, stretched, and patched at will for the sake of the people or for the sake of peace and unity. For in that case there would be no sure and abiding foundation on which consciences could rest."

In the church only God's Word should be proclaimed. Insofar as man's word is proclaimed, the church is no church at all.

Luther writes concerning the above-mentioned passage, If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God: "If anyone would speak, let him keep his own words to himself; let them count for something in the earthly government and in the home. Here in the church he should speak nothing but the Word of the rich Provider of the house; otherwise it is not the true church. Therefore the rule must be: God speaks."

"It has to be that way on earth. If a prince would rule, then his voice must be heard in his country and home. Now if that is the case in this miserable life, so much the more should we let the Word of God be heard in the Church to all eternity. All subjects and governments must be obedient to the word of their lord. This we call administration. Now a preacher is God's steward by virtue

17 of His command and office and therefore dare say nothing else than what God says and commands. And though one does much babbling outside of God's Word, still the church is not there, no matter if they should become mad and absurd. They only cry church, church, you must hear the Pope and the bishops." (XII:1413ff., Pentecost Sermon.)

Insofar as in the church, not God's Word, but man's word is proclaimed, the church is no more God's, but the devil's house. It is a terrible defilement of the house of God where God's Word is not preached in its purity; and God will severely punish such defilement of His house.

Luther, in the sermon referred to above, writes further: "For this cause we must look to Christ and hear Him, how He describes the true Christian church against their false hue and cry. For you should and must rather believe Christ and the Apostles, so that you speak God's Word, and do as St. Peter and Christ the Lord here declare: Where men adhere to My Word, there is My dwelling; there I am the Master Builder; My Word must remain in it, or it shall not be My house. Our Papists want to do it better; let them therefore remain in the danger.

"Christ says: We will make our abode with him [John 14:23], and there the Holy Ghost operates. My household must be a people that loves Me and keeps My commandments. This, briefly, is what Christ wants....On the other hand, under earthly government the Christian hears something different: how men should punish the evildoers and protect the good, and of stewardship. But here in the Christian church we should have a house in which only God's Word is proclaimed."

Under earthly government it is indeed different. The citizens of different kingdoms can obey the most widely differing laws. Every citizen is

guided by the country in which he lives. If he 18
finds himself in America, he complies with American
law; if he is in China, then he lives according to
Chinese law. It is not so in the church. As there
is only one Church, one kingdom of Christ on the
whole earth, so there is only one law for all citi-
zens of this estate, whether they are Americans or
Chinese; that one law is the Word of Christ, as it
is revealed in the Scriptures. Therefore Luther
also says: It is vain for them to cry "church,
church" if for all that God's Word is not even
preached among them.

When Luther discusses this subject, he can nev-
er exhaust it to his own satisfaction. Yet another
passage may therefore be added: "From this you can
answer those criers and spewers who have nothing in
their big mouths but 'church, church.' Now tell
me, dear Pope, what is the Church? Answer: The
Pope and his cardinals. Why listen here, you block-
head, where is it written in God's Word that Father
Pope and Brother Cardinal are the true Church of
God? Do you perhaps say this because the fine-
feathered parrot and the black jackdaw have babbled
it? Christ tells you and me something far differ-
ent: that is My church where My Word is preached
and maintained pure and unadulterated. Therefore
St. Paul warns that we should flee and avoid those
who would lead us away from God's Word. For who-
ever defiles God's temple, which we are, him shall
God in turn destroy (1 Cor. 3:17). Now St. Peter
also says, 1 Pet. 4:11: Watch yourself! If you
will preach, you should preach nothing but God's
Word; otherwise you will defile God's Church. (XII:
1419.)

(Heterodox Churches)

But, now, there actually exist many heterodox
churches, that is, church bodies which do not in
all parts remain with the divinely revealed truth.

- 19 That there would be such church bodies is foretold in Scripture. This fact should therefore not seem strange to us. St. Paul says to the elders of Ephesus, Acts 20:29,30: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." And these men who will speak false doctrine will succeed in gaining a following. In 1 Cor. 11:19 the Apostle actually says: "There must be also heresies" --that is, parties which will spread false doctrine-- "among you."

Now we ask: What is God's will concerning these heterodox church bodies? Especially in our time, as already indicated, it is generally said that it is according to God's will that there are different churches with different faiths. The different confessions, it is said, are the necessary consequences of this, that God leads persons and nations of different characteristics into the church. Therefore the different tendencies in the church, they say, have equal rights. It is said of us that we demand too much when we maintain that all Christians should have the same faith. This view is as wrong as it is general.

As surely as God has revealed only one doctrine in the Holy Scriptures, and as surely as He commands all Christians to accept this one doctrine and forbids every departure from it, SO SURELY IT IS NOT A THING WELL-PLEASING TO GOD THAT THERE ARE HETERODOX CHURCH BODIES. That such church bodies exist is not DESIRED by God, but only PERMITTED. God's universal rule over all things has no more to do with the existence of heterodox church bodies than with any other sin. And this does not contradict the truth that there are dear children of God in heterodox churches.

God, so to speak, just makes the best He can

out of the heterodox church bodies. Also in these 20
bodies children are born to Him, insofar as in them
parts of His Word are still preached. But God does
not want them to exist as heterodox church bodies,
or insofar as they depart from His Word. This we
must firmly maintain on the basis of God's Word. We
must remember what these heterodox church bodies
are as such: churches which have inscribed false
doctrine on their banner and have established a
separatistic body. The Reformed, for example, have
founded a separate body by writing on their banner
a false teaching concerning Baptism and the Lord's
Supper, namely, that Baptism is not the washing of
regeneration, and that in the Lord's Supper the
true body and the true blood of Christ are not
present. That such a church body exists is only by
God's permission.

But then why does God permit heterodox church
bodies to arise? The Word of God answers that. Not
as though God would have heterodox bodies together
with orthodox bodies for the sake of variety in the
garden of His church, but in order that Christians
keep their distance from heterodox church bodies.
Indeed 1 Cor. 11:19 says: "There must be also here-
sies among you"; but then He does not add: God
wants it that way in the church, and now you have
the free choice to belong to any kind of group;
rather: "That they which are approved may be made
manifest among you." God permits the formation of
sects also for this purpose: to prove His own,
whether they are sincere and honest about His Word,
whether they will hold fast to His Word also then
when under very deceptive circumstances they are
perhaps tempted to depart from His Word and cling
to error.

We find proof for this (God's testing of His
people) in Deut. 13:3. This passage says in re-
spect to a false prophet when he comes with signs
and wonders: "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words

21 of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." So these are times of trial for the Christians when God permits false prophets to come. God then tests the obedience of His Christians. For it is not God's will that the Christians should join with the false prophets, but that they should keep away from them, follow the voice of their Shepherd only, and reveal themselves as the lambs of Christ, as Luther says in his writings against Hans Worst: "When it happens that men become disagreed in doctrine, it has this effect, that it separates them and reveals who the true Christians are, namely, those who have the Word of God in all its purity and excellence" (Erlanger Ed. 26, 28).

The same author writes: "These are not the words of an angry Judge, but they are fatherly words. As though He would say: I have given you My Word that you might accept it with a good and peaceful heart, and hold to it; but I will send false apostles and will try you out, whether you will in all seriousness love Me and My Word" (Walch Ed. 1, 2299).

Convention Discussion Recorded by the Secretary

The question was asked: Why must we require of a Reformed person, for instance, who desires to join our church, that he not only have faith and specifically believe our doctrine of the Lord's Supper, but that he also make a profession of faith. The answer was given: Because the Word of God forbids us to have fellowship with the heterodox. He who has hitherto been known as a member of a heterodox church body is rightly regarded as heterodox until he openly declares or lets it openly be said that he has recognized the doctrinal error and has agreed to the true doctrine. Yet we must be care-

ful here, that we do not go too far in requiring a 22
definite form of confession.

