

An Evaluation of the 51 Theses of the 1957 Minneapolis Convention of the Lutheran World Federation

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General Remarks

Years of preparatory work preceded the formulation of these Theses. This work was done by conferences, theological faculties, and individual theologians. Also the Faculty of St. Louis was invited to participate in this preparatory work by way of criticism and advice. The result of all this labor was the Study Document: "Christ Frees and Unites." As a result of severe criticism the first draft of this document was substantially revised. The second draft was a marked improvement upon the first, especially inasmuch as Scripture references had been added. Hence conservative Lutheran theologians began to entertain hopes that the LWF was turning to the road leading to sound Lutheran theology, based wholly and solely upon the Scriptures. Were these hopes realized at Minneapolis? An examination of the Theses will furnish the answer. The preparatory work for these Theses was continued at Minneapolis. It consisted in an analysis of the Study Document and in a perusal of the essays based upon the aforementioned document. These essays were presented at the plenary sessions by prominent representatives of various member churches. One of these, an excellent essay in many respects, was submitted by Bishop Bo Giertz, chaplain of the King of Sweden. It dealt with the freedom to reform the Church and had a truly Lutheran ring about it, except in regard to the doctrine of the Church where he confused the Holy Christian Church with the visible church. It was a thousand pities that on the floor of the convention so little time was devoted to discussion or debate on the important issues raised by Bishop Bo Giertz and other essayists. However, in the afternoon discussion groups, on which sat many learned theologians of Lutheran churches in Europe as well as in America, Asia, and Africa, devoted at least three hours each day for a period of six days to deliberations on the Study Document and the essays which had been submitted to the Minneapolis Convention in connection with the Study Document. The chief purpose of the meetings of the discussion groups was to assist in the formulation of the Theses which were to be considered by the Convention at the close with a view to adoption.

More than this.—After the close of the sessions of the discussion groups their chairmen, secretaries, and recorders met daily under the chairmanship of Dr. Franklin Fry and frequently sat well into the night, sometimes till after 10 o'clock, to examine, distill, and condense the Study Document, the essays, and the recordings on the deliberations of the discussion groups. The outcome of all these vast efforts was the 51 Theses of Minneapolis. Surely all these prodigious labors should have produced a mighty Lutheran witness to the truth worthy to be placed side by side with the great Lutheran confessional writings of the days of Luther.

Next, these Theses were submitted in due course to the Convention. However, at the direction of Dr. Franklin Fry they were not adopted, but received, notwithstanding the fact that the then President of the LWF, Dr. Hans Lilje, had made a powerful plea in his inaugural address for the adoption of a united witness of the Convention to go out into all the world like a mighty electric current to bring to modern man a message regarding Christian doctrine, faith, life, and hope which would arrest his attention and move him to pay heed to the same. However, this solemn plea of Dr. Hans Lilje was not entertained, but at the direction of Dr. Franklin Fry, who had just been made President of the LWF, the Theses were merely received and not adopted. And so Dr. Fry, who is also chairman of the 90 member Planning Committee of the WCC, induced the Minneapolis Convention of the LWF to follow the practice of the ecumenical bodies of our days. But the question enters our mind, Why was this procedure followed? It departs from that of the great ecumenical councils in the first centuries of the Christian era. Think of the councils of Nicea, Chalcedon, Constantinople, etc. At these ecumenical councils doctrine was not only received, but a definite stand was taken. In this respect Nicea and

Chalcedon are outstanding. What a wonderful thing it would have been to have adopted at Minneapolis a powerful united witness as at Nicea, based wholly and solely upon the Scriptures, to show this modern world of ours, given to doubt, uncertainty, and fear, that the house of the Lutheran Churches is built not upon the sand of man-made doctrine, or upon passing human philosophies, but upon the impregnable rock of the Scriptures, whose very heart and core is Christ, the Rock of Ages, who builds His Church, the Holy Christian Church, the congregation of all believers, only upon the confession of Peter: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," against which all the gates of hell shall never prevail! Why was this golden opportunity missed? This question some of the supporters of the LWF answer as follows: The adoption of Theses on doctrine belongs to the work of the Church and not to that of a federation. Had the LWF at Minneapolis adopted the Theses, it would have done the work of the Church and thus would have lost its federative character. However, in view of the powerful plea of Dr. Hans Lilje for the adoption of the Theses this answer is far from convincing. Moreover, this reason was certainly not advanced by Dr. Fry at Minneapolis. If this was the real reason, why was it not mentioned at the sessions of the convention? We believe the real reason is to be found in the very composition of today's ecumenical bodies. They consist of member churches who are deeply divided in regard to doctrine. There are the conservative churches on the one hand, on the other there are the churches who have abandoned even a number of fundamental doctrines. Hence to press for a united witness regarding doctrine might readily lead to a showdown which would break up the organization. Therefore anything that might imperil the existence of the organization must be avoided at all costs. Hence the practice of the WCC, the Evangelical Church of Germany, and LWF at their conventions is not to adopt doctrinal theses but merely to receive them.

Again, another decision of the Convention at Minneapolis was that the Theses be forwarded to the member churches, to all their pastors and teachers. In the *Accompanying Letter* Dr. Hans Lilje states: "We hand them over to all Lutheran congregations in the world, to their pastors, teachers, and members. We ask you to give them your prayerful study and careful consideration. It is our hope that they inspire Christians all over the world and that they may lead them to a new understanding of the riches of our faith and to a deeper loyalty to our Lord." This decision was neither wise nor practicable in view of the fact that much of the language is far above the heads of the people.

Furthermore, perusing the *Accompanying Letter*, we miss the request for replies as well as a statement concerning the future of the Theses. Are they to meet with the same fate as the *Hanover Theses*? They have been forgotten long ago. Surely, if the LWF takes the aim laid down in its constitution to promote doctrinal unity among its member churches seriously, then it should have asked for comments and criticism and should have done something concrete about the future. Just to give prayerful study and careful consideration to them is not enough.

And now a word in general concerning the language in which the Theses are frequently couched. Here are some pertinent examples:

Thesis 1, Section I: "The magnificence of the Creator's endowment of His creature imparts richness and fullness to man's search for freedom and unity. Man's culture is the form his productive vitality takes as he variously unfolds this endowment."

Furthermore in the last Thesis in Section I we read in regard to the freedom we have in Christ: "This freedom is received and lived out within the limitations of history." Let us adduce one more example of this nature: Thesis 2, Section V, states: "It is only in the dimension of hope and with the power of the Spirit that the Church can be true to herself and her Lord." This philosophical language, the language of existentialist theology employed by Kierkegaard and other existentialist theologians is certainly far beyond the comprehension of many members of the Church. It certainly makes no sense to *Hans in der Jacke*, to use Luther's expression, or to use a modern expression, to the man in the street.

What shall we say then that these Theses, frequently couched in most difficult language, have been handed over to the congregations for prayerful study and careful consideration? That includes also the congregations of the primitive natives in Africa, New Guinea, Formosa, etc. Many of these natives cannot even think in an abstract way as regards very simple things. Their whole mind has been trained for thousands of years to think in a very concrete way. Nor is this all. Even some pastors in Europe, America, and Australia must first

consult dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and reference works before they understand the proper meaning of this philosophical language. If the theologians of the LWF are sincerely desirous of deepening the understanding of Lutherans all over the world concerning the riches of their faith—and we doubt not that they are—then they must speak and write in a language which is readily understood by the man in the street. That was Christ's way. That was St. Paul's and Luther's way. That must also be our way even in our twentieth century of world-wide education.

And now let us turn our attention to the examination of the Theses. Two documents containing the Theses 44 and 47 were distributed at the plenary sessions at Minneapolis. In some of the Theses of these two documents the text differs. We take it that the text of Document 47 is the official text and hence shall base our observations and findings on Document 47.

Section I: The Freedom We Have in Christ

Section I is of supreme importance, for it deals with a number of the fundamental doctrines of the Scriptures which we must know to be saved. Hence we shall consider it at length. In it we find a number of statements to which we may readily subscribe, for they are Scriptural and confessional. Such statements are: "Man is not able to restore his life in relation to God. Because he cannot do so, he cannot achieve true order, lasting peace or fulfilment in any other relationship. Man in this predicament needs the Deliverer who is more powerful than anything that is wrong, and deliverance needs to take place where 'wrongness reigns'. God alone can free, and God alone can unite, and He unites by freeing." Thesis 4.

