

# Theses on Unionism

By Dr. Franz Pieper

[An essay delivered at the 1924 convention of the Washington-Oregon District]

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## Translator's Preface

There seems to be a great deal of confusion abroad in the church these days in regard to scriptural principles for inter-church relationships. It is my hope that Dr. Pieper's essay will be a helpful resource in dealing with this confusion among the people of our church. The issues to which the essay addresses itself remain decisive. The answers which it offers are clear and unequivocal.

In the course of preparing this translation I was particularly impressed by three characteristics of Dr. Pieper's approach to the problem. First of all, Pieper is profoundly evangelical. His concern in dealing with other church bodies is first and foremost a concern for the Gospel. As you read these pages you will not find a rigid sense of denominational superiority which looks down on all others with self-righteous disdain. Instead you will find an interest in and a commitment to the salvation of souls through the pure proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Pieper realized a basic truth which many theologians today chose to ignore. All false doctrine must ultimately affect the Gospel, and where false doctrine is tolerated, the Gospel is in jeopardy.

Secondly, Pieper's treatment is surprisingly ecumenical. I say "surprisingly" because we are often presented with a picture of classical Missouri Synod Lutheranism as a phenomenon which could only have existed within a theological ghetto completely cut off and aloof from the ebb and flow of events within the greater church at large. Pieper's concern for the unity of the whole church and the lively awareness which he demonstrates of developments and personalities outside of his own denomination should reveal this view for the shallow, inaccurate caricature it is. The man who wrote this essay did not exist in some kind of theological ivory tower. Instead, he was involved in the developing pattern of church history as a keen analyst and active participant.

Finally, Pieper's method is thoroughly scriptural. The positions which are advanced are based on the conviction that this is the will of God as it is expressed in his inerrant Word. The confusion which seems to afflict many contemporary theologians in regard to the difference between the Bible and the Word of God is no problem here. For Pieper the two are clearly one and the same. In scripture the Holy Spirit himself speaks clearly and authoritatively to reveal to man God's will and God's way.

Quotations from scripture are taken from the Holy Bible, *An American Translation*, by William F. Beck. Confessional citations are from the Concordia Triglotta. The references after Luther quotes are from the St. Louis Edition of Luther's Works, and wherever possible the translations are from the American Edition of Luther's Works.

The translator is painfully well aware that at times his attempt to communicate Dr. Pieper's original thought in English idiom has not all resulted in a smooth and polished product. For this he offers his humble apologies. However, the translation does accurately reflect the original German.

May God bless your reading of this essay, and through it grant you a deeper appreciation for our rich confessional heritage as Missouri Synod Lutherans.

January 1980 L. L. White, Translator

## Theses on Unionism

At this year's convention of the Oregon-Washington District we wish to deal with the topic of unionism. First of all, let us clarify what we understand by "unionism." We understand this term to include church fellowship with false doctrine – that is, doctrine which deviates from the Word of God. This false doctrine may be advocated by an individual or by an entire group. A more precise definition should include the distinction between secular and church fellowship. Secular fellowship with unbelievers and errorists is not forbidden, but in fact, commanded. We learn this, for example, from I Corinthians 5 where the apostle instructs Christians to separate themselves from the world while at the same time maintaining that secular fellowship with their society which is a part of life here on earth. Christians should not run away from the world. This is the command of God. Instead, by word and deed, they should shine as lights in the world.

However, church fellowship with unbelievers and errorists is a much different situation. We will demonstrate from the Word of God that such fellowship is unscriptural and contrary to God's will. Moreover, it contradicts the spiritual calling which Christians have in the world. We have received widespread severe condemnation because of our practice of rejecting church fellowship with unbelievers and errorists. Some describe us as narrow-minded, arrogant, and pharisaic. Others call us separatistic – those who hinder the unity of the church. Still others insist that we are not building up the church but tearing it down. These accusations have made an impression. It is often difficult to hold fast to that practice which is demanded by God's Word in the face of universal opposition. According to our flesh we, too, would like to follow a unionistic practice. But by God's grace we don't want to live according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit – that is, according to the Word of God. Let me repeat this scriptural emphasis: God's Word clearly demands that Christians practice no church fellowship with those who hold to doctrine which deviates from the Word of God. All of the accusations which are brought against us because of our adherence to this practice are the result of a lack of Christian understanding. Our practice should not be characterized as narrow-mindedness, or arrogance, or pharisaic. Instead it should be characterized as obedience to the Word of God. On the contrary, we do not hinder the unity of the Christian church. We promote precisely that unity which God desires in His church: the unity which results from a faithful adherence to the Word of God. Furthermore, we are not separatists who seek to destroy the peace of the church. We contend for true Christian peace – that peace which is not merely external, but which (through God's Word) quiets hearts and minds. We are not a "disturbing" but a "peacemaking element" in the Christian church in our separation from error and our adherence to the inerrant truth of the Word of God. We are therefore in accord with the Church of the Reformation as it speaks in the Smalcald Articles:

It is difficult to separate one's self from so many lands and people to follow a particular doctrine. But here stands the command of God that everyone should beware of and not be united (*socii*, comrades) with those who teach false doctrine or think to preserve cruel tyranny. Therefore our consciences are fully excused and assured.

(Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope - 42)

Then let us not forget: if we so-called "Missourians" and those synods who stand with us in unity of faith and confession would allow ourselves to be drawn into the broad stream of unionism, we would be acting contrary to the will and command of God, outside of the calling which we have as Christians on earth. We would then have fallen away from the truth, which God raised again as brightly as the stars through the Church of the Reformation, to become traitors working together with those who seek to destroy the foundation upon which the Church stands. Then God would also withdraw the blessings which he has hitherto so generously bestowed upon our labors. May God protect us from that!

This has been an introduction to our presentation on unionism. It follows naturally that next we would once more listen to God's Word, the Holy Scripture, on unionism. We must clearly recognize, or to speak more precisely, we must constantly be reminded that we deal with this topic in terms of the recognized truth that the

Word of God forbids all fellowship with false doctrine and describes such fellowship as destructive of the Christian church. From this we proceed to the first thesis.

**I. The Holy Scriptures teach repeatedly and emphatically that all fellowship with false doctrine is forbidden by God and destructive of the Church.**

First of all we recognize this from the command which God has given to all those who are employed in his Church as pastors and teachers. God warns them not to teach their own thoughts or the thoughts of other men but only his Word. The powerful words of I Pet. 4:11 apply here: “So if any would speak (namely, in the Church of God) let him speak God’s Word.” The preacher should neither add to nor subtract from the Word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2). According to Scriptures the greatest praise of a preacher is that he teaches the Word of God completely and accurately, as God has revealed and given it. The apostle Paul says of himself in II Corinthians 2:17, “We are not like so many others who falsify the Word of God.” On the other hand, God threatens all preachers who allow their human thoughts to become mixed with the Word of God with his wrath. So we read in Jeremiah 23:31-32:

I’m against those prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say ‘God said it’. I’m against those who prophesy false dreams says the Lord. They tell them and make my people go wrong by their lies and wild talk. I didn’t send them or order them to go and they can’t help those people at all, says the Lord.