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In the proposed printing of the essay there will be two more paragraphs of convention discussion added here (from pages 24 and 25 of the German original), as indicated in the front-page notes.

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Thesis III

It is therefore not a matter of indifference to which church group a Christian joins himself; but he has God's earnest command to distinguish strictly between orthodox and heterodox churches and, avoiding all church fellowship with the heterodox, to adhere only to the orthodox church.

If, as we have seen in the second thesis, it is true that God wants only orthodox churches, and if the existence of heterodox churches is to be traced back to divine permission only, then, as stated now in the third thesis, it is "not a matter of indifference to which group a Christian joins himself."

Many Christians suppose that it makes no difference which church group a Christian joins, and they act accordingly. When they come to a place where any kind of a Protestant church is found, they join it as members. There are people who successively were Reformed, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist -- depending upon the place where they lived. And we should not be surprised when this happens among the sects, for they are not certain about their distinctive doctrines

23 because they are not grounded in God's Word.

But even such as want to be Lutherans and who confess that the doctrine which they have learned from the Lutheran Catechism is the correct one, often have few misgivings about joining heterodox congregations. And they therefore also act accordingly, as though it makes little difference to which church group a Christian belongs. But that is altogether wrong. Only then would it be a matter of indifference, if before God there were no difference between orthodox and heterodox churches.

But there is a great difference as we have seen in our second thesis --a difference so great that God wants only the orthodox church, and in His Word clearly condemns heterodox churches. Therefore it is the duty of every Christian who would be guided solely by God's Word to distinguish strictly between orthodox and heterodox churches. He must, before he joins a church group, answer the question: Is this church orthodox or not? God expressly requires this of Christians. "Beloved," we read in 1 John 4:1, "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." And the Lord Jesus exhorts all Christians, Matt. 7:15: "Beware of false prophets." So, then, those Christians who will not distinguish between true and false prophets, and consequently also not between orthodox and heterodox churches, are disobedient to an express command of God.

(Who's Orthodox?)

In our day people either do not make this distinction at all, or at least not in the right manner. They not only fail to make it the Christian's duty to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox church bodies, but they even declare it to be a Christian virtue when someone pays no attention to

the doctrinal differences. Yes, they call it pre- 24
sumptuous when a church body maintains that in all
articles of Christian faith it has the revealed
truth of God's Word. Thus we are ridiculed in the
General Synod, yes, even in the Council [two Luth-
eran church bodies in 1889], because we make a
strict distinction between orthodox and heterodox
bodies.

The sectarians indeed also speak of the "ortho-
dox," that is, right-believing preachers and church
bodies. These sectarians, however, are not such as
adhere to all doctrines of the Christian faith, but
such as, in the general falling away, still confess
at least a few fundamental doctrines. They call
such church bodies orthodox which perhaps still be-
lieve that the Bible is God's Word, and that Christ
is God's Son; also, that through conversion man
comes to God and through faith in Christ can be
saved, even though they at the same time deny other
doctrines clearly revealed in God's Word. But this
can never be called the right manner of distin-
guishing between orthodox and heterodox church bod-
ies. Whoever judges on the basis of God's Word can
call only those teachers and church bodies orthodox
which are obedient to God's command, adding nothing
to His Word and taking nothing away from it.

If you therefore ask on what basis a Christian
must distinguish between orthodox and heterodox
churches, the answer is: On the basis of faith, on
the basis of doctrine. Only on this basis can a
sound judgment be reached; not on the basis that
outwardly a Christian life appears to prevail in a
congregation, or that the minister gives the im-
pression of being a pious man. That can all be
sheep's clothing which conceals the errorist, as
Christ the Lord says in Matt. 7:15: "Beware of
false prophets, which come to you in sheep's cloth-
ing." Moreover, you cannot judge on this basis,
that a man appeals to Scripture and quotes Scrip-

25 ture; but Christians must insist on it that the doctrine of Scripture is also actually taught. The devil, too, in the Temptation of Christ, quoted Scripture.

Yes, Christians should not be influenced even by signs and wonders, for, likewise, those wonders can be only seeming wonders, deception, and satanic illusion. Already in the Old Testament God called the attention of His believers to this. In the passage already quoted, Deut. 13:1-3, it is stated: "If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." This is a very powerful passage to show that in judging church bodies and teachers, we should look at the doctrine alone, to see whether they teach God's Word purely and clearly. Even signs and wonders are not infallible distinguishing marks. These can outwardly appear as wonders but in reality be deception or an effect produced by the devil. Signs and wonders should make an impression on us only when they are accompanied by correct doctrine. If false doctrine is present, we should designate him who presents it as a false prophet, even if he would show us things that are ever so astounding.

The Pope's coming, according to 2 Thess. 2, is after the working of Satan with all kinds of lying power and signs and wonders. Of the Last Times Christ the Lord says, Matt. 24:24: "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

Accordingly, the Christians have the duty to dis- 26
tinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches on
the basis of doctrine.

(Laymen Can Judge)

But can they do this? Certainly! For Christ the Lord charges them to do this, which at the same time implies that by God's grace they can do it. Many suppose that only pastors are in a position to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches. But this supposition is altogether wrong. Precisely, all Christians, and not only the pastors, are exhorted by Christ the Lord in Matt. 7:15: "Beware of false prophets." And John says: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). This passage, also, is addressed to all Christians alike. Christ the Lord has so arranged it that all His dear Christians, the unlearned as well as the learned, can distinguish between truth and falsehood in spiritual things. He has revealed all doctrines in thoroughly clear passages, in passages which can be understood by the unlearned as well as the learned. The Holy Scriptures are such a testimony that they make wise also the simple (Ps. 19: 7). When, therefore, a Christian simply abides by the Word of Scripture, then he can very well distinguish between truth and error.

That the Christians sometimes are confused and imagine that they do not know which is the true doctrine is due to the fact that they lose sight of the Word of Scripture, that they want to judge this matter with their blind reason and not with God's Word.

The Word of God refutes all errors as soon as it is brought into the discussion. For example, there once was a dispute in a Methodist gathering

27 concerning perfect sanctification of a Christian in this life. The majority claimed that already here on earth a Christian could be entirely without sin. Then one man arose and said that he had committed no sin for years! Another arose and, instead of making a long reply, simply quoted 1 John 1:8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." By means of this one passage all were silenced. Before the eyes of all, the error was judged by the clear Word of God. And so it is with respect to every doctrine.

The Christian who knows his small Lutheran Catechism can defend himself with this knowledge against all error, for the fundamental articles of Christian doctrine are the very ones against which the errorists offend.

Gerhard writes: "Just as the church distinguishes itself from earthly associations which are outside of the church through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, so it also distinguishes itself from heretical communions which are in the church through the pure preaching of the Word and the correct administration of the Sacraments" (L. de ecclesia par. 131).

(Non-Christian Groups)

We distinguish between erring churches and the godless mass of people which is outside of the church. The latter are communions which, although they still call themselves churches, nevertheless no longer teach anything of the saving Gospel; or, as our older teachers expressed it, such as have no essential parts of the revealed saving truth any more. In these communions, as far as their doctrine is concerned, no man can come to saving faith. Such communions in our day are the Unitarian groups. These teach no Triune God; consequently, they also do not teach that Jesus Christ is

truly God and that He as true God became man in order to redeem man through His substitutionary life, suffering, and death. Therefore no one within this communion can come to faith in Christ as the Savior of sinners; accordingly, this group and similar ones no longer merit the name of "Christian fellowship." They are altogether outside of the Christian Church, as it is also confessed by our church in the first article of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, 28

We do not place these wholly unchristian groups on the same level with heterodox churches. In all heterodox churches it is still confessed that Christ is God's Son and that He died for the redemption of man, although indeed at the same time many errors are also preached. But souls can still come to faith in these churches. We are not here dealing with the difference between the orthodox church and the world, but with the difference between orthodox and heterodox churches; that is, between those churches which confess the revealed truth in all articles of doctrine and such churches as reject the truth and confess error in a number of teachings.