"This deliverance is accomplished because God in Christ invaded man's predicament. He became what man is where man is. For our sake He who knew no sin was made sin for us so that we might become righteous before God. The Son of God stood in the place where guilty man stands. He died our death, and He conquered death." Thesis 5.

"The liberation which God once for all accomplished in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ He bestows and makes effective even now and forever." Thesis 6.

"As man's situation is illumined before the cross, so there, too, his righteousness is judged." Thesis 7.

"In the Church man is grasped by the Gospel incorporated in this redemptive action of God in baptism and revitalized and sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit." Thesis 8.

"Faith begins with what God does; it is trust that God will accomplish what He promises; it is man's life in the faithfulness of God." Thesis 9.

"Much is against us: The limitations of our broken humanity, the pride of our religiousness, death-dealing choices in practical ethics. But what God has done drives into all of this with His action of forgiveness and the restoration of the new being in Christ. Whoever in all of this can say 'Abba Father' has indeed the gift of freedom." Thesis 10.

"The freedom we have in Christ is actual, for it is given. But the giver and the guarantor of this freedom is God, therefore we wait in hope." Thesis 11.

It is plain, all these statements are in agreement with Scripture and therefore we accept them. To be sure, a number of the above statements could have been expressed in clearer language and in more clear-cut terms. This becomes all the more apparent when we compare them with the words of Scripture and of the Confessions used to set forth these divine truths. Often there is a difference between these statements of Section I and those of the Scriptures and the Confessions as between the pale light of the moon and the sparkling light of the sun.

Now what a glorious thing it would be if we could say of all statements in Section I that they are in agreement with the Scriptures and the Confessions! But to a large extent this is not the case. More than this—It is also very regrettable that Section I lacks a number of essential distinctive Lutheran Scriptural doctrines which distinguish the Church of Luther from the Reformed Church. As to both of the above points raised we shall now call for evidence.

Here is the Evidence

Merely a cursory examination of Section I already shows beyond a shadow of doubt that it is marred by grave defects and serious omissions. Frequently the Lutheran trumpet does not give a clear sound. There is much that is vague and leaves matters to conjecture. Well-defined definitions should have been given of the terms used by the authors of the Theses such as: “The Creator’s endowment of His creature,” “fractured God-relationship,” “demonic powers,” “the limitation of his broken humanity,” etc. Why leave the real meaning of these expressions wrapped in doubt and uncertainty?

Furthermore, Section I, though it speaks of the fractured God-relationship and the limitation of our broken humanity, does not indicate in any wise how this sad, disastrous state of affairs in the history of man arose, namely through the Fall. Why this complete silence in regard to the Scripture doctrine of the Fall of man? Next, we notice also that though Section I deals with the fractured God-relationship, it does not mention original sin. Why not? Is it due to the fact that with so many theologians of today, Lutheran as well as Reformed, the Scriptural doctrine of original sin is taboo? Again, Section I speaks of demonic powers, but it fails to make it clear that according to the Scriptures they are personal spiritual beings with a mind and a will of their own, the devils in hell led by Satan, the prince of devils, who are the declared enemies of God and man. Why this vagueness? Why not call a spade a spade, so that we may know at once that the authors of the Theses have not joined the ranks of the modernists who do not believe in personal devils, but merely in an impersonal power of evil?

It must also be pointed out that though Section I speaks of the fractured God-relationship of man, of the limitations of his broken humanity, of the great need of restoring his life in relation to God and of his inability to do so, we look in vain for the distinctive Lutheran Scriptural doctrine on conversion. Why has it been omitted? Since Section I deals with sin and justification we rightly expect a clear-cut statement on conversion based on Scripture and at the same time a declaration which definitely rejects the teaching that conversion is not instantaneous but a drawn out process and that faith and conversion are not synonymous terms. Again, Section I also fails to set forth the distinctive Lutheran Scriptural teaching that the will of natural man is in complete bondage as regards all spiritual things and that it has no ability whatsoever to make a decision to accept Christ as Savior. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Contrary to this clear text the Reformed, including the Fundamentalists and Dr. Graham, persistently teach that unconverted man has the power to decide for Christ.

Furthermore, Section I, though it treats of the cardinal article of the Christian religion which distinguishes it from all other religions, namely justification by grace through faith in Christ, does not even mention absolution, that is the forgiveness of sins granted freely for nothing to penitent sinners. How is this possible since absolution, the forgiveness of sins, is the very heart and core of the Gospel and the very citadel of Lutheran doctrine? This is all the more surprising since some of the foremost Lutheran theologians of our days are responsible for the drafting of the Theses. Is also this grave omission due to the influence of the Reformed who dominate the councils of the WCC and adamantly oppose the Lutheran Scriptural doctrine that pastors by virtue of their office as the called and ordained servants of the Word announce the grace of God to those who confess their sins, and in the stead and by the command of their Lord Jesus Christ forgive the sins of penitent sinners? For Christ says: “Whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained” (John 20:23). Would it not be ostrich-like to refuse to trace the cause of these omissions of distinctive Lutheran doctrines to the close association of the member-Churches of the LWF and their leaders with the Reformed in the WCC and the EKID? Let us not blind ourselves to the fact that fraternization with unionists must inevitably tend to deterioration of our Scriptural theological stand and in the end must lead into the deserts of modernism and liberalism!

But the end is not yet, for our analysis of the Theses discloses further grave omissions. Thus we notice also that in Section I not one word is said about the Law nor about the difference between the Law and the Gospel. Again we are confronted with the omission of distinctive Lutheran doctrines of crucial importance. It is indispensably necessary that the Word of Truth, the Law and the Gospel, be rightly divided, that we never lose sight of the fact that there are a number of fundamental differences between the Law and the Gospel and that these differences must be taken note of in all our preaching and teaching. It must never be forgotten or

overlooked that the Law is spiritual and that it must be preached in all its severity, so much so that impenitent sinners are alarmed and terrified and cry, “What must I do to be saved?” It must never be lost sight of that the Gospel on the other hand must be preached in all its sweetness to penitent sinners. All this belongs to rightly dividing the Word of Truth of which the apostle speaks in II Tim. 2:15, where he lays down that the work of correctly distinguishing between Law and Gospel in all our preaching and teaching is the solemn duty of every pastor. Failure to do so is one of the chief errors in a number of Lutheran and Reformed Churches. Small wonder then that the Christian religion in our days has lost the dimension of depth in religion, that is spirituality. This is the inevitable consequence of failure to distinguish correctly between the Law and the Gospel.

Finally, to cap it all—though Section I deals with Justification, the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, the word “grace” is not mentioned even once, nor do we find it in any other section of the 51 Theses of Minneapolis. What would Luther have said to so grave an omission? Think of it, a Lutheran convention omitting the word “grace” in its Theses on the work of Christ’s redemption! Is not *sola gratia* the second great principle of the Reformation?

From the above it is abundantly clear that distinctive Lutheran Scriptural doctrines are conspicuous by their absence. This is very significant. Alas! it goes to show that the price of *co-operatio in sacris* with liberal, unionistic Lutheran churches and the Reformed is the abandonment of the confession of distinctive Lutheran Scriptural doctrine. This is the tragic result of unionism.

There is another point. We have been told time and again that we must join the LWF because “we can influence it more by joining it than by staying out” and “our testimony would be more vocal than ever before.” The serious, astonishing omission of so many vitally important distinctive Lutheran Scriptural doctrines is palpable proof that such contentions cannot be upheld. Mark, the committee which drafted the Theses was a very large committee consisting of Dr. Franklin Fry, 20 chairmen of the discussion groups and their 20 secretaries and 20 recorders. Amongst them were a number of representatives of conservative Lutheran churches. Remember, they are “inside” the LWF, not outside. But where in the Theses does their influence show up in favor of distinctive Lutheran Scriptural doctrine? Again, why was not their testimony more vocal, why did it not gain more and more momentum when the Theses came up for discussion before the close of the convention when they were submitted to the delegates of the plenary session? Amongst 800 delegates from Lutheran churches all over the world there were only two who testified, and they belonged to churches which had been accepted into membership at the sessions of the Minneapolis Convention. Where inside the LWF were all the bold confessors of the truth of God at Minneapolis? Let us be realistic. The history of the Church shows time and again that in all unionistic organizations or bodies the tendency is not to rise to the high level of confessing God’s Word in its truth and purity, but to sink to the low level of agreeing to disagree, of compromise, of sacrificing distinctive Scriptural teaching for the sake of outward peace and unity; in short, to sink to the level of the least common denominator. It is a stubborn, cold fact that whenever conservative Lutherans began to associate with unionistic bodies their testimony became weaker and weaker and the unionists won out and pulled them down to their level. Think of the state churches of Europe, viz., the Prussian State Church, the State Church of Saxony, the State Church of Denmark, Sweden, etc. Hence, Paul Gerhardt warns: Beware of a unionist!