How improper and indecent it is to proclaim a “*mixtum compositum*” – that is, a mixture of the words of men with the Word of God in the Christian Church. God also holds before our eyes a picture or an image. So it says in Jeremiah 23:28, “but he who has my Word, let him honestly speak my Word. Why mix the grain with the straw, says the Lord?” It is just as improper for a preacher and teacher to present as Christian a mixture of truth and error in the marketplace of the Church and the world as it would be for a citizen to bring to the marketplace a mixture of straw and grain instead of pure grain. In the state we have “pure food” laws. The “pure food” laws of the spiritual realm, the Christian Church, are expressed in the entire Holy Scripture from beginning to end. Deuteronomy 13:1ff. is a most noteworthy passage. From this passage we see that God, under the covenant of the Old Testament, in which he also instituted physical punishments in regard to doctrine, commanded that all false teachers be killed, particularly in those situations whom wonders – that is, miraculous wonders – were done. It says this:

If one of you steps up as a prophet or a man with dreams and offers you a miracle or a wonder and the miracle or the wonder he promises you happens, but he says, ‘Let us follow other gods’ (that you don’t know), ‘and let us serve them,’ don’t listen to what that prophet or that man with his dreams says. The Lord your God is testing you to see if you really love the Lord your God with all your mind and all your heart. Follow the Lord your God, fear him, do what he orders, listen to what he says, serve him, and be loyal to him. That prophet or that man with his dreams must be killed because he told you to desert the Lord your God, who took you out of Egypt and freed you from slavery; he wanted to mislead you from the way the Lord your God ordered you to go. Get rid of such wickedness.

It was also added that no one should be hindered in carrying out this decisive prohibition against false teachers because of consideration of family relationships or friendship. In this regard the text says:

If your brother, your mother’s son, or your son or daughter, or your wife who is dear to you, or your friend as dear as life to you, secretly tempts you by saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ (that you and your fathers haven’t known)... Don’t yield to him or listen to him, don’t pity him,

spare him, or shelter him. Kill him - your hand should be the first that is laid on him to kill him and afterwards the hands of all the other people. Stone him to death because he tried to mislead you to leave the Lord your God. (Deuteronomy 13:6-10)

That was God's will and command under the law covenant of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, however, God did not continue physical punishments. In the New Testament, he himself clarified that the law covenant had become obsolete and had been abolished (Hebrews 8:13). Yes, in the church of the New Testament, God has expressly forbidden the general use of physical or external power against false teachers and enemies of the church. The Lord said to Peter when he wanted to defend him with a sword: "Put your sword in its scabbard!" (John 18), and to Pilate (John 19): "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have fought so that I would not have been handed over to the Jews. But mine is not that kind of kingdom." And Paul, the apostle of Christ, asserts as a general rule: "The weapons of our warfare are not physical." (II Cor. 10).

However, it would be completely wrong if we were therefore to conclude that God was any less opposed to deviation from his Word in the New Testament era than under the law covenant of the Old Testament. The general principle of I Peter 2:11, as we previously heard, carries a great deal more weight in the New Testament. "So if anyone would speak (namely, in the Church of God) let him speak God's Word." That holds just as true in reference to God's Law as in reference to his Gospel. If we who have been called as teachers in the Christian Church teach the Law, then Christ speaks this warning to us in Matthew 5:19 - "Anyone, then, who sets aside one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven." And if we who have been appointed as teachers in the Christian Church permit any deviation from the Gospel, then Paul, the Apostle of Christ, speaks to us in the first chapter of the letter to the Galatians: "Or even if we, or an angel from heaven, would bring you any other Gospel than what we brought you, a curse be on him." (Galatians 1:8) And in chapter 5: "Would God that those who have disturbed you destroy themselves." (Galatians 5:12) with the explanation that "A little yeast ferments the whole dough." (Galatians 5:9). In the first chapter of the letter to Titus the apostle teaches the characteristics of a proper Christian preacher. Not only should he possess and hold fast the "sound doctrine", that is, the foundation, purely and without error, but he should also be in a position to rebuke the opponents and stop their mouths. Naturally, this does not take place through the application of outward force but through refutation from the Word of God so that the false teachers stand there as false teachers and can be recognized. And so it clearly follows from the command and the prohibition that God has given all Christian teachers, that God would have no fellowship with false doctrine and no unionism in his Church.

The same conclusion is also clearly required from the command which God has given all Christians. God bids all Christians to hear and hold to only such preachers who teach the Word of God purely. Christians should not follow or hold to preachers who deviate from God's Word but should withdraw from them. The Scripture views false doctrine as a contagious disease. False doctrine spreads around you like cancer (II Timothy 2:17). God commands through the apostle Paul in Romans 16:17 - "hark those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned and avoid them." God commands through the apostle John: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine (namely, the doctrine of Christ, vs. 9) don't take him into your home or greet him. If you greet him you share in the wicked things he does." (II John 1, 11). The greeting forbidden here is obviously not the worldly greeting which in some circumstances is appropriate in terms of friendliness to all men (II Timothy 2:24). Also, the forbidden "taking into the home" is not the worldly, common, human, "taking into the home." That is not only permitted but commanded by God in words of Scripture like these: "Let us do good to all men" (Galatians 6:10), also to unbelievers and errorists through which we become like God who gave his Son for the evil and the good and allows the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). What is forbidden here in the words of John is that we greet anyone who does not bring and confess the doctrine of Christ as a brother in the faith or take him into our home as a brother in the faith. In short, unionism - churchly fellowship with those who are recognized as false teachers - is forbidden here. For example, with such we should not practice prayer fellowship or communion fellowship, for, as the

apostle says, if we did we would become participants in their evil works. It is an evil work, a very evil work, when anyone who presents himself as a Christian teacher, brings not Christ, but another doctrine. The Lord Jesus describes his true children in this way: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” “But they will not follow a stranger, but flee from him, for they do not recognize the stranger’s voice.” (John 10:27,5) In summary we say, if we were to read through all of Scripture we would find no passage where either a teacher is permitted to deviate from God’s Word, or a Christian is permitted to have churchly fellowship with a teacher who does not remain with God’s Word. Instead, both preachers and hearers are commanded to separate themselves from error.

At the same time, the Scripture also teaches that unionism, fellowship with false doctrine, is destructive to the Church since it is dangerous to spiritual health. We must not present God as a tyrant who finds pleasure in mere commands and prohibitions. God’s commands and prohibitions stand in service of his great inexpressible divine love and mercy which seek to make us poor sinners holy. God is not only our Lord and Master, but at the same time, our Savior and Sanctifier. If he commands us, “Avoid them!” (namely those who have deviated from the apostle’s doctrine) this is done in the interest of our salvation. When God forbids us to greet or treat anyone who does not bring the doctrine of Christ as a brother in the faith, this is done, once again, with a view to our salvation. We should not lose the salvation which is already ours by faith. In the same context St. John says, “Watch yourselves, so you will not lose what you worked for” (II John 8). God has given us great grace and mercy. God’s Son has come into the flesh and has won for us and for all men the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Beyond that he has given us his Word, from which we learn of the accomplished salvation and claim it as our own by faith. Our own salvation, and the salvation of all men, rests in the Word of Christ. All those teachers who bring us the doctrine of Christ bring us the salvation of our souls. They do a “precious work” (I Timothy 3:1). On the other hand, all those teachers who deviate from the doctrine of Christ do an evil work in regard to the souls of men. As far as it lies in their power, they deprive those people upon whom they intrude as teachers, of salvation. For that reason Christ warns, “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, for inwardly they are ravaging wolves.” (Matthew 7:15)

In the final thesis we will discuss more fully justifications which have been raised in defense of unionism. However, we will go into one justification here in the immediate context of the first thesis. This justification is also present in the hearts of the children of God according to the flesh. It goes like this: If false doctrine is so destructive and so strongly forbidden by God, then why has God been patient for so long with those who deny his Word and Will? We answer: In this case we certainly stand before a miracle of God’s patience. On this subject Luther expressed surprise that God did not strike him down in anger as he (Luther) as a Roman priest, offered his first mass, and by the sacrifice of the mass, dishonored Christ’s single expiatory sacrifice. Luther gave his opinion on the sacrifice of the mass (XII 1552):

That one would offer up Christ in the mass is a blasphemy, an abomination, and the most awful sin which could be done. Christ was sacrificed once, and now we can only thank him for eternity. The sacrifice of Christ which took place once is valid forever, and we become holy as long as we believe in it. When man prepares something in addition to that one sacrifice it is a blasphemy.