(Practice What You Preach)

Therefore a Christian can and should distinguish between orthodox and heterodox churches. He should then also act according to this knowledge. While avoiding all fellowship with the heterodox, he should adhere to the orthodox church only. This God's Word declares in all passages which admonish the Christians not to hear false prophets, but to flee from them. For by belonging to heterodox congregations you will be hearing their preachers, the false prophets, and thus do the very opposite of that which Christ has commanded with respect to false teachers. The passages quoted belong here also--Matt. 7:15: "Beware of false prophets," and

29 2 John 10,11: "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine" --the doctrine revealed in God's Word, the doctrine of Christ--"receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed," namely, as a brother in the faith.

That you should not become a member of a heterodox fellowship is set forth also in Acts 20:30,31. Here the Apostle says: "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." And for such a time he gives the warning: "Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears"; that is to say, abide in the true doctrine which in the last three years I have taught you with such great labor and care, and do not have company with those who speak "perverse things."

(2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

2 Cor. 6:14-18 says most expressly: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Objections have been raised against the application of this passage as proof that God has forbidden fellowship with heterodox churches. The objectors claim that this passage speaks of unbelievers, and not of erring believers. But erring

churches, insofar as they err, are also unbeliev- 30
ing. They are unbelieving with respect to quite a
number of Bible passages. And to this they add the
terrible sin that on the basis of their errors they
have established sectarian communions in the Chris-
tian church. Thereby they split up Christendom and
fight against the orthodox church.

Word for word 2 Cor. 6 applies to the erring
churches insofar as they are such. It says: "What
fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteous-
ness?" To preach false doctrine and to believe
false doctrine is the greatest wickedness there is:
a sin against the First Commandment. Luther stress-
es this so frequently. He always repeats: "False
doctrine is sin against the First Commandment."
Whoever sets God's Word aside, twists God's Word a-
round, puts his own meaning into God's Word -- he
does not permit God to be his God; he acts wicked-
ly. God often says in His Word: "Thou shalt not
steal." But just as clearly and even more often we
find it said in Scripture: You shall not believe
false doctrine; you shall not preach false doc-
trine; you shall not hear false doctrine. Now just
as he is wicked who transgresses God's Word by
stealing, so he is especially wicked who, contrary
to the equally clear commandment of God, preaches,
accepts, or promotes false doctrine, no matter in
what measure or form. When God says that you must
not steal, then you shall not steal even a little
bit. The same applies to the matter of hearing and
preaching false doctrine. Herein you already be-
come a partaker of wickedness by spreading and ad-
vancing only one doctrinal error. The first part
of Christian righteousness and Christian life is
the trusting acceptance of all of the Word of God.

We read further: "What communion hath light
with darkness?" False doctrine is darkness, just
as true, revealed doctrine is the light in this
world.

31 "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" All false doctrine is the work of the devil. It is the lie in spiritual things against God. And the real father of this lying is the devil. Whoever deals in false doctrine is doing the devil's work.

"What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" The church is God's temple, and it is this for the very reason that God's Word resounds in it. Insofar as man's doctrine -- error -- is preached in the church, you teach the worship of a different god than the true One who has revealed Himself in Scripture. Yes, insofar as a different doctrine than God's Word is proclaimed in the church, you really make a temple of idols out of God's house. That the "coming-out-from-among-them" (2 Cor. 6) applies in particular to separating from the heterodox, is set forth in Rom. 16:7 where we read: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them."

The objection is raised: You yourselves admit that also in heterodox bodies there still are dear children of God, and yet by separating yourselves from these churches, you separate yourselves from the children of God in them; yes, you condemn these believers. In that case, isn't it better to practice fellowship with the heterodox? First of all, we answer: No! It cannot be better because God expressly forbids us to do this. Moreover, we do not separate ourselves from the children of God among the sects, but from the sects as such. The sects separate these dear children of God from us.

They hold those who belong to us -- for children of God are determined to accept the whole Word of God -- captive among themselves. So these believers must outwardly support a wicked cause while in their heart they belong to us. These children of God would, of course, come over to us at once if

they were better instructed.

3

It is also for the benefit of the children of God among the heterodox that we refuse fellowship to these churches. Thereby we are constantly reminding them that they are in the wrong camp. According to God's Word, Christians do not belong in the company of such who openly contradict some doctrines of Christ. Many a one for this reason also steps out of the wrong camp into the right camp.

(Rom. 16:17)

It must by all means also be held that we do not cause any divisions in the church when we avoid the fellowship of the heterodox. According to Rom. 16:17 they cause divisions and offenses in the church who teach doctrines besides the revealed truth. According to the Word of God the matter stands thus: Whoever adheres to false teachers and thereby strengthens their cause, co-operates in the divisions of the church. But he who avoids false teachers and their followers and practices no fellowship with them is engaged in the holy work of preventing divisions within Christendom. But sad to say, the devil has been successful here in falsifying the concept and the language. The destroyers of unity are called the promoters thereof and, on the other hand, the promoters of unity are called the destroyers thereof.

Now what is included in avoiding all fellowship with the heterodox? It does not include that you avoid also all civil association with the heterodox. It also does not include that you should not speak when you can do so with the heterodox about spiritual things. We should rather do as St. Peter exhorts in 1 Pet. 3:15: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." From

- 33 our association with them the heterodox should notice that we have no passion for quarreling and condemning, that we are God-fearing, truth-loving, peaceful people who act as we do only because we fear God's Word.

By the command of God which forbids fellowship with the heterodox, everything is forbidden whereby we strengthen the evil work of the heterodox body. Christians should therefore not become members of heterodox bodies, indeed, under no circumstances. If in a certain place no orthodox church is found, the Christian must be content with private, home worship, for God has nowhere given release from this word: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them."

This divinely commanded avoiding of heterodox churches includes also this, that a Christian under no circumstances contribute to the building fund of sects or even of the Roman church, for thereby he promotes heterodox churches. And a Christian should, then, when he is approached for such a contribution, briefly and earnestly give the reason for refusing his support. He should openly state that according to God's Word he is obliged to reject the false doctrine which the heterodox church teaches, and therefore cannot help to bring it into house and home. You should in such cases not brush off those who desire an offering by perhaps saying that you have no money, etc. Then they think that you are merely too stingy to give them something. No, here is the opportunity frankly and openly to confess your faith.

Convention Discussion

In addition, the following questions were discussed here:



1 "What should we think of the occasional 34
participation of a Christian in the worship of heterodox churches?"

It is not a sin under all circumstances to be present at some time in such a service. Take the case of Lutherans who with heterodox men are members of a city council. Now if one of the councilmen who is heterodox dies, the Lutheran can participate in the funeral to show civic honor to the deceased. Neither does he have to absent himself when in connection with the funeral there is a heterodox service. Only he should never go beyond the role of an observer. The same is to be said of all occasional attendance at the religious services of the heterodox. You must not seek edification there nor act as though you were seeking edification. Therefore you may not join in singing, praying, etc., but you positively must conduct yourself only as an observer. Really, you cannot speak at all of a "participation" in the service of the heterodox.

2. "Is it allowed to join the heterodox in carrying out works of Christian charity?"

It is not forbidden in God's Word that we as citizens, for example, co-operate with the unbelievers or the erring in building a city hospital. We allow ourselves to be taxed for city hospital buildings. Nevertheless, it must be understood that the hospital is a purely civic institution. If it were reported that a Papist, a Methodist, or some other sectarian preacher were to be appointed as chaplain (Seelsorger), it would be a sin to have part in building such a hospital. By taking part in such a case you would enter into forbidden fellowship with errorists, namely, by furthering their religious work. Now, then, as citizens we can join the heterodox and the unbelievers in carrying out civic undertakings. But this dare not happen when the question is one of church or Christian endeavors, for example, missions, and, in general, when

35 it involves works of Christian love. Christian love proceeds from Christian faith. With whom we are not in fellowship of faith, with him we cannot join to carry on works of Christian love.