And now let us turn from the consideration of the grave omission of distinctive Lutheran doctrines to a detailed examination of a number of Theses in Section I.

An Analysis of Theses in Section I

Thesis I reads: “The magnificence of the Creator’s endowment of His creature imparts richness and fulness to man’s search for freedom and unity. Man’s culture is the form his productive vitality takes as he variously unfolds this endowment.”

This Thesis, as it is to a high degree vague and nebulous, because of its manifest lack of clarity of thought and perspicuity of language, is one of the most difficult to analyze. In the first place it fails to explain

what is meant by the expression “the Creator’s endowment of His creature.” Does endowment here mean the image of God, and if so does it mean the image of God in the narrow or in the wider sense which also includes the mind and the will? All this is not clear. Again, the Thesis does not distinguish between spiritual and earthly freedom and unity. It speaks of freedom and unity in general. This includes spiritual freedom and unity. Furthermore, the Thesis fails to distinguish between the regenerate and the unregenerate man. We quote: “The magnificence of the Creator’s endowment of His creature imparts richness and fulness to man’s search for freedom and unity.” Note, since the terms “man” and “freedom” and “unity” are quite general and therefore include the unregenerate and the regenerate, earthly and spiritual freedom, it follows that the Thesis attributes also to the unregenerate man the ability to search for spiritual freedom and unity. This is synergism, a doctrine that is plainly contrary to Scripture. St. Paul writes, I Cor. 2:14: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned.” Furthermore, concerning the above-mentioned endowment of man given by God Thesis I maintains that also the natural man still has the endowment of God. We read, “Man’s culture is the form his productive vitality takes as he variously unfolds this endowment.” Mark, in the above sentence the present tense is used as well as the general term “man.” Thus it includes all men, regenerate and unregenerate, down to the last day, and of all men it says “man’s culture is the form his productive vitality takes as he variously unfolds this endowment.” This is a most unfortunate and erroneous statement which cannot stand in the light of Scripture. All of man’s culture cannot be an unfolding of God’s endowment, for is it not an established fact that much, very much, of man’s culture is idolatrous? Think of the culture of the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Romans, and the Greeks, etc. Their culture to a large extent found expression in the production of graven images and temples dedicated to the worship of idols. Never can this be an unfolding of God’s endowment. On the contrary, it is the unfolding of a perverted will and a darkened mind, and a wicked heart, and thus hails from Satan and not from God. Mark, the last statement of Thesis I followed to its conclusion implies that God is the author of sin. We know that the authors of the Thesis had no such intention, but this is the tragic result when vague, nebulous language is employed. It is regrettable that not greater care was exercised in the formulation of these Theses.

One more word before we pass on to the next Thesis. Thesis I fails to make a distinction between spiritual and temporal freedom in another respect. Freedom and unity which is spiritual enables the slave to rejoice even in the midst of a brutal slavery and to enjoy contentment and peace. Job thanked God at the funeral of all his children, who had been killed on one and the same day. This is not the case with earthly freedom and unity. If trials and troubles beset the natural man, he becomes restless, discontented, and if the opportunity comes his way, he revolts, Alas! our analysis of Thesis I constrains us to conclude that it is a very inferior sample of sound, Scriptural Lutheran doctrine. What a poor figure it cuts besides the clear, definite confessional statements of the Lutheran Confessions!

Thesis 2: “But every achievement of man within his creaturely existence is both perverted and ambiguous, for the freedom and unity bestowed by the Creator is corrupted by man’s fractured God-relationship. In the Scriptures God reveals the name and truth of this situation to be sin. Guilt, captivity by demonic powers, death are the results of it.” Also this Thesis suffers from lack of clarity of thought and clearness of language. Thus, though it speaks of the fractured God-relationship, it does not set forth what is meant by this expression. Now a fracture does not necessarily mean a complete severance or separation. Thus a bone may be fractured, but the parts are not completely separated, but still hang together. Again, a skull may be fractured, but the bones still have contact. However, through the Fall a complete separation between God and man was brought about, so much so that when man fell in the Garden of Eden, he was no longer a child of God, but God’s enemy, yea the slave of Satan. This is the language of the Scriptures and the Confessions, definite, clear, precise; hence we know at once where we stand.

Next, as Thesis 2 speaks of man’s fractured God-relationship, why does it not state how this fractured God-relationship was brought about? The Scriptures tell us time and again that the Fall of man brought about a complete separation between God and man. Why do the Theses ignore the Fall of man completely? Is the influence of modernism reflected in this silence concerning the Fall—modernism which relegates the Scripture story of the Fall to the realms of mythology?

Let us look once more at Thesis 2. It points out in its first statement that “the freedom and unity bestowed by the Creator is corrupted by man’s fractured God-relationship.” Mark the word “corrupted.” It does not mean that the freedom and unity in Christ were entirely lost through the Fall, but according to this statement they were only corrupted. Hence, Adam and Eve, though they fell away from God, still possessed the freedom and unity in Christ, only it was corrupted. But the Scriptures and the Confessions clearly teach that the freedom and unity were not merely corrupted by the Fall of man, but completely lost. Read I Cor. 2:14 and Eph. 3:2.

Thesis 3. “This means that human freedom and unity as envisioned and achieved by man is both restless and full of pathos: restless because the creature is not abandoned by the Creator, pathetic because every achievement denies the original endowment. Unless, therefore, the right God-relationship is restored, men can neither be free nor united. Fear, anxiety, wretchedness are the marks of man’s existence. Man is formed by God for freedom and unity, and he is bound within the limitations of his broken humanity.”

This Thesis is in harmony with Scripture when it states that the freedom and unity as envisioned and achieved by man are both restless and full of pathos. It is also on Scriptural ground when it sets forth that man can neither be free nor united unless the right God-relationship is restored. But when it states that man is restless because the creature is not abandoned by the Creator, it is beginning to tread on the dangerous ground of synergism. This statement does imply that man, natural man, seeks the true God. But the Scriptures teach: “There is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11). Furthermore, we notice that the first and foremost cause of man’s restlessness, sin, is not even mentioned. Yet the Scriptures remind us times without number that sin has brought all the restlessness and pathos into the world. Read Genesis 2:17. See how God warns man against sin and against the dire trouble that would be the inevitable consequence of sin as surely as night follows day. Again, we note also that in listing the marks of man’s existence the Thesis omits the chief mark, which is sin.

At the close Thesis 3 states: “He (man) is bound within the limitations of his broken humanity.” Thank God that our Confessions do not use such language which cannot possibly register with the people. They tell us in unmistakable language: Man, natural man, is bound by the total depravity of his human nature, by a will enslaved by sin. by the complete loss of the image of God, so that men may become alarmed and terrified over their sins and cry: “What must I do to be saved?”

Thesis 4. There is much in Thesis 4 to which we may readily subscribe.

Thesis 5 and 6 are Scriptural and confessional.

Thesis 7. “What God did in the desolation of the cross is received by faith and in the brokenness of repentance. As man’s situation is illumined before the cross, so there, too, his righteousness is judged and God’s righteousness is imparted.”

Thesis 7 should have distinguished between the righteousness of God which is the essential perfection of His nature and the righteousness which Christ won for us on Calvary. For the latter and not the former is the righteousness which becomes ours through faith in Christ. Concerning this righteousness St. Paul writes II Cor. 5:21: “He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” Indeed, Christ through His perfect fulfilment of the Law, through His payment to the last farthing of the sins of men, through the shedding of His blood on the cross, through His bitter, innocent suffering and death won for us the righteousness which we must have to find favor in God’s sight in the hour of death and judgment. Hence this distinction between God’s inherent righteousness and the righteousness merited for us by Christ on the cross is indispensably necessary. Next, we must challenge the word “impart” used by the authors of the Theses. The Thesis states “God’s righteousness is imparted to us.” That reminds us of the Catholic doctrine concerning the *gratia infusa*. The Scriptures do not use the word “impart” when they speak of penitent sinners receiving the righteousness Christ gained for us, but they use the word “impute” or “count.” We quote: “That righteousness might be imputed to them also” (Rom. 4:11), “and therefore it was imputed to him (Abraham) for righteousness” (Rom. 4:23), “even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.” “Count” is used in the same sense as “impute” in Rom. 4:3, and in Gen. 15:6, and Gal. 3:6. “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” “And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” We are well advised to adhere to the use of

Scripture terms when we deal with doctrine, for they are the most fitting and precise, having been inspired by the Holy Ghost.