Through the sacrifice of the mass (XXIa, 907) “Faith is destroyed and the one sacrifice, which Christ himself has offered once for us, is forgotten and despised.” We, too, have marveled previously over the fact that God has not come down to damn and persecute the pope and his handiwork; he who calls himself the vicar of Christ and thereby abolishes the Gospel of Christ and the doctrine of grace through which alone men are saved. There is nothing in the world more shameless than a false teacher. They carry on more boldly and impudently than any worldly tyrant. Why does God put up with them so long and allow them to do so much evil in the world? God’s patience is so miraculously incredible, as indeed all of the attributes of God are incredible to us. We are dealing here with an impenetrable mystery. Therefore, we contain our thoughts about God within the limits of his revealed Word.

God does not totally explain why those who oppose his will and Word are not struck down by thunder and lightning in his Word. He only provides us with enough information. Scripture says: “God has patience with us, and doesn’t want anyone to perish, but that everyone would turn from sin to him.” (II Peter 3:9). Therefore God has delayed the judgment of the last day. Think about what God has accomplished with such people who strongly opposed him at first. Saul raged with threats and murder against the children of God, and yet God made from Saul a Paul, who worked more than all of the other apostles. James and John wanted to let fire fall from heaven upon the city of the Samaritans because they denied shelter to Christ (Luke 9:52-56). However, Christ turned them away and warned his children and said, “Don’t you know which Spirit’s children you are? The Son of Man is not come to destroy the souls of men but to preserve them.” And what did Christ produce from the Samaritans after Pentecost? We read in Acts chapter 8 that the apostles in Jerusalem heard, Samaria has received the Word of God. From Luther, who through the sacrifice or the mass blasphemed the expiatory sacrifice of Christ, God made the reformer of the Church. Here we catch a glimpse of light as to why God does not immediately strike down to punish those men who set themselves against his Word and Will. Scripture also provides us with further reason, why false teachers and sects are allowed to arise. We read in I Corinthians 11:19, “There must be divisions among you to show clearly which of you can stand the test.” From this we learn that God allows false teachers and sects to come, not for this purpose, so that you can join up with them and have fellowship with them, but so that we may flee from them. (Romans 16: 17) “Avoid them!” Earlier we heard the same thing in Deuteronomy 13:3:

The Lord your God is testing you to see if you really love the Lord your God with all your mind and all your heart. Follow the Lord your God, fear him, do what he orders, do what he says and be loyal to him.

We now proceed to make practical application of this in the second thesis.

## **II. As we apply this in the practice of our church we will not unite with:**

- a. Unitarian Groups;**
- b. Rome;**
- c. the Reformed Sects or those who teach that God would not have all to be saved, or with those who assert that it is not by the grace of God alone that men are converted and made holy; unfortunately, the latter is also maintained within the Lutheran Church;**
- d. those who deny the Means of Grace, established by God;**
- e. those who deny that the Holy Scripture is the inerrant Word of God.**

**a. We do not unite with the Unitarians.** Unitarians deny the triune God. Christ, the Son of God who became man, is said not to be of the substance of God, begotten of the Father from eternity, but only a man, albeit the best of men. Consequently, Unitarian groups also deny the vicarious atonement of Christ, that is, they deny that Christ has fulfilled the Law of God in our place and through his suffering and death in our place has taken our punishment for our transgression of the Law and paid the penalty. And what is the result or consequence of this error? The Christian faith can have no further discussion with those who hold to this error. The redemption which has been accomplished through Christ is precisely described in Scripture as consisting in that Christ gave himself to be under the duty and punishment of the Law in our place. Galatians 4 speaks of this: “But when the time was fulfilled, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law (namely, under the Law which God had given to men) to free those under the Law and make us his sons.” In Galatians 3:13 we read: “Christ has freed us from the curse of the Law in that he was cursed for us.” Christ, the Savior given and sent from God to men, is a completely different Savior than the saviors which men are constantly making for themselves and are still making. Men praise him as the greatest teacher, light, and savior of humanity who taught law, morality and human virtue. But neither these teachers nor their students obey that Law, nor can they keep it. Both teachers and students remain under the consequences and curse of the Law, and therefore are set in

evil knowledge. In this regard the one marvelous Savior of men, Christ, attacked the problem from a totally different direction. He took the burden of the Law, which no man can carry, upon himself, and has fulfilled the Law. Christ imputes this complete righteousness to all who accept him as their Savior as their own righteousness. The saviors made by men (these man-made saviors) usually also take the punishments of men upon themselves, so that in this way they may repay the guilt for the sins which have been committed. So also the so-called Catholic Church and the multiform heathen religions. Such works of atonement are and must remain sinful works, for the blood that flows thereby is and remains sinful blood, mere things, which could never propitiate God. It is another situation in regard to Christ, the one marvelous Savior of men, who is holy, blameless, undefiled, separate from sin, and higher than the heavens (Hebrews 7:26). This completely righteous and holy son of man and Son of God has allowed his blood to flow for mankind and thereby accomplished a complete punishment payment. And this punishment payment is credited to all those who accept Christ as their Savior, as the payment for their own punishment. As the Holy Scripture so abundantly testifies, for example, Hebrews 9:12, "Through his own blood he entered only once into the Holy of Holies and paid a price that frees us forever"; Romans 5:10, "We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son"; I John 1:7, "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, makes us clean from all sin." Therefore Christ is the one Mediator between God and man because of his fulfillment of the Law in our place and because he suffered the punishment in our place. "He gave himself as a ransom for all..." (I Timothy 2:6). Therefore among Unitarians, there can be no Christian faith because they deny the triune God, the eternal divinity of Christ, and the vicarious satisfaction of Christ (in Latin: *satisfactio vicaria* - in English: vicarious sacrifice, vicarious atonement). Therefore we do not unite with the Unitarians. All Unitarians, as they also wish themselves to be called, stand outside the Christian Church. The Christian and the Unitarian religions cannot be united with one another, but they relate to one another like "Yes" and "No". From the very beginning, namely in the first article of the Augsburg Confession, our Lutheran Church has decisively condemned all Unitarianism, old and new. The first article of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession added that all Unitarians "are idolaters, blasphemers of God, and outside the Christian Church (*extra ecclesia Christi*)." He who would remain within the Christian Church dare not unite with the Unitarians. Luther counted all those who did not recognize the triune God among "the Jews, the Turks, and the heathen." and spoke of their so-called worship of God, which without "cost," that is, without the vicarious atonement of Christ, would gain God's grace, as idol worship which accomplished absolutely nothing because it is offered to a false God who is disposed to be gracious without the atonement of Christ. Luther says (XI, 1085):

I have often said before that the belief that there is one God is not enough to satisfy God; you must also believe in the cost. The Jews and the Turks also believe in God but without the Mediator and cost...

This means that they do not believe that the eternal Son of God became man and is the one Mediator between God and man, who "gave himself as a ransom for all, that this might be announced at the right time." (I Timothy 2:6) It is now important that we look around ourselves to examine Unitarianism in our own land. Particularly in recent decades, Unitarianism has penetrated the Reformed sects, which were previously called the "Orthodox" sects, because they still held to the divinity of Christ and confessed the vicarious atonement. To a great extent that has changed. Late in May and early in June this year the Northern Baptists gathered in Milwaukee. At this convention the entire slate of Unitarian thinkers was victorious over the so-called Fundamentalists. Unitarianism has also penetrated into Baptist mission work among the heathen, as the fundamentalist leader Dr. Stratton of New York openly demonstrates. Stratton correctly concludes that such missions to the heathen have no part of the Christian Church because, according to the Unitarian principle, unbelievers are not led to Christ but rather, away from Christ. Unitarianism is also pressed upon us in our American classics like Hawthorne, Emerson, etc. S. J. Barrows, or the Unitarian journal, "The Christian Register," says in "The Concise Dictionary of Religious Knowledge" (by Samuel Macaulay Jackson) in the section on Unitarianism: "Indeed Unitarianism has exerted its greatest influence more through literature than through organized effort" and he adds, "Outside the pale of theology Unitarianism has been represented by an

array of noble men in literature.” He lists as Unitarians among others, Emerson, Irving, Hawthorne, Longfellow, and Bryant. Among historians he includes Prescott, Bancroft, and Motley. While we cannot avoid familiarizing the students of our colleges with the writing of these men, the necessity is shifted to our professors to warn them against the Unitarian error which they will encounter in these writings. Unitarianism has deeply penetrated the lodge. The official religion of lodgery is Unitarianism. The official religion of lodgery asserts that every man can enter heaven through his own virtue, without faith in the triune God, without faith in the divinity of Christ, and without faith in Christ as the only Mediator between God and men who has given himself as a ransom for all. So it says in “Webb’s Monitor of Freemasonry” by Robert Morris, p. 280:

So broad is the religion of Masonry, and so carefully are all sectarian tenets excluded from the system, that the Christian, the Jew, and the Mohammedan, in all their numberless sects and divisions, may and do harmoniously combine in its moral and intellectual work with the Buddhist, the Parses, the Confucian, and the worshipper of deity under every form.