3. "What about accepting the position of sponsor for a child in a heterodox church?"

Accepting the position of a sponsor is a church matter. A Christian should not permit himself to be induced to become a sponsor for a child in a heterodox church. If a Christian accepts the position of sponsor in a Reformed church, for example, he therewith sanctions its false doctrine of Baptism. The question whether this also applies to accepting the position of sponsor in the [Lutheran] Texas Synod was answered in the affirmative because the Texas Synod continues in fellowship with errorists. As long as it does not quit such fellowship, it must be dealt with as a heterodox body. An exception would of course be made if a man were indeed outwardly a member of this body but also was in the state of confession, testifying against the false doctrine which that body tolerates.

To the further question whether a heterodox person could take the position of sponsor in our church, it was answered: If a Lutheran has already asked a heterodox person to be sponsor, then we can indeed accept such a one as a witness to be present at our Baptism. But consider that such a person cannot really be a baptism-sponsor, but only a baptism-witness, that is, a witness who testifies that the Baptism was properly performed. A heterodox person cannot be a sponsor because he who is not one with us in faith surely cannot accept the duties connected with the office of sponsor. But if perhaps people are chosen as sponsors who even laugh at our doctrine of the value of Baptism, then that is making a mockery of sponsorship. If heterodox persons have been chosen as sponsors, and

if the matter cannot be undone, you should emphasize the fact that the heterodox can be baptism-witnesses only. After all, engaging the heterodox as sponsors remains an offense which should as much as possible be avoided. 36

The pastor therefore will admonish his congregation to accept only orthodox Lutherans as sponsors who in case of need can also instruct the children in the Lutheran Catechism. Finally, to the question as to how to indicate the fact that we acknowledge the heterodox, not as sponsors, but only as witnesses, the answer was that the usual questions of the baptismal rite are not to be directed to the heterodox, but only to the orthodox sponsors.

(The Confessions and Luther)

The following testimonies were pointed to as a confirmation of what was set forth under Thesis III.

After the Apology makes the concession that also the Baptism performed by unbelieving pastors in the name of the church is effective, it continues: "Impious teachers are to be deserted, are not to be received or heard, because these do not any longer act in the place of Christ, but are antichrists. And Christ says Matt. 7,15: Beware of false prophets. And Paul, Gal. 1,9: If any man preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed" (Trigl., p. 243-5, Apology VII,VIII:48).

Smalcald Articles: "Paul commands that godless teachers should be avoided and execrated as cursed, Gal. 1:8; Titus 3:10. And 2 Cor. 6:14 he says: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with darkness?

"To dissent from the agreement of so many

37 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" (Trigl., p. 517, par. 41b.f.).

Furthermore: "Paul, Gal. 1,7f., enjoins that bishops who teach and defend a godless doctrine and godless services should be regarded as accursed" (Trigl., p. 525, par. 72).

Luther says: "Whoever knows that his pastor teaches Zwinglianism, should avoid him, and rather forgo receiving the Sacrament all his life than to receive it from him, yes, rather also die and suffer all things" (Warning against Zwinglianism, XVII, 2440).

Thesis IV

We have recognized this difference between the orthodox and heterodox church bodies, that God desires the former; the latter are only permitted by Him (Thesis II); further, that fellowship with the orthodox is commanded for the Christians, but fellowship with the heterodox is forbidden them by God. If nothing more were said to us of such differences, etc., between the orthodox and heterodox church bodies, then this would have to suffice us. But with this difference still others are connected, to which we give our attention in Thesis IV.

Thesis IV: Likewise, only in the orthodox church God is given the honor which he requires; and only in it souls are rightly cared for. Fellowship with heterodox churches militates against God's honor and is a constant danger to the soul.

God's Word revealed in Scripture is God's honor. As God in His Word has revealed Himself to us

human beings, so He wants to be honored and worshipped by us human beings. As men stand towards God's Word, so they stand towards God. This we dare not forget. We mortal beings have God here on earth only in His Word. When by God's grace we have arrived in yonder life, we will see God face to face. Whoever seeks God here on earth must seek Him in His Word; whoever wants to keep company with God must keep company with God's Word; whoever claims that he loves God must prove His love by loving God's Word, as Christ our Lord expressly says: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words" (John 14:23).

Therefore we also say: Whoever would honor God must honor Him in His Word. And what does this include? He must accept all of God's Word as inviolable truth. He must accept God's words as they read, and not take the liberty to explain things away--misconstrue them--because the openly expressed sense of a passage is against his reason. Neither does he have the right to make a choice of the doctrines revealed in God's Word, accepting some but rejecting others. God's honor demands that we accept and keep all His Words.

Let us now apply this to the difference between orthodox and heterodox churches. In the orthodox church all of God's Word is respected as truth to be kept unbroken; all words of God are accepted as they read, without any forced explanations; all doctrines revealed in the Holy Scriptures are believed and confessed. Thus in the orthodox church God is honored in all His words; to Him alone is given that honor which He demands. In the heterodox church, on the other hand, all of God's Word, revealed by God in the Holy Scriptures, is, as a matter of fact, not accepted. God's Word is misconstrued in order to gain a sense that is pleasing to man's reason. Of those doctrines revealed in Scripture, some are denied altogether; others are

39 twisted; doctrines are also set forth as divine which are simply not contained in God's Word. Thus in heterodox church bodies God's honor is diminished, yes, disgraced.

But right here the leaders of heterodox church bodies assure us that they place God's honor above everything and seek to honor God in all things. Let us maintain this over against them, that God is honored and respected in His Word. They must demonstrate that they honor God in all things by letting God's Word as it reads be the deciding factor in all doctrines. If they assent to God's Word in all doctrines, good! then, indeed, they truly honor God; then, also, they cease to be heterodox. But if they continue to misconstrue God's Word, to twist God's Word and cast it behind them, then they, in spite of their assurances to the contrary, should not try to talk us into believing that they honor God.

This is the case even with the honor of an earthly king. His subjects must demonstrate that they honor him by submitting to the laws which he issues. If they do not concern themselves about his decrees, and at the same time with fine talk act like loyal subjects in the presence of the king, then that is hypocrisy. Now Christ is the King in His Church, in His spiritual kingdom. He has made His revealed Word, the Holy Scripture, the Law of His kingdom. He requires of His spiritual subjects that they accept all of His Word. When you misconstrue His Word and in part reject it, then you are in rebellion against Christ as the sole Ruler in His kingdom. And if in this connection you act very humble and pious, then that is either great ignorance or pure hypocrisy.

(Good Works)

Let us by no means forget that God is either

honored or else despised by man's attitude toward 40
His Word. We are only too easily inclined to lose sight of this truth. We rather put at the head of the list certain outward, striking marks among those works by which we are to demonstrate our Christianity. Works of charity toward the needy and forsaken are regarded above others as signs of genuine piety. Of course, also these works must be found in a Christian's life. He that does not do them, although God requires also just these works from him, he will one day hear from the mouth of Christ the words: "I was an hungered, and ye gave Me no meat," etc.; "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (Matt. 25:41).

But the first and foremost work whereby a man must give proof of his Christianity is and remains surely this: from the heart he fears God's majestic Word, believes it, submits himself to it, does not take anything away from it, but confesses it wholly and fully. The Lord says: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word" (Is. 66:2); "If a man love Me, he will keep My words" (John 14:23).