Thesis 8: “In the Church man is grasped by the Gospel, incorporated into the redemptive action of God in baptism, revitalized and sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit. So crucial is the renewal of life that the resurrection of the Lord is alone adequate to create and describe it.” “We know that we have passed out of death into life” (I John 3:14).

Now though Thesis 8 is Scriptural and Confessional, it is nevertheless marred by a grave defect. Whilst it deals with the great things of faith in Christ and sanctification, indispensably necessary for Christians, it strikingly fails to give the means of grace, the Gospel, as laid down in the written Word, the Bible, its proper due. Of course, the resurrection of Jesus Christ creates faith and along with it the renewal of life. In I Pet. 1:3 we read: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” However, it cannot be stressed too much that the means, the only means, whereby the resurrection of Jesus Christ begets men unto a lively hope is the Word of God, the written Word, the Bible, whether read or preached, the Bible which is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God, quick and powerful, the incorruptible seed of God, which alone brings about the new birth, lest men fall into grievous error regarding the means by which the resurrection begets us unto a lively hope in Christ. Especially must we emphasize and re-emphasize the above vital truth over against the sects: The Quakers and all the Holiness Churches, commonly known as Pentecostal, the Churches of Christ, and others of a like nature, that men are converted wholly and solely by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel as set forth in the written Word, the Scriptures, and that sanctification, holiness of life, is not brought about by the preaching of the Law, but that it is the fruit of faith in Christ nourished and cultivated and promoted wholly and solely by the Gospel, the glad tidings of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. To be sure, sanctification follows faith as inevitably as day follows night. Let us hear what the Scriptures have to say concerning the work of the Holy Ghost in regard to the conversion and sanctification of men: “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (I Cor. 12:3), again: “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:11). Hear what the Bible has to say regarding the power of the Word to create faith in the hearts of men: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Finally, Christ Himself tells us that sanctification flows from faith in Him. “He that abideth in me and I in him the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:5).

Thesis 9: “His faithfulness begets man’s faith.” Again the Scriptures, the written Word, do not receive their due. They are not acknowledged as the means used by God to bring men to repentance and faith, and hence there is a lack of clarity of thought and expression.

Thesis 10. We find no fault with this Thesis except with its philosophical language and the ambiguity of the word “limitations.”

Thesis 11: “The freedom we have in Christ is actual for it is *given*—‘where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom’ (II Cor. 3:17). This freedom is received and lived out within the limitations of history. But the giver and guarantor of the freedom is God; therefore we wait and hope, ‘for in this hope we were saved.’ Rom. 8:24.” We readily subscribe also to this Thesis except that we question the statement, “this freedom is received and lived out within the limitations of history.” What is meant by the limitations of history? Once again we encounter the vague, philosophical phraseology, which the members of the ecumenical movements love to use in their speeches and writings in order not to commit themselves definitely. Again it is left to conjecture as to what the real meaning of living out Christian freedom in the limitations of history is. The authors may mean by the limitations of history the opposition, hostility, and persecutions of a tyrannical government like that of imperial Rome in the first three centuries and Communism in our day. They may mean the bloody persecution of Christians by the Roman Catholic Church. Christ when He speaks of Christians and the freedom He gives them, tells them that He will be always with them until the end of the world, that the more they abide with Christ the greater will be their freedom from sin.

Christ comforts them that whatever troubles and perils may threaten their freedom, whatever limitations the flesh, the world, and the devil may endeavor to impose upon them and their freedom in Christ, He will be

their mighty shield and buckler and their unfailing Deliverer. Christ assures them that when their traveling days are done, Christians will enter upon perfect, endless freedom from sin, death, and Satan—"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). "And there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling" (Ps. 91:10). In those plain words of Christ there is comfort and hope for men, but not in the jargon of existentialist philosophical theology. If the authors of the Theses had subjected their Theses to the searching analysis of the Scriptures and measured them with the yardstick of the Confessions, they would not have used language which the people could not comprehend.

To conclude,

Section I contains some fine Lutheran doctrinal statements, but all in all Orthodox Lutherans are deeply disappointed in its witness to the great truths concerning our salvation, especially in its testimony regarding the doctrine of justification. Compare these Theses with the powerful, crystal-clear, majestic confessional statements of the Lutheran Confessions, with the wonderful writings of Luther, Chemnitz, and Johann Gerhard, with the glorious uplifting hymns of Paul Gerhardt, with the pellucid writings of Walther, Reu, Hein, and Pieper, and with the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod. No! Here we must marvel at the clarity of thought and the perspicuity of language and the simplicity of presentation. Here the Lutheran trumpet has no uncertain sound, but is clear as a bell. Listen to the Confessions: "Furthermore, it is taught that we may not acquire the forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God by our merits, works and satisfaction, but we obtain forgiveness of sins and are justified before God by grace for Christ's sake through faith if we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for His sake the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life are given freely to us. For such faith God counts and imputes to us for righteousness. Rom. 3 and 4."¹

Section II: The Unity of the Church in Christ

Thesis I reads: "Men reconciled to God are one in Christ Jesus. Charged with the ministry and the message of reconciliation the Church herself is the first fruit of reconciliation: by baptism we are made a people with a life together, a communion, a body, the body of Christ."

Section II deals with a very important doctrine, the doctrine concerning the Church. A close scrutiny of the Theses of this Section reveals the marked failure of the authors of the Theses to impart clarity and clear-cut definition to the doctrine of the Church. They make no distinction between the Church *strictae dictae* and *largae dictae*, in other words between the *Una Sancta*, the Invisible Church, and the Visible, the organized Church, which consists of the various denominations in Christendom; they do not stress the vital importance of faith in connection with membership in the *Una Sancta*, namely that without faith in Christ as our Savior from our sins, from death and damnation no one can belong to the Holy Christian Church, in other words that personal faith in Christ as our Savior is the indispensably necessary requirement, the *conditio sine qua non*, for membership in the Holy Christian Church.

This is very regrettable, all the more so, since the doctrine of the Church is surrounded by confusion and uncertainty in most Lutheran as well as in most Reformed Churches. Also Dr. Walther was confronted with this confusion and uncertainty concerning this doctrine in the early days of his ministry, and it was only through prolonged and intense study of the Scriptures and the Confessions that he saw the light. The outcome was his classical treatise on the doctrine of the Church in his famous work *Kirche und Amt*. We note also that Bishop Bo Giertz in his very fine essay "The Freedom to Reform the Church" is not clear on the doctrine of the Church, for he states that the Lutheran Church is part of the Holy Christian Church.

Surprisingly enough, the Lutheran Confessions which teach and confess on the basis of Scripture the doctrine of the Church with great clarity and clear definition are not even referred to in Thesis I. But let us look at Thesis I of Section II. The conclusion of the very first statement is not in accordance with Scripture. It reads: "Men reconciled to God are one in Jesus Christ." Now it is certainly Scriptural that God in Christ reconciled the world, that is all men, to Himself, for the Scriptures say that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto

¹ *The Augsburg Confession, Triglotta*, page 44.

Himself, II Cor. 5:19. However, it is contrary to the Scriptures that all men are one in Christ, for they expressly teach that men are one in Christ only then when they have the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ men have only when they sincerely believe that Christ was wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities and that they are healed with His stripes. The Scriptures declare “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9), and “He that believeth not shall be damned.”

The first Thesis continues: “Charged with the ministry and the message of reconciliation ... by baptism we are made a people, a life together, a communion, a body, the body of Christ.”