From the preceding it is clear that the Christian religion and the religion of lodgery certainly are sharp opposites, mutually exclusive, relating to one another like “Yes” and “No.” The Christian knows that faith in the Christ who was crucified for the sins of the whole world is the only way to holiness, and that the duty of the Christian Church is to stand steadfastly therein and convert the Jew, the Mohammedan, and the adherents of all other religions to Christ. The lodge boldly says no to that and contends that all religions are the same and have the same validity. This is exactly what we hear: “So broad is the religion of Masonry so that the Christian, and the Jew, and the Mohammedan ...may and do harmoniously combine.” Therefore it is clear that no man who has the religion of lodgery in his heart can be a Christian, but stands outside the Christian Church. Hence our earnest and unceasing struggle against the lodge. Hence also, the practice of our church in reference to lodges. Therefore we allow no adherent of the religion of lodgery into the membership of the congregations or to attend communion, until such time as they have openly renounced the religion of lodgery, and thereby so that all men can see, proved themselves to be Christian. A local Christian congregation, and we must not forget this, is composed only of Christians; only of “called saints,” of such “who have called upon the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ,” also of such as “have come to faith in Christ as the Savior from sin.” This we can see with complete clarity from the beginnings of the apostolic letters, I Corinthians 1:2, Romans 1:7, etc. And as this concerns Holy Communion, so this is also only for Christians. When we preach the Gospel, we are, as Luther has illustrated, in a large house. There all are welcome, including the unbelievers, who should be the first to come to faith in Christ. But Holy Communion has only been established for those who have already become believers. In the preaching of the Gospel the Savior marched through the entire land, cities, and villages. But he celebrated the first Holy Communion only in the circle of his disciples. We learn the same thing also in the first letter to the Corinthians where the apostle Paul says about participation in communion:

As often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup you show the Lord’s death (namely, the redeeming death of Christ) until he comes. Then anyone who eats the bread or drinks from the Lord’s cup in an unworthy way is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourself and then eat some of the bread and drink from the cup.” (I Corinthians 11:26-28)

All of this presupposes faith in Christ. So also Luther in the Small Catechism answers the question, “What is the Sacrament of the Altar?”: “It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ himself.” The question arises repeatedly as to whether or not it is still possible for a lodge member to be a Christian. First of all we must answer, as we have previously said, not in those situations where the lodge member actually has the religion of lodgery in his heart because the Christian religion and the religion of the lodge stand in relation to one another like “Yes” and “No.” Just as little as we have the right to hold that a member of a Unitarian group is a Christian, so little are we justified in allowing a lodge member, in good faith, to pass as a Christian. We must logically conclude that he who is a



member of the lodge also consents to the Unitarian religion of lodgery. We Christians know that there is salvation in no one else, and there is no other name given among men whereby we can be saved, than the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified for the sins of the world, the Savior of sinners. To this the religion of lodgery says no and teaches that there are many names, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, etc., in which men are promised salvation. Christ warns all Christians, "Whoever will not confess me before men, him will I not confess before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before men, him will I also deny before my heavenly Father." The patrons of lodge religion say no to that and boldly say to Christians, "They are not permitted to introduce them (namely, their particular meanings) into the lodge or to connect their truth or falsehood with the truth of masonry." (Mackey, *Lexicon of Freemasonry*, p. 404). We can therefore understand our position that those who are lodge members must first explicitly deny the religion of lodgery, acknowledge themselves to be poor sinners who become holy only through Christ, and therefore take no more part in the divine worship, or speaking more accurately, the idol worship of the lodge. The fathers of our synod, especially Dr. Walther, have frequently explained the incompatibility of the religion of lodgery with Christianity in great detail. It has, however, been asked how Walther can then speak of a permissible temporary admission to communion in reference to those who have not yet severed their ties with the lodge. That Walther was able to comment in this way is a result of the fact that on this point he distinguished between doctrine and life (Proceedings of the Western District, 1870, p. 54, 63). He would admit no one to communion as long as that person had not abandoned the religion of lodgery and participation in its religious ceremonies. He spoke only of temporary admission to communion in those situations where the error lay not in the area of doctrine but of life; for example, if someone erroneously believed that he could use the lodge as a mere social society without at the same time being answerable for the false religion of the lodge. That such situations occur is well known among us. However, also in these situations Walther would not allow the problem to be put off indefinitely. Especially the earnest friendly pastoral conversation and then also the handling of the matter before the congregation which would, by the grace of God, produce the result that the Christian who had something to do with such would also abandon this last outward bond which united him with the lodge. (This is in reference to the very well known example which we alluded to earlier.) In recent years we have received news, especially from the younger pastors that in dealing with the lodge question the Word of God in their mouths has indeed been demonstrated as the power of God. In addition to the public testimony we must also come to the personal pastoral conversations which are particularly important in regard to requests for communion fellowship because holy Communion was ordained by Christ for Christians. Proper pastoral care is based on personal discussion from the very beginnings. We Missourians, and our partners in confession are commonly recognized as those – and for this let us say "Thank God!" - who hold Christianity and lodgery to be irreconcilable. If someone who still belongs to the lodge requests communion fellowship, he must wait until the pastor has seriously spoken with him on this matter. If this does not happen, it is the result of his mere human suspicions and fears of the pastor, which do not allow him to approach the pastor with confidence.

**b. Furthermore, we will not unite with the Roman Church.** A group of British and American Episcopalians recently expressed the desire to unite with Rome. We read this year in the Leipzig "Lutherischen Kirchenzeitung" in reference to the situation in Germany, "It is now a catholic time." And "This can be recognized in the attitude of the government and observed in our literature." Rome presents herself as the defender of the state and worldly order in the chaos which has resulted from the World War. This in spite of the established historical fact that there have been more revolutions in the Catholic countries than anywhere else. Still Rome claims to be the strongest dam against the revolutionary parties. However, we will not speak further on this point but direct our attention to Roman religion. It is true that Rome recognizes the triune God and the divinity of Christ. It also speaks of the suffering and death of Christ for the benefit of humanity. But Rome denies the fruit of the incarnation, suffering and death of the Son of God. It denies that the forgiveness of sins and holiness has been received by grace through faith by the perfect merit of Christ. It makes holiness dependent upon a man's own virtue and so-called good works, upon keeping the Law of God and the law of the Church. There is no substantial difference between the religion of the lodge and the Unitarians on the one hand,

and the church of the pope on the other. They both belong in one category, namely the category of works religions. Among the various works religions there is only a difference as to what works are proscribed for the attainment of holiness. When Rome and the lodge fight against one another it is only a juggling trick of the devil. The result for souls remains the same. If the lodge wins a soul from Rome for its religion of works, the soul is still lost. This word of Scripture applies to that soul. “No flesh becomes justified before God through the works of the Law.” If Rome wins a soul from the lodge for its religion of works, the very same word or Scripture applies to that soul and denies it any possibility of salvation because it seeks holiness through its own works instead of trusting in the perfect merit of Christ. Only Rome comes forward as blasphemously and as boldly as the lodge. Where Christ says “Yes,” the lodge freely and decisively says “No,” and vice versa. Christ commands that all those who are heathen be made his disciples and be baptised in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things that he has commanded his Church. As we have seen, the lodge says that is not important: the Jew, the Turk, the Buddhist, the Parsee, the Confucian, etc., can contentedly remain in his own faith. Christ says through his holy apostle:

Don't be yoked with unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with unrighteousness? How can the light have fellowship with the darkness? How can Christ agree with the devil? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? How can God's temple agree with idols?... So come out of them and separate from them says the Lord and don't touch anything that is unclean. (II Corinthians 6:14-17)

The lodge says no to this and commands the opposite. The Christian should not come out from the Jews, the Turks, the Mohammedans, the Parsees, etc., but should have fellowship with them, “harmoniously combined.” That is certainly abominable and shameless enough. But the official religion of Rome is found to be much more abominable and shameless. The Roman church not only denies the Christian religion, but also lays down an anathema on the Christian religion and all who believe it. We have this understanding: the Christian religion is to be distinguished from all other religions by the doctrine that man is not justified before God by his own works but through faith in the mercy of God which through Christ, namely through the perfect merit of Christ, will forgive sins. Against this Rome has spoken officially in the Conclusion of the Council of Trent:

If anyone says the justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake: or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified: let him be anathema (Trid. Session VI, Canon XII).

The Roman Church has condemned that which God blesses in his Word. God's Word says in Romans 4:6,8:

So David calls the man blessed whom God counts righteous apart from what he does. Blessed are you if your wrongs are forgiven and your sins are covered. Blessed are you if the Lord doesn't count your sins against you.

And because the Roman sect pronounces this anathema upon all Christians, with great outward Christian pomp – they drape themselves with crosses in front and in back, and the pope calls himself the Vicar of Christ, and infallible – so he is clearly recognizable as the great Antichrist written of in II Thessalonians 2:

Who sets himself above anything that is called God or anything we worship so that he sits in God's temple (that is, in the Christian Church) as a God and proclaims that he is God... whose coming (that is, entrance into the world and Church) is the work of Satan who uses every kind of false power, miracle, and wonder.

The question has been raised whether it is still possible to be a sound Christian within the Roman Church. The answer is this: all those members of the Roman Church who really believe the official Roman

religion cannot be spoken of as a part of Christianity. For the Word of God speaks this judgment: “You who try to become righteous by the Law have lost Christ and fallen from grace.” (Galatians 5:4) As little as someone, who believes in the religion of lodgery can be a Christian, so little can anyone who actually believes the so-called Catholic religion be a Christian. But nevertheless, there have always been individual souls within the Roman Church who do not believe the official religion of Rome, but in pangs of conscience and fear of death have put their trust in the mercy of God through Christ alone. Luther often alluded to this. He says:

I have seen a monk, who while all the other monks praised their own works, took up a cross in his hand and said, ‘I know of no merit of my own save the merit of him who died for me on the cross’, and he also died believing that. (VII, 1949, f.)

Our Lutheran Confessions also repeatedly refer to the fact that God has maintained for himself a group of believers under the papacy (Apology 270:98, 151, 271). We encounter such Catholics in our hospital work and in our worldly business. In pangs of conscience and fear of death they perhaps say, “I am a great sinner. I cannot become holy by my own works or by the works of the saints. I trust in the merit of the crucified Christ” of whom they have heard in the epistles and the gospels. But therefore we can make no union with Rome. The whole structure of Romanism is built upon the doctrine that the attainment of the forgiveness of sins and holiness is dependent upon a man’s own works. Therefore the Roman Church spreads a religious pestilence in its official doctrine and practice. As we have said, we will not unite with Rome, but instead we call to all those who are in the Roman camp,

Come out from them, my people, so that you do not become participants in their sins, and are not infected by their plague. Her sins have reached up to heaven and God has remembered her crimes. (Revelation 18:4,5)

Let us not become alarmed by the zealous Roman propaganda presently at work in our land. As long as we hold to the doctrine of Christ, Rome cannot harm us. Rome has won a few from our midst. But as always for every one that Rome wins from us, we win a hundred from Rome. Only those who have not received the love of the truth, that is the Gospel, the Christian religion, will fall victim to Rome. This is the teaching of Scripture (II Thess. 2:9-12).

**c. Furthermore we will not unite with the Reformed sects.** First of all not with those who deny the universal grace of God; that is to say, deny that God’s gracious will and the redemption of Christ extend to all men. Are there such among the Reformed? To be sure! Although the Scripture so clearly and definitely teaches: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...” (John 3:16), further, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29), further, “Christ is the ransom for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:2), further, “God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (I Timothy 2:4). In spite of these quotations from Scripture which so clearly teach universal grace, Calvin has contended that God does not want to make all men holy, but only a relatively small percentage, and that all of the rest have been destined by God to damnation. (Institutes III, 21:5, 24, 12) This is not only the position of traditional Calvinists but it is also held by Calvinistic theologians in our day. So in the Presbyterian “Confession of Faith” (Chapter III, 6): “Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called ...but the elect only.” Hodge, a Princeton theologian from Union Seminary in New York, Shedd, and Bohl from the Protestant faculty of Vienna agree with this position. Can a man come to faith in Christ or remain in the faith with this restriction of the grace of God to one part of humanity? The matter works itself out practically this way. As long as a man does not seriously question his salvation, it apparently makes no difference to him whether Christ has redeemed and would save 100% or 20%. However, as soon as the atmosphere changes in his heart and mind, that is, as soon as the individual experiences the condemnation of the Law of God in his heart and mind, then according to the Calvinistic heresy he is to be counted among the 80%

which Christ has not redeemed and does not want to make holy. He will succumb to despair if he cannot be informed of the indisputable truth from Scripture: Behold the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world, and your sins too. The Calvinistic doctrine which restricts the grace of God to only one part of mankind is a trap of despair, a pestilence, death and damnation for the soul. The Reformed acknowledge this themselves. A modern Reformed theologian, Schneckenburger\*, demonstrates that the Reformed Calvinist who is actually struck by the awareness of sin must become a Lutheran if he is not to be overcome by despair. He must forget partial grace and flee to the universal grace which does not exclude one single man, which the Lutheran Church teaches and confesses on the basis of Scripture. Schneckenburger summarizes in this way: "In practice the Reformed doctrine is always pulled toward the Lutheran side." This is true of Reformed Calvinists generally, including Calvin himself. Calvin warned that when touched by the pangs of conscience, "make use of the universal promises of God," but as Schneckenburger correctly adds, "But strictly speaking, this can only be done from the Lutheran standpoint, as we have said, with the result that our practice drives us toward the same." (I, 261f) The Calvinist Reformed doctrine that the grace of God includes only one part of mankind is a soul-murdering doctrine. Therefore we will not unite with the Calvinist-Reformed sects, but refuse them church fellowship. We should not go to them, but they should come to us. Without a doubt, in the course of time, millions within Calvinist-Reformed congregations have been saved. But there is a two-fold reason for that. Some have never accepted the poison of this partial grace, because in preaching many are reticent to speak in regard to this false doctrine. Others who have accepted this poison have rejected it in the pangs of conscience and the fear of death, when they were confronted with those Scripture passages which so clearly teach universal grace.