To accept God's Word in humble faith is obedience to the First Commandment. As surely as the First Table of the holy Ten Commandments precedes the Second, so surely the trusting acceptance of His Word is also the first part of God-pleasing piety. This first part of piety is also the foundation for all other good works. Without a sincere fear of God's Word all external works, though they be ever so impressive in the eyes of men, are worthless before God. Let us never forget what Luther so often says: Doctrinal error, the departing from God's Word, is sin against the First Commandment. Insofar as a man separates himself from God's Word, he separates himself from God's authority, follows other gods, and profanes the name of God.

41 The objection is raised that the heterodox church bodies mean no harm. Of course the Christians in these churches mean no harm; it is due to their ignorance that they do not confess the whole Word of God. But founders and leaders of the sects have evil purposes; and the devil, the originator of all false doctrine, would rob God of honor, and souls of their salvation. But if you say: In the heterodox churches they are only indifferent to God's Word, then it should be answered: Indifference to God's Word is disrespect for God. A Christian should not be indifferent to God's Word; rather, God's Word should stand higher in his estimation than everything in the world. Christ says: "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" (Matt. 5:19). We must say with Luther: "I feel that every word of God makes the world too narrow for me." That is rightly honoring God.

Concerning this matter Luther writes: "God says: Their worship is idolatrous and false who use My name only with their mouth. Indeed, I hear My name, He says; they call Me Creator of heaven and earth, but altogether in violation of the Second Commandment. For they do not in sincerity thus call Me Creator; yes, what is more, they corrupt the worship with commandments of men. They require God to give account, and approach God to dispute with Him, as it is written in Is. 58:2. But I will not be worshipped with such service and teaching as men have chosen. In fear before Me you shall serve Me--that is, you shall accept My Word in faith--as it is written in the last chapter of Isaiah, v. 2: 'To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word'; such people shall serve Me. Likewise, Isaiah in chapter 8, v. 13: 'Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread'" (II:721). And (I:1538): "However, let none ever fear God except solely in His

Word, as it is written in Ex. 20:3,4: "Thou shalt 42
have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make
unto thee any graven image.'

"Where God reveals Himself--in His Word--there serve Him; there show Him honor. Then you are truly God-fearing, as you should be. Therefore we tread upon Pope, factions, and sects. We are not afraid of them; neither do we honor those who establish a worship of God of their own invention, outside of and against God's Word, who condemn the true religion and correct teaching, and call it heresy. They fear where there is no cause to fear; and where there is cause for fear, they do not fear at all."

Let us yet show by the contents of several doctrines how by falsifying them God's honor is diminished.

God's Word teaches that Christ has redeemed all people and that God would have all men to be saved. To honor God rightly we must accordingly believe that God desires the death of not a single sinner, but that according to God's will each sinner should by faith in Christ obtain eternal life. See, therefore, how God is dishonored and what a false picture is drawn of Him by the false teaching which claims that God has redeemed and would save only a part of mankind. No, we should think thus of God: As the light of the sun is universal and shines on all people, so also in Christ the divine sun of grace is risen upon all people without exception, which should give them light unto spiritual and eternal life.

Another example. God's Word teaches that those who obtain salvation are converted and saved solely by God's grace in Christ, so that no man can glory in himself above others, but each one must confess: "That I am now converted, that Thou alone hast

43 done." But the synergists -- that is, the false teachers -- claim that a man by his own efforts, by his better conduct, etc., brings it about that he, in preference to others, is converted. They thereby do not give God alone the glory for their conversion and salvation, but ascribe this glory partly to themselves.

The Reformed and all reformed sects deny the Real Presence of the body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Thereby they detract from God's honor. Apart from the fact that these do not accord Christ the honor of believing His Word, consider this: How gloriously the love of Christ beams on us poor sinners when we in accordance with His Word firmly hold that He even gives us His body and blood as a seal for the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins! Whoever vitally understands this, will in his heart rightly sing and rejoice before God. Whoever, on the other hand, regards the Lord's Supper as a mere memorial feast in which there is nothing else present than bread and wine, in his heart no such praise will be found.

Furthermore, also this is a difference between the orthodox and the heterodox church, that only in the orthodox church souls are rightly cared for, while fellowship with the heterodox churches is a constant danger to souls.

(All Bible Doctrines Serve Our Salvation)

No doctrine in Holy Scripture is given us by God without purpose, but with each doctrine God has our salvation in mind -- that we come to faith in Christ, are kept in faith, and thus by the power of God through faith are preserved unto salvation. Thus we read at the end of John's Gospel (John 20: 31)--and what applies to the Gospel of John applies to all Scripture: "These (things) are written, that ye might believe," etc. Whoever therefore cuts off

a part of Bible doctrine cuts off a part of that 44
which should bring him to faith and keep him in it.
Furthermore, we read in 2 Tim. 3:16: "All Scripture
is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable
for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for in-
struction in righteousness." And in Rom. 15:4:
"For whatsoever things were written aforetime
(namely, all Scriptures of the Old Testament) were
written for our learning, that we through patience
and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

Thus all doctrines revealed in Scripture stand
in relation to our salvation. They serve this pur-
pose, that they correctly reveal God's will regard-
ing us human beings, so that we might in faith know
God as a gracious God, that in temptation we might
have rich comfort, that patience might remain with
us in affliction, and that we cling to the hope of
eternal life. Now whoever detracts from the doc-
trines revealed in the Scriptures or falsifies
them, he takes away from the saving doctrine, sub-
tracts from the comfort which is so necessary for
us poor sinners and intended for us by God.

Let us make this clear to ourselves by con-
sidering several examples. Whoever falsifies this
doctrine, that we by grace alone, for Christ's sake,
through faith in Christ, have forgiveness of sins
and eternal life; whoever ascribes the obtaining of
God's grace altogether or in part to our works or
better conduct: he makes it impossible for us to be
sure of God's grace and our salvation. For he who
has an awakened conscience and somewhat knows him-
self must confess with Paul that in him--that is,
in his flesh--dwelleth no good thing. Now if grace
and salvation rest even only in part on our own
worthiness, then we can never be sure of them, but
must spend our life in doubt and uncertainty.

The doctrine of the free grace of God in Christ
is not only denied by the Pope, but it is also

45 corrupted by all sects. How soul-destroying the doctrine of work-righteousness is, as it is held by the Papacy, we can see in Luther. In spite of his honorable and strict life, he sank ever deeper into doubt concerning God's grace. And he would have been ruined altogether in body and soul if he had not by God's grace come to the knowledge that the forgiveness of sins does not rest on our works, but altogether on God's mercy in Christ. With this knowledge the certainty of grace entered into his heart.

But also among the sects the teaching is mostly such that the grace-hungry souls can have no sure comfort. The almost universal rule of sectarian preachers is to impart the comfort of the Gospel then only when sinners have first ceased from sin and have become better. But at the same time a true Christian knows: There can be no betterment as long as a person does not believe the grace of God.

A person who comes to the knowledge of his sins needs much comfort. Therefore God has opened manifold channels of comfort in the means of grace which He has ordained. God blesses us with the forgiveness of sins not only by the preaching of the Gospel, but also through holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper wherein He bestows upon and seals for each sinner in particular the forgiveness of sins. Thus it is written that we are baptized "for the forgiveness of sins"; it is written that in the Lord's Supper Christ gives us that body which was given for us and that blood which was shed for us--as a pledge and seal of the forgiveness of sins which we have through Christ's suffering and death.

Yes, Christ the Lord has in addition also ordained Absolution in the words: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them" (John 20: 23). so that a poor sinner when he hears the absolution out of man's mouth can be certain his sins

are forgiven before God in heaven. But now the 46
sects not only deny these means of grace, but they
also declare it to be a misleading into carnal se-
curity if one would become certain of the forgive-
ness of sins through Baptism, the Lord's Supper,
and Absolution. So they stop up the channels
through which Christ wants rich comfort to flow un-
to His own.