Here the authors of the Theses are putting forward a definition of the Church of God when they say we are a communion, a body, the body of Christ. They also point out that by baptism we are made a people with a life together, a communion, a body, the body of Christ. In short, through baptism we become members of the Church of God, that is, of the Holy Christian Church. All this is correct as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough and hence is incomplete. Mark, it does not sufficiently bring out the fundamental importance of faith as regards membership in the Church of God or the *Una Sancta*; it does not close the door to the error that the mere *opus operatum*, the mere fact that a man has been baptized, makes him a member of the *Una Sancta*; it does not reject the error of those who identify the Visible Church with the Holy Christian Church; it does not state that personal faith in Christ as our Savior is the *sine qua non* without which no man can remain a member of the *Una Sancta*, and hence if any one who has been baptized loses his faith in Christ as his Redeemer, he simultaneously loses his membership in the Church of God; finally it does not make it clear that the various organized churches are not *per se* members of the Holy Christian Church but only those who are believers in Christ within these churches. Thus it is clear that Thesis I on the Church suffers from incompleteness and lacks clarity and clear-cut, adequate definition. What a striking contrast in this respect do we find when we compare what the Confessions teach concerning the doctrine of the Church with the statements of the above Thesis! We quote: “*Igitur illi tantum sunt populus iuxta evangelium, qui hanc promissionem Spiritus accipiunt. Adhaec ecclesia est regnum Christi, distinctum contra regnum diaboli. Certum est autem impios in potestate diaboli et membra regni diaboli esse, sicut docet Paulus Eph. 2:2, quum ait, diabolum efficacem esse in incredulis. Et Christus inquit ad Phariseos quibus certe erat externa societas cum ecclesia, id est, cum sanctis in populo legis, praeerant enim, sacrificabant et docebant: Vos ex patre diabolo estis (John 8:44). Itaque ecclesia, quae vere est regnum Christi, est proprie congregatio sanctorum. Nam impii reguntur a diabolo et sunt captivi diaboli, non reguntur Spiritu Christi.*”²

Jacobs’ translation reads: Therefore only those are the people according to the Gospel who receive this promise of the Spirit. Besides, the Church is the Kingdom of Christ, distinguished from the kingdom of the devil. It is certain, however, that the wicked are in the power of the devil, and members of the kingdom of the devil, as Paul teaches Eph. 2:2, when he says that the devil ‘now worketh in the children of disobedience.’ And Christ says to the Pharisees, who certainly had outward fellowship with the Church, i.e. with the saints among the people of the Law, for they held office, sacrificed and taught: ‘Ye are of your father, the devil,’ John 8:44. Therefore, the Church which is truly the kingdom of Christ is properly the congregation of saints. For the wicked are ruled by the devil, they are not ruled by the Spirit of Christ.”

From the above it is crystal-clear that the Lutheran Confessions draw a sharp distinction between the Church *stricte dicta*, the *Una Sancta*, the Invisible Church, and the Church *large dicta*, the Visible Church. Note also that the Confessions in no uncertain terms plainly bring out the vital importance of personal faith in Christ as the Savior of sinners in connection with membership in the *Una Sancta*. What a splendid thing it would have been if the authors in their definition had clearly and adequately and comprehensively echoed the teachings of the Confessions on the Church based on the Scriptures! Alas! they missed a golden opportunity to remove the confusion in the Church concerning the doctrine of the Church. Once again there is proof that the authors of the Theses did not always measure their judgments with the yardstick of the Confessions.

Thesis 2: “Thus her unity is found and founded in Jesus Christ. Neither by ideals, nor by enthusiasm, neither by tolerance, nor by agreements are we made one, but by Jesus Christ. In all our attempts to manifest the

² *Apologia Confessionis, Triglotta*, page 230.

unity of the Church in visible church-fellowship, the dimensions should be neither smaller nor greater than the dimensions Christ has given to His Church.”

Issue must be taken with the beginning of the last sentence: “In all our attempts to manifest the unity of the Church in visible church-fellowship.” Again the authors do not distinguish clearly between the Church *stricte dicta*, the “invisible *Una Sancta*” to which believers, all believers, and believers only, belong and the Church *large dicta*, the visible Church, to which believers and hypocrites belong. Again they are mixing up the *Una Sancta*, the Holy Christian Church, with the Visible, the organized Church. As a result they take it for granted that it is our duty to make attempts to manifest the unity of the Church in visible church-fellowship. However, in this they are gravely mistaken, for since the *Una Sancta* consists of believers only, and is therefore invisible, it is plainly impossible to manifest the unity of the Church in visible church-fellowship. Moreover, all such as make attempts to manifest the unity of the Church, the *Una Sancta*, in visible church-fellowship are attempting to do something which is against God’s order, for it is He who has made faith in Christ as our only Savior the absolute requirement for membership in the *Una Sancta*.

Thesis 3: “As the communion of reconciliation the Church suffers under her dividedness. We may find some consolation but no excuse in referring to an invisible unity of all true believers. We know that the ministry of reconciliation is jeopardized by the lack of manifested unity.”

Once again no clear distinction is made between the *Una Sancta* and the Visible Church. This is quite clear from the phrase: “The Church suffers under her dividedness.” True, the Church suffers from her dividedness, but this is the Visible Church, and this is deeply to be regretted. All of us should pray diligently that God in His mercy may remove the dividedness, so that unity may be brought about on the basis of the Scriptures concerning all doctrine and practice.

Thesis 4: “In this situation the Lutheran Churches are called back to their confession: ‘To the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments: nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies instituted by man should be everywhere alike.’ Here the words ‘it is enough’ witness to our freedom: Wherever we hear the Gospel preached in its truth and purity and see the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we may be assured that the one Church of Christ is present. There nothing separates us from our brethren, and both faith and love constrain us to overcome our dividedness.”

In Thesis 4 the authors of the Theses turn to the Lutheran Churches and exhort them that they should overcome their dividedness and manifest visible church-fellowship.

Interestingly enough, whereas in Thesis 1, in connection with their definition of the Church, the authors do not quote a single line from the Confessions, here they turn to the Confessions and in support of Thesis 4 cite *Augustana VII*: “To the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.” Mark, how they stress the words ‘it is enough’ and emphasize that they witness to our freedom. What do they mean by this freedom? This is clear from what they add: “Wherever we hear the Gospel preached in its truth and purity and see the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we may be assured that the one Church of Christ is present. There nothing separates us from the brethren, and both faith and love constrain us to overcome our dividedness.”

All this sounds very fine, for the phraseology is Lutheran and, what is more, Scriptural. And at first sight, the question enters our mind: After all, may not the claim that all judgments at Minneapolis were subjected to the searching analysis of the Scriptures and measured by the yardstick of the Confessions have a real basis in fact? However, that the above statements regarding the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments are not taken in all their seriousness, and at their face value, is quite clear in the light of the serious defects of the Theses in Section I where even the doctrine of synergism finds room, as well as in the vital omissions of doctrines affecting the very heart and core of the doctrine of Justification. The very same evidence we find in Section V where the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper is presented in such a way that also the Reformed may readily subscribe to such a statement. Mark well, we must ever be on our guard. With our Old Adam there is ever a strong disposition to water down also the requirements which God has laid down in His Word in regard to Church union, so much so that men without realizing it may reach the least

common denominator and are selling out the Lutheran Church. Therefore it behooves us all the more to watch and pray that God may preserve us even from the smallest departure from the truth in order to please men.

Furthermore, most Lutheran Churches in our days maintain that *Augustana VII* dealing with church unity contrasts the doctrine of the Gospel with other doctrines of Scripture and reminds us that it is not necessary for church unity to agree on all doctrines of Scripture but only concerning the doctrine of the Gospel, that is, in regard to the doctrines necessary for salvation, commonly known as the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. As for non-fundamental doctrines they hold that we may agree to disagree, viz., that the original writings of the Scriptures in their totality are the divinely inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God, that there will be no millennium before Christ's return to judgment, that the image of God has been lost altogether through the Fall of man, that man is by nature totally corrupt, etc. All this is not divisive of church-fellowship. If this interpretation of *Augustana VII* is Scriptural, then we have erred grievously in the past in withholding the hand of fellowship from all those Lutheran Churches who do not strictly adhere to Scripture and the Confessions in doctrine and practice. But is this interpretation of *Augustana VII* correct? To begin with, all those who interpret *Augustana VII* in this narrow sense overlook the incontrovertible fact that the Confessions do not contrast the doctrine of the Gospel with other doctrines of Scripture and teach: "To the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel, namely that we believe that Christ suffered and died for us and rose again for our justification and that we receive the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation by grace through faith in Christ and that the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution, but as for all other doctrines of Scripture agreement is not necessary for the true unity of the Church." Nothing is further from the truth as the context plainly shows. To be sure, from the context it is quite clear *Augustana VII* does not contrast here the doctrine of the Gospel with other doctrines of Scripture, but with ceremonies which are . Concerning these it states that it is not necessary for the true unity of the Church that all the churches have the same ceremonies. Let us hear the *Apology* which amplifies and reinforces *Augustana VII* and makes it crystal-clear that the doctrine of the Gospel is contrasted here with ceremonies and not with other doctrines of Scripture: "We are speaking of true, i.e., of spiritual unity (we say that those are one harmonious Church who believe in one Christ, who have one Gospel, one Spirit, one faith, the same Sacraments, and we are speaking therefore of spiritual unity) without which faith in the heart, or righteousness of heart before God, cannot exist. For this we say that similarity of human rites whether universal or particular is not necessary, because the righteousness of faith is not a righteousness bound to certain traditions (outward ceremonies of human ordinances)." ³