Some have also maintained that Luther, like Calvin, denied the universal grace of God. Just as we Missourians and our partners in confession have been slandered as deniers of universal grace throughout the whole world, because we teach that a man is saved by the grace of God alone and is not saved and converted because of his behavior or lesser guilt. We can see, for example, how strongly Luther taught the universal grace of God which comes to all men and does not exclude a singly; human being, in his commentary on John 1:29 .. "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world." He says:

This is an extraordinarily fine and comforting sermon on Christ our Savior. Neither our thoughts nor our words can do the subject full justice, but in the life beyond it will redound to our eternal joy and bliss that the Son of God abased himself so and burdened himself with my sins. Yes, he assumes not only my sins but also those of the whole world, from Adam down to the very last mortal. These sins he takes upon himself; for these he is willing to suffer and die that our sins may be expunged and we may attain eternal life and blessedness... This is the basis of all Christian doctrine. Whoever believes it is a Christian; whoever does not is no Christian, and will get what he has coming to him. The statement is clear enough: "This is the Lamb of God who bears the sins of the world." Moreover, this text is the Word of God, not our word. Nor is it our invention that the Lamb was sacrificed by God and that, in obedience to the Father, this Lamb took upon himself the sin of the whole world. But the world refuses to believe this; it does not want to concede the honor to this dear Lamb that our salvation depends entirely on his bearing our sin. The world insists on playing a role in this too, but the more it aspires to do in atonement for sin, the worse it fares... For the Lamb itself preaches to us, 'Behold how I bear your sins!' However, no one will accept it. If we believed and accepted it, no one would be damned. What more is the Lamb to do? He says, 'You are all condemned, but I will take your sins upon myself. I have become the whole world. I have incorporated all people since Adam into my person.' Thus he wants to give us righteousness in exchange for the sins we have received from Adam. And I should reply, 'I will believe that, my dear, dear Lord, the Lamb of God, has taken all sins upon himself.' Still the world will not believe and accept this. If it did, no one would be lost

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\**Komparative Darstellung des luth. und ref. Lehrbegriffs*, 260ff.

....Refusal to believe this is not Christ's fault, it is mine. If I do not believe this, I am doomed. It is for me to say simply that the Lamb of God has borne the sin of the world. I have been earnestly commanded to believe and confess this, and then also to die in this faith. You may say, 'Who knows whether Christ also bore my sin? I have no doubt that he bore the sin of St. Peter, St. Paul, and other saints; these were pious people, O that I were like St. Peter or St. Paul.' Don't you hear what St. John says in our text: 'This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.' And you cannot deny that you are also a part of this world.' For if you are in the world, and your sins form a part of the sins of the world, then the text applies to you. All that the words 'sin', 'world', and 'the sin of the world from its beginning until its end' denote - all this rests solely on the Lamb of God. And since you are an integral part of this world and remain in this world, the benefits mentioned in the text will, of course, also accrue to you. (VII, 1717 ff.)

All of our preaching and literature demonstrate that we have determined to teach the universal grace of God in exactly this manner.

We will also not unite with those Reformed sects which limit the grace of God in other ways. These groups teach that men are not converted and saved by the grace of God alone. They teach that conversion and salvation also depend on the relative righteousness of a man, in comparison with other men, and upon a lesser degree of guilt before God. These Arminian-Reformed groups teach in their confession (*Apologia Confess. Remonst.* 1630, p, 162b) that the conversion of a man does not take place solely by the gracious working of God, but that the co-operation of the individual is also necessary. This same heresy has already penetrated the Lutheran Church, Melancthon taught this in the later years of his life, and he discovered other followers far this heresy. Thirty years of intense controversy followed the death of Luther. Our last confessional writing, the Formula of Concord of the year 1580, swept this garbage out of our midst. But it emerged again in the seventeenth century. In our day this error is not only defended by the modern theologians of Germany, but it also has its zealous champions within the Lutheran churches of America. We Missourians and our partners in confession have been called Calvinists, deniers of universal grace because we refuse to teach the heresy that a man's conversion and salvation do not depend solely on the grace of God but are also dependent on the man himself, his individual behavior or his lesser degree of guilt in comparison with other men.

How do we evaluate this doctrine? First of all, it contradicts Scripture. Secondly, it makes faith in Christ impossible. It contradicts Scripture. The Scripture clearly teaches that the grace of God is extended to all men without distinction in Christ. Christ has taken away the sins of the whole world. Scripture also teaches, just as clearly, that men who believe in Christ are not justified and saved by their individual behavior or by a lesser degree of guilt before God, but solely because of the grace of God. The Scripture teaches: "There is no difference. All have sinned and are without God's glory. They are justified freely by grace through the ransom Christ Jesus paid to free them." (Romans 3:23, 24) The Savior himself teaches in John 6:44 - "A person can come to me (that is, believe in me) only if the Father who sent me draws him." The apostle Paul confesses in the name of all Christians: "We believe according to the working of his (that is, God's) mighty power." (Ephesians 1:19), and once more, "God who said, 'Let light shine out of the dark (namely at the creation of the world) has caused a bright light to shine in our hearts.'" (II Corinthians 4:6). Christ says of those who believe on him that "they have been born not of the blood of parents, or of a desire of the flesh, or of the will of a man, but of God's." (John 1:13) St. Paul reminds the Ephesians, "He made us who were dead in sins alive in Christ.. " (2:5), and the Colossians, "You were raised with him through faith produced by the power of God." (2:12). So Scripture strongly teaches that Christians have only divine mercy and grace to thank for their faith. He who denies this in his heart has not yet come to Christian faith. The Christian faith is based upon and has in all circumstances the character that it is built upon and trusts in the grace of God alone. "You are saved by a gift of grace which you get by faith. You didn't do it. It is God's gift. It isn't because of anything you have done or you might boast." (Ephesians 2:8,9) If anyone believes that he has attained the forgiveness of sins and salvation because of himself (that is, because of his standing as a Christian, that in comparison with others he has remained righteous, or has a lesser degree of guilt before God) he contradicts the word of Scripture. "Here there

is no distinction.” He does not say with the publican, “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” but he places himself in the large category of the Pharisee. The Pharisee formulated his confession in this way, “I thank you, God, that I am not as other men – thieves, evildoers, adulterers, or not like this publican.” Now we know that the publican stood within the Christian faith. He was presented by the Savior of all the world as an example of the Christian faith. The Pharisee, on the other hand, did not stand within the Christian faith. He was presented before our eyes by the Savior of all the world as an enemy of the Christian faith. Therefore speaking figuratively, Luther said, “He who would be saved dare not exalt himself in his heart above any prostitute. When that happens, the first shall become last.” And Luther, the great Reformer of the Church, also applied that to himself. He says literally:

It is very necessary that this Gospel (for Septuagesima Sunday, Matthew 20:1-6) should be preached to those who in our time know the Gospel, like me and others like me, who are teachers of the whole world and become its masters. We are very prone to develop the idea that we are closer to God than others, and that we have devoured God’s Spirit with feathers and legs ...So this is the sum of this Gospel lesson: No one is so high, or will ever reach such a height, of whom it is not to be feared that he could become the lowliest. On the other hand, no one has ever fallen so deeply, that he cannot entertain hopes of becoming the highest. The reason for these paradoxes is that all merits are set aside and God’s goodness alone is praised. The first will be last and the last will be first. “When God declares, ‘The first will be last,’ he takes away all of your presumptions and forbids you to exalt yourself, even above a whore, even if you were Abraham, David, Peter, or Paul. But when he says, ‘The last will be first,’ he bids you cast off all despair and not to regard yourself unfavorably even in comparison with the saints, even though you were Pilate, Herod, Sodom, and Gomorrah. (St. L. XI, 513f.)