It is, of course, true that if someone on the
basis of the preached Gospel, yes, on the basis of
only one passage (for example, "For God so loved
the world," etc.; "The blood of Jesus Christ," etc.)
believes the forgiveness of sins, he really has
forgiveness of sins-- in general, all the spiritual
gifts merited by Christ -- and can be saved. His
faith which is based on only one Gospel passage has
a divine foundation. For that reason many also
within the sectarian churches are saved, although
they are hindered by sectarian doctrine from making
the right use of their Baptism, the Lord's Supper,
and Absolution. But they should do this [that is,
make the right use of Baptism, etc.]. Christ wants
His own to be richly supplied. Thus in the hetero-
dox churches the rich comfort meant for them by
Christ is spoiled, and such churches therefore are
not the right dwelling place for them. Souls are
not rightly cared for among the sects.

There is, of course, a great difference between
those who grow up in heterodox churches and who out
of ignorance remain in them--they can with their
unknown sins be saved--and those who from childhood
have learned the truth but transfer to a heterodox
church in order to please men, for the sake of con-
venience, or perhaps even on account of some rebuke
administered to them in the orthodox church. These
commit a wilful sin which becomes a hindrance to
their salvation. That also in the heterodox churches
people can be saved cannot benefit us who know
that a Christian should not be found in a heterodox

47 church.

(The Three Brooks)

The harm of union between orthodox and heterodox churches can be made clear by an example. Three neighboring farmers each have a brook. The one brook has clear, pure water; the second has cloudy, muddy water; and the third has stagnant, impure water. The proposal is made to combine the three brooks in order to form a bigger, more important-looking stream. "No," says the owner of the pure water, "I want to keep my water clear. If you wish clear water, then get it from me; I'll still have enough." Likewise, the orthodox church should refuse union with heterodox churches, in order that the water of life may not be mixed with any deadly ingredients.

The danger of staying in a heterodox church becomes clearly evident when considered from still another viewpoint. For a Christian it is necessary above all things that the Word of God remain for him immovably and incontestably certain. Therefore David prays, Ps. 119:38: "Stablish Thy Word unto Thy servant."

When a sinner is in temptation and in the throes of death, when the waters of Belial roar about him and the Foe accuses and assails him with the charge: You are a shameful sinner and therefore damned, then there is only one deliverance. At such a time words such as these must be impressed upon him: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7); "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). If a sinner accepts these words as they read and regards them as sure and certain words, then he has comfort in the midst of

death, and his heart becomes peaceful in the might- 48
iest storm of temptation. But in heterodox churches the Word of God is constantly made uncertain for the Christian; that is to say, in order to justify their false doctrine, these churches must constantly pervert God's Word; they must disregard God's Word as it reads; they must continually practice all sorts of trickery with the Word of God. Several examples should make this clear.

They who claim that Baptism is not a means of grace, no washing of regeneration, must continually deny these words of Scripture, Gal. 3:27: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." Even so also Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Again, Titus 3:5: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Whoever denies the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper must pervert the words of Institution where Christ the Lord, speaking of that which He gives His Christians to eat, says: "This is My body," and speaking of that which He gives them to drink, says: "This is My blood." Likewise the words in 1 Cor. 10:16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

Whoever does not make conversion and salvation dependent solely on the grace of God, but makes them dependent also on the conduct of man, he must actually strike out hundreds of Bible passages. He must strike out all passages which testify of the spiritual death, the through-and through corrupted

49 nature of man, its enmity against God, etc. (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13f.; Gen. 8:21; John 3:5; Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14). Moreover, he must strike out all those passages which declare that we are righteous through faith alone (Rom. 3:28,24; 1 Cor. 4:7), and that we are kept by the power of God unto salvation (1 Pet. 1:5; Phil. 1:6).

Thus in heterodox churches, in order to defend false doctrine, God's Word must continually be denied. It is rightly said: "It takes nine lies to maintain one lie." Whoever allows himself such liberties with the Word of God, let him beware lest the devil make doubtful for him in the hour of death also the clear Word that says this: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Therefore, staying in heterodox churches is a very dangerous thing for the soul. You must avoid them, so that you may retain a firm and certain Word of God. As those two hundred who in their simplicity went with Absalom had to share the danger of rebels, so also those Christians who are among the heterodox must share the danger for the soul which false doctrine brings with it.

Furthermore, consider this: All doctrines of the Bible are connected with one another; they form a whole. One error draws in others after it. Zwingli's first error was the denial of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. In order to support this error, he had to invent a false doctrine of Christ's person, of heaven, of the right hand of God, etc. If one error is held, the whole Word of God logically falls, and it is but by God's grace if, then, not all divine truths are torn out of the heart by the devil.

Luther strikingly answers the objection of the Zwinglians, that they erred in one point only and that therefore fellowship should not be denied

"'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump' (Gal. 5:9). This is a warning which St. Paul regards as important, and which, it stands to reason, we, too, especially in our time, should regard as important. For the factions which claim that Christ's body and blood are not present in the Lord's Supper censure us and slanderously say of us that we are quarrelsome, hard-hearted, and unfriendly; that we for the sake of one point of the Sacrament transgress Christian love and break the unity of the church. They believe, therefore, that we should not regard this article so high and great that because of it we let the whole Christian doctrine and common unity of so many Christian congregations go to pieces, especially since they are otherwise really agreed with us in all other articles of Christian doctrine, which are more necessary and important. (This article, they say, is of little consequence, and that, of course, you cannot be sure about it since the Apostles have not sufficiently explained it as indeed explanation should be necessary.)

"With this argument of theirs, which really is impressive and sounds good in the ears of the general run of the people, they cause not only those who are their followers to become bitter against us, but thereby persuade also many pious people to dislike us and to blame us, as though out of sheer stubbornness or else because of a special enmity we would not make common cause with them. But these are all vain and clever tricks and deceit of the devil, with which he seeks nothing else than to overturn and destroy, not only this article, but also all Christian doctrine" (Commentary on Gal. 5:9).

These are precious words which should be taken to heart also in our time. It appears strange to

51 many that we cling so firmly to pure doctrine; people call this obstinacy or love for disputation on our part; but our conscience is bound in the Word of God.

First, we maintain: The first part of faithfulness to God is the simple, humble abiding in His Word. Then: Every departure from God's Word, every error, is dangerous to the soul. There is a terrible, a diabolical power in error, for every error is the devil's work; and through fellowship with error you put yourself under the influence of the devil. Here human reason is helpless. The Papacy is an example. Although you can already by the light of reason recognize its errors, reason, nevertheless, does not offer any security against being misled by it. Yes, we see this: also worldly-wise, intelligent people are ensnared and caught by the Papacy; neither can they free themselves from its uncanny hold. Whoever is not rescued from it by God's strong hand will nevermore get out.

Let us beware, therefore, lest by practicing fellowship with the heterodox we carelessly place ourselves into danger and so lose our salvation.

Thesis V

We should therefore regard membership in the orthodox church, not only to be our duty, but also as the greatest favor and highest honor, even when the orthodox church outwardly bears a humble form.

This thesis is a simple deduction from the foregoing. If God has commanded fellowship with the orthodox church--and that, as we have seen, is the case--then this fellowship is our duty: a duty under all circumstances and a duty for every Christian. God has under no circumstances dispensed

with the keeping of the First Commandment, and has 52
said to no Christian: You for your person can cultivate church fellowship with false teachers as though they were your brothers in the faith. Rather, God has said: "Avoid them"; that is, avoid all who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Accordingly, whoever has church fellowship with the heterodox is disobedient to God.

But we should look upon fellowship with the orthodox church not merely as a duty in the sense of being a bitter must for us; it should not be that, for a true Christian who has learned to know God as his dear, gracious Father is happy when he knows that in a certain matter he is doing God's will. In those works which God commands him, the Christian walks as in a paradise, as Luther says. Also, as we have learned, only within the orthodox church God is given the honor which He demands, and only in it sinners are rightly served, so that they reach the final goal set for man--salvation.