Again, those who interpret the term Gospel in *Augustana VII* so narrowly as to include merely the glad if of the grace of God in Christ overlook the fact that the Confessions in the *Augustana* as well as in the *Apology* demand that it belongs to the true unity of the Church that all with one accord teach the Gospel in its truth and purity. In the German text we read: "*Dass da eintraechtlich nach reinem Verstand das Evangelium gepredigt wird.*" In the Latin text we have: *In qua evangelium recte docetur.* ⁴

Next, those who place a narrow interpretation on the term Gospel lose sight of the fact that the term Gospel is used in the Confessions by the Reformers synonymously with the Word of God. It is used thus in the *Apology*, Müller, page 152. The Latin text reads: *Videlicet puram, evangelii doctrinam.* The German text states: *Naemlich wo Gottes Wort rein gehet.* ⁵

This is nothing new and it is Scriptural usage. Thus we read of the four Gospels that they contain a great amount of law and also history of those days. When Christ tells the Scribes and Pharisees that all men, they included, should love their neighbor as themselves, when He tells men in the Sermon on the Mount how they are to be and what they are to do and not to do, this is no Gospel but the Law.

Moreover, Gospel lessons have been set aside for every Sunday of the Church year, to be read in the churches, but they also contain matters which are not Gospel.

³ Jacobs, page 168, 31. *Triglotta* page 237.

⁴ *Augustana VII*, *Triglotta*, page 46.

⁵ *Triglotta*, page 226. In regard to Luther's usage of the terms Gospel and Word of God Professor T. A. Kantonen states: "The Gospel to Luther was synonymous with the Word of God." *The Uunity of the Church*, p. 41.

Again, such a narrow interpretation of the words “doctrine of the Gospel” used in *Augustana VII* is also untenable in view of the fact that the Lutheran Reformers insisted upon unity in doctrine, including non-fundamental doctrines, so much so, that they labored unceasingly to bring about unity in regard to all doctrines of Scripture and rested not till the *Formula of Concord* was adopted and signed by the Lutheran Churches in Germany. Why go to all this trouble if in *Augustana VII* they had laid down that all that was necessary for church union was that the churches agree concerning the doctrines necessary for salvation and are agreed on the administration of the Sacraments according to Christ’s institution?

Furthermore, are we not adding insult to injury, if we contend that the Reformers taught: Indeed, to the true unity of the Church it is enough that we agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with Christ’s institution, but as to other doctrines of Scripture, especially those which are on the periphery, it is not necessary for the unity of the Church to agree? In regard to the Law, viz., it is not necessary for the unity of the Church to agree that our human nature is totally corrupt, or that man by nature is altogether lost and condemned, an enemy of God and a child of wrath, or that the Law cannot make men pious nor save men from damnation. Obviously this cannot be upheld, for it strikes at the words of Jesus who says: “If ye continue in my word (not merely in the Gospel) then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth.” Again there are not a few Lutherans who hold that the words: “*It is enough*” refer to the doctrine of Justification only. Hence they maintain: For the unity of the Church it is enough to be in agreement concerning the doctrine of justification. Others contend that it is restricted to the doctrines contained in the *Augustana*. But all such contentions cannot be upheld in the light of the incontrovertible fact that the *Augustana* does not contrast here one doctrine with another, or fundamental doctrines with non-fundamental, but doctrine with ceremonies. This settles the argument. Neither can these arguments be upheld in the face of the definite insistence by the Reformers that there should and must be unity in all doctrines clearly taught in the Scriptures. Think of Luther’s statement that one word of God makes the whole world too narrow, that is to say, that we must bow to every word of God and pay no heed to all that the world may say against it.

Finally, even if the Confessions in *Augustana VII* taught (which they plainly do not) what many Lutherans claim, that would not make the teaching right, for it is diametrically opposed to the injunction of Christ: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Thesis 5: “For our Lutheran Churches with a diverse past and different situations in the past and commitments in the present, that ‘it is enough’ transcends local, national, and synodical traditions and urges us to express our unity where it is nurtured and made manifest, i.e., at the Lord’s Table.”

When Thesis 5 states that the dividedness between the Lutheran Churches is due to a diverse past, different situations in the past, and traditions, and omits the real cause, namely differences in doctrines, it is presenting a picture that is false. All these things are matters of indifference even as ceremonies in the Church, but not the doctrines of God’s Word. Since we are but servants, ambassadors, messengers of God, we dare not proclaim any other message but that of God found in the Scriptures. It is He and none other that demands that we teach men to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded us. It is He and none other that requires of us that we mark and avoid those who teach deliberately contrary to the doctrine of God’s Word. As long as churches deliberately uphold doctrines contrary to the Scriptures we dare not practice pulpit and altar fellowship with them. God forbid it!

To conclude: Section II powerfully stresses that the Church should be united, in particular it calls upon Lutheran Churches to strive for union. Whilst the call to unity must be commended and whilst we deeply appreciate many fine things said in connection with the Church, we must reject the basis of union which the Theses advocate, namely a union on the basis of the doctrine of the Gospel in the narrow sense and on the basis of the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with Christ’s institution. It is enough! For such unity leaves open wide the door for all manner of false teaching and preaching in regard to all other doctrines and ultimately must call into question even the doctrines which we must believe if we are to be saved.

Another point that we must make is the following: It is with profound regret that we notice that whilst all the stress is laid on unity, not a single word is said concerning the demand of God in His Word, the Bible, that we must separate from all those who deliberately and persistently teach contrary to God’s Word, nor is the

damnamus exercised to any extent. Antitheses and the rejection of false doctrine are conspicuous by their absence. It must ever be borne in mind that whilst on the one hand it is the Will of God to heed the call to unity on the basis of the Scriptures, it is equally the Will of God on the other hand that we heed also in all earnestness the warning and admonition, yea, the command of God to avoid all false prophets and teachers and to reject outright all doctrine contrary to the Scriptures.

SECTION III: The Freedom to Reform the Church

Many things are said in Section III of which Lutherans roundly approve and it is to be hoped that Lutherans everywhere heed its message. However, this Section is also marred by the false doctrine concerning the Church. Again the Holy Christian Church is confused with the Visible Church. This is so clear in Thesis 3 that there is no need to go to any length to demonstrate or prove that this is the case. May it suffice to quote the Thesis: “This temptation (the temptation to betray her Lord) is manifold. On the one hand the Church is tempted to identify herself with the Kingdom of God which is to come, to equate her own words with the Word of God, her dogmas of Christ with the living Lord Himself, her venerable confessions with living confession. On the other hand, the Church is tempted to distort the proclamation of the Crucified and Risen Lord as her only Saviour and King into political and economic ideologies, religious syncretism, self-sufficient moralism, or individual sentimentalities in order to make her message acceptable to man.” Here is a description true to life of the temptations which the Visible Churches encounter. However, the authors should have completed the picture by adding that, alas! many Churches, also Lutheran, have yielded to such temptations and in many respects have drifted far, far from the moorings of God’s Word; for to most Churches the Bible is not the sole source and norm of Christian doctrine, faith and life, and it is not the only rule by which all doctrines and teachers in the Church must be judged.

However, this picture applies to the true Visible Church only in part. Indeed, also the true Visible Church, the Church which acknowledges the Scriptures, that is, the original writings, as the infallible, inerrant, divinely inspired Word of God from beginning to end, as the sole source and norm of all Christian doctrine, faith, and life is sorely tempted, but by the grace of God and with His help it resists all temptations. As long as it is loyal to God, as long as it faithfully sticks to the Scriptures in doctrine and practice, the true Visible Church will never establish dogmas of the Church, but ever faithfully contend for the faith once delivered to the saints; it will not equate its own words with the Word of Scripture; it will not formulate its confessions on the basis of thinking up things nor on the shifting sand of developmental theology, nor on hearing the brethren, nor on the decisions of conventions, synods, or councils, nor on the judgments of church councils or faculties, but wholly and solely upon the Scriptures. The true Visible Church acknowledges its confessions based upon the Scriptures not only *de jure* but also *de facto*, it will not mix Church and State but ever bears in mind the injunction of Christ: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” Luke 20:25. The true Visible Church therefore will stand unflinchingly for separation of Church and State and hence attempts to distort the proclamation of the Crucified and Risen Saviour and King into political and economic ideologies cannot succeed for any length of time in the climate of the true Visible Church. The true Visible Church firmly embedded in the concrete of the doctrine of the Scriptures will not stoop to compromise the truth, or to co-operate *Oin sacris* with heterodox Churches, nor will it yield to the clamour of men to make God’s message palatable to modern man, but by God’s grace it will cling faithfully to the Scriptures and the Confessions and give no quarter to unionism, false doctrine, and worldliness.