It has often been asked what Melanchthon’s standing in the Christian faith was in the later years of his life, because alongside the grace of God he also made the will of man or his behavior a source of conversion. This essayist agrees with those who say that Melanchthon never believed in his own heart the false doctrine which he advocated in his later books. No Christian believes that. Granted that a Christian, according to his sinful flesh still has self-righteous thoughts which tell him that he does not have only the grace of God to thank but also in part his standing as a Christian, his better behavior, and his lesser degree of guilt. But, as Walther liked to say, the Christian should discard such thoughts as “the filth of the devil.” Luther called such thoughts “nasty, secret material” of the human heart, which the Christian must repress if he is not to lose the Christian faith and go from being the first to the last. He who fancies himself better than another before God and explains the fact that he is a child of God and has received his salvation on that basis, has erred in a “primary fundamental article,” that is, in reference to one of the basic articles of the Christian religion. In distinction from all other religions, the Christian religion is a religion of grace. That’s why Scripture warns us so frequently against exalting ourselves above other men. It does this in word and example. In word, or in principle, Christ warns in Luke 18:14 - “Everyone who honors himself will be humbled.” And this general principle is applied by Christ in the example of the Pharisee who imagined himself superior in comparison with the publican. The high and exalted God dwells in his grace only with those who are of a broken and contrite spirit (Jeremiah 57:15). Jesus welcomes sinners (Luke 15:2), that is, not those who are half or three-quarters, but sinners who consider themselves completely deserving of damnation. This was the national sin of the Jews – that they considered themselves better and more worthy before God than the heathen. This caused their exclusion from the kingdom of Christ and their eternal damnation. As the Savior says:

Many will come from the east and the west to sit down in the Kingdom of Heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But the children of the Kingdom (the Jews) will be cast out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 8)

As a further example, because the gentile Christians considered themselves to be superior to the Jews, the apostle Paul gave them the same warning:

They (the Jews) were broken off because they didn't believe. You (the Gentile Christians) stand by believing. Don't feel proud, but be afraid. If God didn't spare the natural branches, he will not spare you. Now see how kind and how severe God can be – severe to those who fell, but kind to you if you cling to his kindness (that is, to his grace); otherwise you too will be cut off. (Romans 11:20-22)

As we have seen, Luther also took this to heart for himself. We so-called Missourians should likewise take this warning to heart, along with all those who are involved in Christian or religious work, because we have only the grace of God to thank. If we had yielded to modern theology or American Lutheranism which required from us the belief that our conversion and salvation did not depend solely on the grace of God but was also dependent on our own efforts, our individual behavior, or our lesser guilt, then inwardly we would have fallen from the Christian faith. They were striking at our very soul. And accordingly, if we had changed our doctrine we would have been giving up the basic article of the Christian religion and could no longer rightfully have asserted that we were an orthodox Lutheran synod. We would not have been leading men to trust only in the grace of God in Christ to salvation, but instead to trust in themselves, therefore leading them to damnation. Therefore, we will not unite either individually or corporately, with those who would make conversion and salvation dependent on a man himself, namely, on his right behavior or his lesser guilt in comparison with others, instead of solely on the grace of God in Christ.

If we still ask how people like the later Melanchthon and many others, who would not willingly deny the Christian faith, contrary to the Scripture and contrary to their own Christian experience have dared to teach that one source, much less a “basis for explaining,” conversion and salvation lies within man himself; we can only answer: these men allowed themselves to be led astray because they wished to know more than the Word of God has revealed. They wanted to explain to human reason why all men are not saved if indeed the grace of God extends to all and all men equally corrupt. The Calvinists say: That can be explained in this way – God does not want to save and redeem all men in Christ. He has only saved and redeemed a part of mankind. We have seen that this doctrine not only contradicts Scripture, but, when it is truly believed in the heart, it makes personal faith in the grace of God impossible. The Arminians and apostate Lutherans say: That can be explained in this way – the conversion and salvation of a man does not depend solely on the grace of God but also on his correct behavior and lesser guilt. We have seen that this doctrine also not only contradicts Scripture, but when it is truly believed in the heart, makes personal faith in the grace of God impossible. That is why our Lutheran church, in the Formula of Concord, rejected not only the doctrine of Calvin – that God does not want to save all men – but also the doctrine of the Arminians and those Lutherans who have become weak – that conversion and salvation do not depend on the grace of God alone. The Formula of Concord banishes the question of why not all men but only a part of mankind are saved when grace is universal and all men's guilt and evil behavior are identical, beyond the limits of human understanding in this life. The Scripture reveals only this much: those who are saved are saved only by the grace of God; on the other hand, those who are not saved are condemned only because of their own guilt. It says literally:

When we proceed so far in this article we remain on the right way, as it is written (Hosea 13:9) ‘O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help.’

However, as regards these things in this disputation which would soar too high and beyond these limits, we should, with Paul, place the finger upon our lips, and remember and say (Romans 9:20) ‘O man, who art thou, that thou repliest against God?’ (Trig., p. 1083, 62,62)

The Formula of Concord is particularly concerned about sweeping the Lutheran Church clean of the heresy of the later Melanchthon and his followers which stirred up thirty years of conflict within the Lutheran

Church. Melancthon had compared Saul and David with one another and concluded that the fact that Saul was rejected and David accepted could only be explained on the basis of their individual behavior and that therefore the universal grace of God could not be maintained. (Loci, Detzer, I, 74). This explanation based on “individual behavior” was rejected by the Formula of Concord. In a detailed exposition the Formula states that when those who are saved are compared with those who are lost, they are found to have the same guilt and the same evil behavior and that their conversion and salvation must be ascribed solely to the grace of God. The Formula of Concord says literally:

Likewise, when we see that God gives his Word at one place, but not at another; removes it from one place, and allows it to remain at another; also, that one is hardened, blinded, given over to the reprobate mind, while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again, etc., in these and similar questions Paul fixes a certain limit to us how far we should go, namely, that in the one part we should recognize God’s judgment. For they are well deserved penalties for sins when God so punishes a land or nation for despising his Word that the punishment extends also to their posterity, as is to be seen in the Jews. And thereby God in some lands and persons exhibits his severity to those that are his (the believers) what we all would have well deserved and would be worthy and worth, since we act wickedly in opposition to God’s Word, and often grieve the Holy Spirit sorely, in order that we may live in the fear of God, and acknowledge and praise God’s goodness, to the exclusion of and contrary to, our merit in and with us, to whom he gives his Word, and with whom he leaves it and whom he does not harden and reject.” (Trig. p. 1081, 1083, 57-59)

The real proof of whether we hold to the grace of God in earnest is accomplished when we compare ourselves with the thief on the cross, the sinful woman, and others. We declare our personal position on grace if we consider ourselves to be better, or of lesser sinfulness than the thief on the cross, or the openly sinful woman, or the publican, etc. If this happens, it is a sign that we still do not understand what “grace” is. We still have not placed ourselves where we belong – namely, in the position of a poor sinner. But instead we still are coming into the temple before God to stand and say with the Pharisee, “I thank you, God, that I am not as other men.” And therefore we return to our houses unjustified. Whether Copernicus wrote his epitaph himself is uncertain; but in any case it expresses that which all Christians can expect from God. The epitaph says:

I do not demand the grace which Paul received, nor the favor with which you pardoned Peter:  
Only that which you granted the thief on the cross, I implore only that.

The statesman Hugo Grotius worked for union with Rome and supported work-righteousness during his life. However, at the hour of his death, under the pastoral care of the old Lutheran theologian John Quistrop, who reminded him of the publican in the temple, Grotius said, “I am the publican.” As we have seen, Luther forcefully said the same thing about himself and described Abraham, David, etc., in the same way. St. Paul did not explain his conversion and salvation on the basis of the fact that in comparison with others he was less of a sinner. On the contrary, he called himself the chief of sinners (I Timothy 1:15). To really believe the opposite within your heart excludes you from Christianity.