Therefore we should look upon belonging to the orthodox church as a most glorious privilege, as a great proof of God's grace, for which we can never sufficiently thank God. For we have not provided this treasure for ourselves, but it is the grace of God which has led us into this church. Therefore we must, if we only reflect a bit, daily thank God upon our knees, that we are members of the Church of the Reformation. Think of those Christians who are found within the heterodox church. Compare our condition with theirs. Note how the souls of those who sincerely seek their salvation are hindered and tortured there, for example, by the false doctrine concerning the marks of being a Christian, and by the false doctrine which makes the grace of God uncertain for sinners.

But even when a soul has found peace by the

53 fact that God through His special grace prevented the error from prevailing in him, and rather saw to it that the truth which was still preached in the heterodox church was impressed upon the heart, there still remains something which must not be underestimated. Heterodox churches are such as cause divisions and offenses in Christendom (Rom. 16:17). Such Christians as are found in the heterodox churches support, without intending to do so, those evil works so severely condemned in God's Word. The heterodox churches as such are in a state of rebellion against God because they will not let certain parts of God's Word rule. Now those Christians who are in them strengthen, though unknowingly, this rebellion against God.

Finally, heterodox churches are on a continuous war-footing against the orthodox church, against that church which in conformity with the will of God confesses all parts of the truth. The heterodox insult and persecute those who abide in God's Word. Surely an evil work! for Christ says that He will regard that which is inflicted upon those who confess Him as being done to Him. Now those Christians who are in heterodox churches take part in this evil work and persecute Christ in His confessors of the truth.

It is, for example, most terrible that the Lutheran Church, because it has the true doctrine of Baptism and Lord's Supper, is decried as "Catholic." This attack against the true church is no small matter. The Apostle also, at sometime before his conversion, persecuted the confessors of the truth--in ignorance--as he himself admits. But when he came to the knowledge of the truth, this grieved him much, yes, plagued him until his death. He says: "I...am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God" (1 Cor. 15: 9). Therefore we truly have every reason to thank God daily, to thank Him upon our knees, for leading

us into the orthodox church and for preserving us 54
from the heterodox church. We must regard it as
the greatest favor of God when we, next to having
at all come to faith in Christ, find ourselves in
the orthodox church.

Convention Discussion

In the discussion this also was said: That we
are in the orthodox church by grace, and not by
merit, everyone should easily understand. What did
any one of us do to be born of Lutheran parents, to
be reared in Lutheran schools, and to arrive at the
right knowledge of the truth? That this is grace
everyone will understand; but that it is the high-
est grace, all will perhaps not see. That one en-
joys good health and the like is surely also a gift
of God's grace; but what is all grace in earthly
things compared to the grace that we as members of
the true Christian church have, in that we have ac-
tually been showered with spiritual treasures and
thus are well provided for in respect to the soul?
Erring Christians, of course, laugh at us when we
glory in our membership in the orthodox church as
being the highest grace; our reason often does the
same. But a time will come when there will be no
more laughing about this.

Indeed, the essayist continued, also the ortho-
dox church is not in every respect a pure church.
Godless people minge with the godly people in it.
Among the godly in the orthodox church there are
hypocrites, people who use the expression "pure
doctrine" with their mouth only and who only out-
wardly act as Christians; but their heart is far
from God. These are an abomination to God also in
the orthodox church, and, when they become mani-
fest, a disgrace to the church.

Also the upright members of the orthodox church

55 are and remain poor sinners who must daily pray the Lord's Prayer, especially also the Fifth Petition. But in spite of this the orthodox church is clothed with a glory by which it is distinguished above all other churches. It has God's Word pure and clear. In the face of all error it adheres to the truth which God has revealed to man in the Holy Scriptures. It continues in the Word of Christ in every point, as Christ requires it of the church. It can, to the glory of God, glory in the fulfillment of the words of Christ in it: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed" (John 8:31). It is free from the ugly spots which disfigure the heterodox church before God; it is free from false doctrine. It is therefore--taking the word in the spiritual sense--the precious one among the visible church bodies. To belong to it we should regard as the highest honor--the word again to be taken in the spiritual sense. Do you take offense at this? Then, indeed, you do not realize the glory of true doctrine, nor the horribleness of false doctrine before God.

To be sure, the orthodox church outwardly bears a very humble form. And this can, even for Christians when they are not on their guard against their flesh, become an inducement to be ashamed of their Lutheran Church and to hanker after sectarian churches which stand in outward splendor. But, we ask, what is the cause? why does the Lutheran Church outwardly often appear so much in the form of a servant? Is it not just on account of its faithfulness to God's Word? Is it not this circumstance, that the orthodox church in its doctrine is earnest about God's Word; that it, because God commands it, does not remain silent over against error, but condemns error; that it does not deal treacherously with the divine truth, does not look upon truth and error as having equal rights? Is it not, furthermore, also on account of this circumstance, that the orthodox church seriously applies

the word of God to life; that it impresses upon the 56
poor as upon the rich that all who name the name of
Christ have the duty to depart from iniquity, and
that whoever lives in conformity with the world
will also be lost with the world?

Yes, that is the way of the orthodox Lutheran Church, and therefore it must often bear a humble form. Would it not be disgraceful if we would be ashamed of this church because of its outward lowliness which under these circumstances is an honor? Would it not be disgraceful if we would rather want to adhere to heterodox churches because outwardly they are more prominent and count for more in the eyes of the world? For wherewith have these for the most part bought this outward greatness and honor before the world? By unfaithfulness to God's Word. They deny the truth by not insisting on the divine truth as the sole source of doctrine, and let all kinds of opinions stand. They make love with the wisdom of this world and its godless living.

Some time ago a respected Presbyterian pastor in St. Louis confessed that if he in his congregation would want to have God's Word rule as it does with us, then in four weeks his whole congregation would scatter. The sects owe their outward greatness mostly to this, that they play church instead of actually conducting themselves as God's church. Neither do they rightly bear witness of the Law to man, nor do they show themselves as true witnesses of God's grace. But this the Lutheran Church does; by God's grace it is a faithful witness of God which will not be bribed into error.

Let us therefore not be ashamed of the external lowliness of the Lutheran Church; else we are ashamed of Christ Himself and of His holy Gospel. Christ the Lord walked about on earth in lowly form

57 as a poor Man. And yet at that time all were required to follow Him. We condemn the scribes and Pharisees and all such in Israel who would not follow Christ because of His outward lowly form. Now let us take heed lest we commit the same sin! What Christ taught, that the Lutheran Church teaches; and as He in the days of His flesh bore the servant's form, so also the Lutheran Church bears this form. So we dare not let its form keep us from joining the orthodox church with joyful confession. Otherwise we deny Christ in denying it.

Let us learn evermore to look upon the Lutheran Church with the right kind of spiritual eyes; it is the most beautiful and glorious church, for it is adorned with God's Word. This adornment is so precious that an orthodox congregation is much, much rather to be preferred for fellowship than a heterodox congregation. (Our Lord Jesus here below lay on hay and straw in a stable.) Now if an orthodox congregation consisted altogether of poverty-stricken people, of nothing but woodchoppers, and even if it assembled for worship in a barn, yet every Christian would far, far rather have the fellowship of such a humble congregation in preference to the fellowship of a heterodox one, even though the members of the heterodox church were all bank presidents and though they worshipped in a church built altogether of blocks of marble. Let us be sure that our flesh and the talk of others do not darken the glory of the orthodox church or push it out of sight.