Thesis 2: “The promise is that the Lord will abide with her even to the end of the age and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.” This is certainly true of the Holy Christian Church and applies to the true Visible Church as long as it continues in God’s Word, the Scriptures. However, it does not apply to the organized visible churches which have departed from the Scriptures. The gates of hell shall prevail against them if they do not repent and return to the Scriptures. See what God says by the Apostle St. John to the Churches in Asia Minor who kept not His Word, who became lukewarm, who harboured false teachers and false doctrine!

The Theses which especially arrest our attention are 4, 7, and 8, for in these Theses we find the phrase “apostolic tradition” which the authors of the Theses in Theses 4, 7, and 8 set up as an authority in connection with the Scriptures. The Theses read:

Thesis 4: “From the very beginning the Church was called to be the herald of the truth, receiving and delivering the apostolic message of the mighty deeds of God in the history of salvation, supremely the life and earthly ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and calling men to repentance and faith. This apostolic tradition in which the Lord Himself reigns and acts, remains sovereign and unchangeable throughout all ages. In every generation the Church must be confronted and judged by this apostolic message. This is her ongoing reformation.”

Thesis 7: “The Lutheran Confessions claim our allegiance because they not only proclaimed the Gospel in a crucial age of the Church’s life in accordance with the Scriptures, but they continue to direct us in our understanding of the Scriptures consistent with the apostolic tradition.”

Thesis 8: “Listening obediently to the Scriptures, abiding in the apostolic tradition, and free to respond to the demands of our time, the Church trusts the Holy Spirit to guide her to confess her faith rightly and relevantly in continuity with her historic witness.”

The phrase “apostolic tradition” was first introduced into the terminology of the Church in the second century of the Christian era. In those days when men often sharply differed in the interpretation of vital passages of Scripture affecting fundamental doctrines of Scripture regarding Christ’s deity and humanity, when those controversies threatened to wreck the Church, it was felt that there was a pressing need for an authority in the Church concerning the interpretation of the Scriptures which would explain and safeguard Holy Writ. As a result Irenaeus and Tertullian fathered, fostered, and furthered the apostolic tradition of which it was claimed that it contained the principles and teachings of the Apostles which had been orally handed down at first and later committed to writing. Alas! it led to the dethronement of the Scriptures as the sole source of Christian doctrine, faith, and life. Already in the writings of Tertullian: *De praescriptione haer.*, 1ff. we find the pernicious statement: “The Scriptures cannot decide the issue with the heretics.” Here the apostolic tradition is set up as an authority above the Scriptures. In the Ancient and Eastern Churches tradition was always regarded as a source of revelation besides the Bible. Now whilst we do not find in the Scriptures the term “apostolic tradition,” we do read of the oral proclamation of the Gospel by the Apostles before the Scriptures were written. See Luke 1:2; Acts 16:4; I Cor. 15:3, etc. (Meusel’s *Kirchliches Handlexikon*.) We also find that the Apostles’ oral proclamation of the Gospel is placed on the same level with the Scriptures (II Thess. 2:15; I John 1:3, 4; II Cor. 1:13). This oral proclamation by the Apostles is, however, not to be equated with the “apostolic tradition” of the church fathers. Modern Anglicans who do not accept the *sola Scriptura* have introduced into the terminology of the ecumenical movement the term “apostolic paradosis” and they look upon it as a source of revelation. The Lutheran Reformation did not begin with an investigation of the question what is the norm of Christian doctrine and the contrasting of the Formal principle with the principle of tradition of the Medieval Church. To Luther it was self-evident that the Bible is the only authority in matters of religion, the only source of revelation, the only norm by which all doctrine, all practice, and all teachers must be judged. It was only after Luther’s death in the seventies of the sixteenth century that in the Introduction to the *Formula of Concord* headed: *De Compendiaria Regula Atque Norma* that the *principium cognoscendi* was definitely placed in opposition to the principle of tradition upheld by the Medieval Church. See Meusel *Tradition*. Here they outright and at length condemn and reject all other sources and norms of doctrine. We know where Luther and the Lutheran Fathers stand, but we do not know where the authors of the Theses stand, for their Theses concerning the question of the *principium cognoscendi* and the principle of tradition lack clarity of thought and expression especially in regard to the term “apostolic tradition” which is un-Biblical. In Thesis 4 they declare that the “apostolic tradition in which the Lord Himself reigns and acts remains sovereign and unchangeable throughout all ages.” In Thesis 4 we notice also that they equate the apostolic tradition with the apostolic message. In Thesis 7 the authors set up the apostolic tradition as an authority above the Scriptures: “The Lutheran Confessions ... direct us in our understanding of the Scriptures consistent with the apostolic tradition.” In Thesis 8 they co-ordinate the apostolic tradition with the Scriptures, “Listening obediently to the Scriptures,

abiding in the apostolic tradition.” In what sense do the authors use the term “apostolic tradition”? Do they use it in the sense that it covers the New Testament? We know that a number of conservative Lutheran theologians used the expressions “apostolic tradition” in that sense. If so, we find no fault with Thesis 4. However, if they use it in the sense of an oral proclamation of the Gospel by the apostles as a source of revelation besides the Scriptures or as an authority above the Scriptures in accordance with which the Scriptures are to be interpreted we object in the strongest terms and must sharply rebuke the authors for abandoning the first great principle of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura*, the *principium cognoscendi*. It is quite clear from our examination of the above Theses that the term “apostolic tradition” admits of different interpretations because of its vagueness and ambiguity which has its origin first and foremost in the glaring lack of clarity of thought and expression. Hence the term “apostolic tradition,” which is un-Biblical, un-Lutheran, and un-Confessional, should never have been used. The Lutheran Church has never stood for the principle of tradition upheld by the Medieval Church and recognized and sanctioned by the Catholic Church at Trent as a source of revelation, but it has unreservedly rejected it. Instead it has upheld unswervingly the Scriptural principle observed by the Prophets, Christ, and the Apostles, Scripture explains itself: “*Scriptura ipsius interpret*,” that is, “if there are dark passages in Scripture (and there are) we must look for clear passages of God’s Word which throw light upon the dark passages. If we cannot find any we must leave the matter to God.”

A final word in this connection. Is there another authority in matters of religion besides the Bible? Another source of revelation besides the Scriptures? Another authority above the Scriptures, namely the apostolic traditions of the dogmas of the Roman or the Anglican Church in accordance with which Scripture must be interpreted? Never! Be it known to all the world, we believe, teach and confess that the Bible alone is the sole source of all Christian doctrine, faith, and life; the Bible alone is the sole norm according to which all doctrines and teachers must be judged. Never shall we recognize any other sources and norms. So help us God!

Now we cannot leave Section III without pointing out one of the great (if not the greatest) weaknesses of the Minneapolis Theses. In all the 51 Theses the first great principle of the Reformation, the Formal Principle, *sola Scriptura*, that the Bible is the sole source and norm of all Christian doctrine, faith, and life is not acknowledged even once. Never once do the Theses recognize that the Bible throughout, that is the original writings, are the divinely inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God. What a striking contrast between the testimony of Christ and the Apostles and Luther and the Lutheran Fathers concerning the credentials of the Scriptures and that of the Minneapolis Theses of the LWF!

The omission of a thesis on the concrete authority of the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments (an allimportant, vital question) clearly shows in what sorry plight by far and large the Lutheran Church of today is. Of this sorry plight Professor Peter Brunner of Heidelberg, Germany writes:

“Allegiance to the Lutheran confession today means a recognition of the deep spiritual crisis in our church which consists of the fact that the speaking Scripture, the judging Scripture, the Scripture as sole rule and standard for proclamation and doctrine has largely been lost. Then only one alternative remains; the sigh out the deep.”