Also within the Lutheran Church one meets people who, although they still belong to it, nevertheless look upon their church as a kind of second-class church because they have a very great respect for the outward prestige of the sectarian churches. The Lutherans in the General Synod and in part also those in the Council [two Lutheran bodies of 1889, now merged in the ULC] feel themselves honored when

they are treated by sectarian churches as though 58
they were a denomination of equal rank. Whether
the sects recognize us or not, we should not think
of ourselves as a second-class church, nor allow
ourselves to be pushed into a corner as outcasts
who must first apologize for taking the liberty to
exist alongside sectarian church bodies. We should
and must remain conscious of this--God requires it
of us--, that we alone as the orthodox church have
an express charter from God for our existence. The
sectarian church bodies exist only by God's permis-
sion. Therefore our whole heart should belong to
our church. We should be happy to belong to it as
members. We should, moreover, even under the most
humble outward conditions, also gladly serve our
church as preachers and teachers, and with joyful
spirit and restless zeal work for its extension.
We should most earnestly strive and daily pray that
our descendants may be the heirs of the Church of
the Reformation.

Luther confesses of himself and of the whole
church body named after him: "No man can deny this,
that we have the ministry and God's Word pure and
richly; that we use and teach the Word diligently,
without any addition of new, our own, or human doc-
trine, just as Christ commanded, and as the Apos-
tles and all Christendom have done. We invent
nothing new, but adhere to and remain with the old
Word of God, as did the Old Church. Therefore, we
with it are the true old church, as the one church
which teaches and believes the one Word of God.
Therefore the Papists blaspheme Christ Himself, the
Apostles, and all Christendom, when they call us
Modernists and heretics. For they find nothing a-
bout us except only the same old things of the an-
cient church, and that we are like it and one
church with it" (Against Hans Worst, 1541).

Luther writes also: "The impurity of doctrine
which is not God's Word or is without it, is such a

59 poisonous evil thing that even if St. Peter, yes, an angel from heaven would preach it, it would still be accursed, Gal. 1:8. Therefore false teachers and Anabaptists or fake masters of the Sacraments cannot be or remain in the church, as Psalm 1 says. For not only is the life undermined by them, which the church must suffer, especially where this goes on under cover, but also the doctrine is undermined, which must be bright and shine openly, so that the life can be regulated according to it" (Erl. Ed. 26,37).

Thesis VI

The reasons which have been advanced for joining heterodox church bodies and for remaining in them sound in part very pious; but they are, considered in the light of God's Word, altogether invalid and stem from our blind, conceited, self-willed, and presumptuous flesh.

The reasons which should be named here were already partly covered in the discussion of the first five theses. Let us yet briefly refer to only a few of them. The reasons sound in part very pious, but considered in the light of God's Word they are altogether invalid.

(Business Reasons)

Sometimes their origin -- namely, that they come from the flesh -- is written plainly on the face of them. Thus, for example, it is argued that a man out of consideration for his business must belong to a heterodox church. To this we simply say: That is turning one's faith into an earthly business. It means that the question "What must I do to be saved?" is subordinated to the other one: "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal

shall we be clothed?"

60

(Deeds, Not Creeds)

Others say: Faith does not matter at all. The important thing, finally, is the deeds. This is altogether a heathenish statement. So much depends on faith that he who believes in Christ is not condemned; "but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). And concerning the works which are well-pleasing to God and through which faith should manifest itself, the chief one among them is this, that you adhere to the whole Word of God and confess it, and thus adhere to the orthodox church.

(Family Considerations)

This reason sounds more honorable: "My relatives, yes, members of my family belong to a heterodox church; so I do not want to cause disturbance and disorder in my family by belonging alone to the Lutheran Church. I love my own too much for that." If you earnestly love your relatives, then in all love and patience bring the testimony of the Bible truth to them, that they may in all things give honor to the Word of God, and depart from error. You should not go over to them, but they should come over to you: that is God's will. If you do not succeed in winning them from error, then you must forgo the good fortune of being united with your own also in one and the same church.

True it is that it hurts not to be able to have church fellowship with those who are closely related to you. But Christ the Lord has already taken such a case into consideration and has definitely decided it. He says, Matt. 10:37,38: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of

61 Me....And he that taketh not his cross, and follow-
eth after Me, is not worthy of Me." And Matt. 19:
29: "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or
brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife,
or children, or lands for My name's sake shall re-
ceive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting
life." Therefore, at such times and in such a sit-
uation give heed to this: "The Lord your God is
testing you whether you love Him who is the Savior
of your soul and shed His blood for you -- whether
you love Him more than all others.

(When to Get Out)

You say: "I want to remain in the heterodox
church in order to accomplish good in it, namely,
to prevent it from losing the truth altogether."
If you should sometime find yourself in a heterodox
church, then first of all bear witness to the
truth, clearly and definitely. If you are heard,
that is good. Under circumstances you can also
wait a little to see whether the truth is received.
But as soon as it is clear that the truth will not
be accepted, you must separate yourself from that
church which adheres to error. If you nevertheless
remain in it, then you are no longer supporting the
truth, but rather the error. It is blindness if
you suppose that you are still a witness-bearer for
the truth when you continue in fellowship with
openly-known errorists. It is a complete contra-
diction to be both a witness-bearer for the truth
and an associate of false teachers. As Luther says:
You "cannot remain in the same stall with others
who spread false doctrine or are attached to it or
always speak good words to the devil and his crowd"
(XVII:1477).

(The Question of Outward Peace)

Further it is said: If you distinguish so ex-
actly between orthodox and heterodox churches and

will have no fellowship with the heterodox, then 62
the church will be disturbed constantly, and the
harm it will suffer will be more than the benefit
it can receive. Such words come from the conceited
flesh. Surely Christ the Lord knows best what will
harm or benefit His Church. He says concerning
those who adhere to falsehood: "From such turn a-
way" (2 Tim. 3:5); "Avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). This
do, if you want to be a Christian according to the
Lord's Word; and do not presume to rule the church
with your blind thoughts. Besides, this objection
is based on an altogether wrong conception of the
Church. The Church is the communion of believers,
of those who in faith cling to Christ as their Sav-
ior.

The Church is benefited when only that is
preached which works faith and maintains it--name-
ly, the unadulterated truth revealed in Scripture--
and when everything is kept away that hinders faith
in Christ, that is, false doctrine. Indeed, if the
Church were not the spiritual kingdom of those be-
lieving in Christ, but rather an external organiza-
tion, an arrangement to provide a living for pas-
tors, superintendents, and other ecclesiastics, or
also a society for the support of the civil state,
then everything would need to be anxiously avoided
that could disturb the outward peace of the church;
then outward peace would need to be bought at the
price of tolerating false doctrine. But now the
fact is that the Christian Church is an institution
of Christ for the preaching of His pure Word to
save souls.

(Take Heed Lest You Fall)

Another says: "I can very well take care of my
soul, also in those church bodies which proclaim
error together with truth. Whatever is there said
against God's Word, I will not accept." So speaks
the presumptuous flesh. He that carries his soul

63 in his hands will not speak that way. Don't trust yourself too much! Error is not such a powerless thing. In your heart there is tinder, as for all sins, so also for every doctrinal error. This is already proved by your objection. The objection itself proves that you do not at all have the right abhorrence of false doctrine. You are already half gone astray.

Besides, you simply cannot care for your own soul. That God must do. He wants to do it, and He also will do it. He will protect you, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone, also in spiritual matters. That He has promised. But that He has promised to do and that He does when you walk in God's ways. When do you so walk? Then, when you abide in God's Word, when you avoid the fellowship of errorists, as God has commanded.

(Conclusion)

If, therefore, we judge on the basis of God's Word, and not according to our own thoughts, then this will be sure: By avoiding all church fellowship with errorists, we walk according to God's will and serve the best interests of the Church in general as well as our own soul in particular. May God ever give us enlightened eyes of our mind so that we may at all times actively recognize the difference between orthodox and heterodox churches. And may God likewise give us the right, holy love for the truth so that we may ever act in accordance with such knowledge.

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The work of translation and of mimeographing this essay has been done by a number of persons.

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