Now what are the prospects of restoring loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions in the many Lutheran Churches where both loyalty to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions has been largely lost? Again let us hear Professor Peter Brunner of Heidelberg, Germany: “What will our Synods, bishops and church leaders say to this demand? Would one not say, ‘That is a hot iron.’ We cannot touch it. The attempt to formulate an authoritative reiteration and explanation of the Lutheran confession by applying several articles of the Augsburg Confession to our contemporary theological and ecclesiastical situation would create crisis after crisis. Because of the disposition of the church, such an attempt would precipitate disaster from the very outset. Therefore, we must not disturb the doctrinal twilight which lies over the church. Only in this twilight can we remain together.”

“Are those men right (asks Professor Brunner) who speak in this fashion?”

Section IV: Free for Service in the World

An analysis of the Theses in Section IV shows that the Theses are Scriptural, Lutheran, and Confessional. This is very gratifying indeed!

Section V: Free and United in Hope

It gives us pleasure to record that the first five Theses are Scriptural, Lutheran, and Confessional. Therefore there is no need to subject them to a searching analysis. However, we feel constrained to draw attention to a rather one-sided presentation of Christ. It is emphasized here that the Church lives by faith in Christ, that her hope is centered in Him, the Risen Lord; that she knows Him as the One who came and established His kingdom, that she knows Him as her Lord here and now who rules the world with sovereign power; that she knows Him as the King who will come in glory as Judge and Saviour. Though in many respects this is an excellent presentation of Christ and our hope, it is nevertheless onesided and in no small measure incomplete. It is not brought out sufficiently that our hope above all is Christ, the Lamb of God who suffered and died for us on Calvary and rose from the grave on Easter morn; that His amazing love for sinners, as is evidenced so conclusively by His suffering and death, is unseparably bound up with His Lord and Kingship; that Christ Crucified has won for us on the cross forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This in the final analysis is the basis of all our hope.

We pass on to Thesis 6. It reads: "In the Sacrament of Baptism we are brought under the power of His resurrection and are born anew to a living hope, waiting for the redemption of our bodies. In His Word God acts here and now as our Judge and Saviour. The Sacrament of the Altar, where Christ is really present, is the anticipation of the heavenly banquet. He who comes to us in bread and wine, is the same Christ, who is to come to us in glory."

This Thesis deals with the Sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. For many centuries the Lutheran doctrine of the Sacraments which is based on the Scriptures has been the great wall of division between the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches. The Lutheran Church, taking reason captive, teaches on the basis of God's Word that the Sacraments are means of grace by which God offers, conveys, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. The Reformed Churches, guided by reason, teach that the Sacraments are not means of grace which offer, convey, give, and seal unto the recipients who believe the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, but that they are merely signs and symbols of God's grace. The Lutheran Church, on the basis of Christ's institution, teaches concerning Holy Communion that in, with, and under the bread and wine we receive Christ's true body and blood, (that body which He gave for us on the cross, that blood which He shed for us on Calvary) with the mouth of the body, in a supernatural manner. The Reformed Churches teach that we do not receive Christ's true body and blood in the Lord's Supper, but only bread and wine and that we eat and drink Christ's body and blood spiritually, that is, in faith. Luther at Marburg would not yield, no, not even an inch, concerning this doctrine in the battle with Zwingli, for he was convinced that this, his doctrine, was the truth clearly expressed in the words Christ used when He instituted the Lord's Supper. Thanks be unto God that Luther stood like a rock in the battle for the everlasting truth and never wavered! How disappointing on the other hand is the witness of the authors of the Theses to the Scripture doctrine on the Sacraments! True enough, they state in regard to Baptism that we are brought in it under the power of His resurrection and are born anew unto a living hope; true enough, they say concerning the Lord's Supper that Christ is really present, that He comes to us in the bread and wine, but they fail to set forth clearly, definitely that the Sacraments through the Word of God connected with certain visible signs offer, give, and seal to us the grace which Christ merited for us on the cross, namely the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation; they fail to set forth the Scriptural, distinctive Lutheran doctrine as regards Holy Communion that under the bread and wine we receive Christ's true body and blood with the mouth of the body, not in a natural, but in a supernatural manner. Instead they state that Christ is really present and comes to us in the bread and wine. This is a phraseology to which also the Reformed may subscribe. This phraseology reflects in no uncertain manner the powerful influence which the Reformed exercise upon many theologians of the Lutheran World Federation. But we must pass on.

Summary

The analysis of the *Minneapolis Theses* establishes the following facts:

1) On the credit side we note that the Theses emphasize that man is not able to restore his life in relation to God; that he needs a Deliverer who is more powerful than anything that is wrong; that God alone can free and unite and that He unites by freeing; that God invaded man's predicament; that He became what man is; that He stood in the place where guilty man stands; that He died our death and conquered death; that the liberation God accomplished once and for all through Christ He bestows upon us and makes it effective once and forever; that through faith we make all these great things Christ won for us on the cross our own; that faith begins with what God does and that the Holy Ghost must revitalize and sustain us.

2) On the credit side we also record with pleasure the call to unity *per se*, as well as the exhortation to ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the obstacles in the way to unity. Furthermore, it is also very pleasing to note the grave warning of the authors in Section III concerning the many temptations to which the Church is exposed in this world, as well as the declaration that Reformation therefore is not creative of a new Church, but recovery of the true Church, and that it is the duty of the Church to enter into the life of each age and to witness to the Gospel among all nations. Again, we are also gratified that a whole section, Section IV, is Scriptural, Lutheran, and Confessional.

3) Finally, the authors are to be commended that they do not engage in dreams of a millennial age in which Christ will come to this earth to raise the believers from their graves and reign with them a thousand years in this earth before His advent to Judgment, but that our hope lies alone in Christ who will come to judge the quick and the dead and take us home to paradise.

On the debit side we note:

1) The language employed is often vague and ambiguous. From time to time a phraseology is employed shot through with philosophy which wraps the meaning in doubt and uncertainty and hence admits various interpretations.

2) There are grave doctrinal defects:

The total corruption of our human nature, as it is before we accept Christ as our Saviour, is not taught. The authors allow synergism to creep in. The doctrine of Justification is not emphasized as it ought to be, namely that it is the cardinal article of the Christian religion, which distinguishes it from all other religions, which alone gives abiding comfort to sinners and accords all glory to God alone.

Furthermore, the doctrine of the Church, since it sorely lacks clarity and clearcut definition is confused. Many distinctive Lutheran doctrines are conspicuous by their absence. The *principium cognoscendi* is not acknowledged, and last but not least, the distinctive Scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper is side-stepped.

Now though the authors of the Theses have stated numerous things which are Scriptural, Lutheran, and Confessional, they have stated little which is distinctively Lutheran, little which could not readily be subscribed to by the Reformed. Alas! the authors have even obliterated the great doctrinal, confessional dividing line between the Lutherans and the Reformed, the doctrine of the Sacraments. Thus the debit side far outweighs the credit side. Of course, it will be said: These Theses are not to be taken seriously, for they were not adopted by the convention at Minneapolis. Nevertheless the cold, hard fact remains that a very large and representative committee presided over by Dr. Franklin Fry, on which sat also members of conservative Lutheran Churches, agreed that these Theses should be submitted to the convention and no one on the committee disassociated himself from this decision. This is serious enough! All this goes to show that the LWF is traveling on a perilous road and as long as it continues on that road there is no security, no safety, for Lutheran Orthodox Churches in the fold of the LWF. It is a tragic delusion to believe that on the road of unionism and compromise of doctrine lies the salvation of the Lutheran Church.

What are we to do then? Sit back, fold our hands, and let matters take their course? No! a thousand times No! To save the Conservative Lutheran Church from being engulfed by the mighty river of unionism and doctrinal indifference, it is indispensably necessary that the Orthodox Lutheran Churches draw closer together and present a united front and valiantly and staunchly defend the faith once delivered to the saints. This is not to

say that the door is thereby closed to doctrinal discussions to bring about unity. No! let the door be wide open for doctrinal discussions, with a view to bringing about unity on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions. Indeed let us have doctrinal discussions on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions with other Lutheran Churches and with the Theological Commission of the LWF in order to reach a doctrinal agreement in harmony with the Scriptures. We are delighted that steps have been taken to convene a conference of theologians of Conservative Lutheran Churches from various parts of the world at Oakland, California, U. S. A.. May God bless this conference a thousand-fold to the end that the brethren may be strengthened in the faith once delivered to the saints and with one accord bear witness to the everlasting truth of the Scriptures. God grant it!