**d. Furthermore, we will not unite with those who deny the means of grace ordained by God.** In his great grace and mercy God has taken all that which pertains to the attainment of salvation into his own hands. God has allowed us to acquire grace and salvation through Christ. In the same way he has established outward means through which the accomplished forgiveness of sins is distributed and faith is worked and preserved. These outward divine means are the Word of the Gospel and the sacraments of baptism and communion. The Word of the Gospel is the divine proclamation that he, the almighty God, has been reconciled with the whole world through Christ. So we read in II Corinthians 5:19, “God was in Christ, reconciling the whole world to



himself, and not counting their sins against them; and he has put into our hands the word of reconciliation.” Paul says this on the basis of that which has been accomplished by the reconciliation accomplished through Christ. We read in Luke 24:46, 47 - “This is what is written, Christ must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and in his name you will preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins.” Peter clearly testified that baptism offers the forgiveness of sins on the first Pentecost. The crowd asked him, “Dear brother, what should we do?” He responded, “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins will be forgiven.” (Acts 2:38) In the same way, Christ has given us a continuous reminder in communion that through him we have a forgiving God, who has given his body for us and shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins. (Matthew 26, Mark 24, Luke 22, I Corinthians 11) Scripture clearly declares that the inward working of the Holy Spirit, who produces and preserves the faithful, is accomplished through external means established by God. Faith comes from preaching (Romans 10:17). Baptism is the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Tit us 3:5). Both baptism and communion are instruments or means of the Holy Spirit, through which we believers are made a part of the body of Christ, and therefore Christ himself (I Corinthians 12:13). “By one Spirit all of us, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, were baptized to form one body and that one Spirit was poured out for all of us to drink.”

On this very point Zwingli and Calvin stirred up a revolution in the Church in the sixteenth century. As a result the Church was sundered. The modern Reformed and the Reformed sects carry on this revolution. They contend that it would be unworthy of the Holy Spirit and improper for him to bind the revelation and working of grace to outward means like the Word of the Gospel, baptism, and communion. Zwingli asserted that the Holy Spirit needed no wagon to approach us (Niemeyer, *Collectio Confessionum*, p. 24). Calvin says the same thing (Inst. IV, 14, 17). Charles Hodge, a modern American reformed theologian, writes, “efficacious grace acts immediately.” (Syst. Theo., II, 684)

We must now ask: Can the Christian faith be produced and maintained in the face of this denial of the means of grace established by God? Certainly not if the advocates of this immediate working of the Holy Spirit really apply their false doctrine in their own practice. First of all, they must then adjust and silence their own preaching and writing in order that their own speaking and writing may not hinder the alleged immediate working of the Holy Spirit. However, they have not been silent but are extremely active in speaking and writing. And when, in these activities, so much of the Word of God is inserted that a man can thereby come to a recognition of his sin and faith in the crucified Christ, the Holy Spirit then gives the opportunity through the Word of God which is taught to work faith in Christ. So these enthusiasts, who sundered the Protestant church in the sixteenth century with their doctrine of the immediate working of the Holy Spirit, contradict themselves. They must practice as Lutherans if they themselves are to come to faith, or if they wish to lead others to the faith. Luther pointed out this self-contradiction, as we also have, in the words of the Smalcald Articles:

And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants his Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may thus be protected against the enthusiasts, that is, spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word... All this is the old devil and the old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts, and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualizing and self-conceit, and nevertheless he accomplished this through other outward words. Just as our enthusiasts condemn the outward Word, and nevertheless they themselves are not silent, but they will fill the world with their pratings and writings, as though, indeed, the Spirit could not come through the writings and spoken word of the apostles, but through their writings and words he must come. Why then do they not omit their own sermons and writings, until the Spirit himself comes to men, without their writings and before them, as they boast that he has come to them without the preaching of the Scripture. (Trig. p. 495, 3-6)

Against this the objection has been raised in the past and will doubtless still be raised in our own day: Cannot the almighty God work and preserve faith in Christ without external means, that is, without the

preaching of the Word, baptism, and communion? Certainly God could, if he were so inclined. If it were permitted to philosophize about the abilities of God without first inquiring as to the will of God, then we could perhaps say: God, who on the first Christmas was born as Christ in the stall of Bethlehem could have created faith in all living men as through an electrical current, “For unto us is born this day a Savior which is Christ the Lord.” The same thing could have happened on the first Good Friday as Christ entered the Holy of Holies with his redeeming blood. The same thing could also have taken place on the first Easter as Christ rose from the dead for the actual justification of all mankind. But God has ordained otherwise, as we see in the Word of God, the Holy Scripture. He chooses to create and preserve faith through the proclamation of the Gospel, which he has committed to the Church, the community of believers. (Luke 24:46, 47) “Christ must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and in his Name you will preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all men beginning in Jerusalem.” This is how it is now and will remain until Judgment Day as Scripture also testifies: “Faith comes from preaching, and preaching from the Word of God.” (Romans 10:17) Luther offers the following blunt advice to all those who would bypass the means established by God because the almighty God can work without means:

It may take place apart from the Gospel, for who could hinder God if he had actually willed to redeem us, yet had decided not to have it preached and not to become man? Just as he created heaven and earth, and accomplished all things continuously even now without outward preaching, and does not on that account become man; would the Gospel therefore be nothing? But if it is his will to give salvation to you through the humanity of Christ, through the Word, through the bread in the Supper, who are you, insolent, thankless devil, that you dare to ask why he does not do it in a different way and without these means. Will you prescribe and choose means and methods for God? You ought to leap for joy that he does it in whatever manner he chooses, if only you obtain it.’ (XX, 882f.)

Therefore we will not unite with those who bypass the means of grace established by God. As much as is in them, they demolish the path, the bridge, the stairway, by which we come to grace and faith. We should not give in to them, instead they should give in to us. No one from among them can come to the knowledge of grace except he who would depart from the immediate grace, which is only a delusion given to no one, and return to the external means, established by God, through which grace and the Spirit are given.

**e. It is self-understood that we will also not unite with those who deny that the Holy Scripture is the inerrant Word of God.** Unfortunately, in our day, this happens quite commonly within so-called Protestant Christendom in the United States as well as in Europe. Theology professors who are widely known and recognized as representatives of Protestant theology in the public press, almost without exception deny “Verbal Inspiration.” That is to say, they deny that the Holy Scripture was given to the holy writers by God and that, therefore, it is his inerrant Word in all of its parts. They thereby directly contradict Christ and his holy apostles. Christ makes this testimony about Old Testament Scripture: “Scripture cannot be broken.” (John, 10:35). The Savior offers exactly the same testimony in reference to the writings of the apostles of the New Testament, when he says in his high priestly prayer, that all men who come to faith until judgment day “through their” – namely the apostles – “Word will believe.” Until Judgment Day the Church of the New Testament is described as “built upon the foundation of the prophets and the apostles” (Ephesians 2:20). The apostles, therefore, insisted that their words be recognized and received as the Word of God. In the Corinthian congregation arrogant spirits arose who would not recognize and treat the words of the Apostle Paul as the Word of God. Hence the Apostle writes to the congregation:

“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, he should know that what I write you is what the Lord orders.” He then continues with the following threat: “But if anyone ignores this, he should be ignored.” (I Corinthians 14:37, 38)

This ignorance, which the Apostle Paul so sharply criticizes, is found throughout the whole of modern theology and is offered by its advocates as “wisdom.”

And what is the natural consequence of this ignorance? None other than this, that in the midst of so-called Protestant Christendom we have the same situation that prevails in the church of the pope. As in the Roman church, not the Holy Scripture but the allegedly infallible authority of the pope is the single source and rule for doctrine, so also modern Protestant teachers create Christian doctrine not from Holy Scripture but from their own “pious self-consciousness,” their own experience, etc. And Holy Scripture is adjusted accordingly. Under the papacy, only that is considered Christian doctrine which is drawn and established from the shrine of the papal heart. In the same way modern theologians will only regard those portions of Scripture as Christian truth which are recognized as truth by their own “pious self-consciousness.” In short, the blindness of modern Protestant theologians removes the Church from its only foundation for confession and faith, the foundation of the prophets and apostles, in exactly the same way as the papacy. Can the Christian faith be maintained under these circumstances? Certainly not if the error is followed to its logical conclusion. He who does not believe Christ when he says in John 10:35 - “The Scripture cannot be broken” - must logically then conclude that he also doubts the word of Christ in John 3:16 - “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Therefore, we will not unite with those who deny that Holy Scripture is the inerrant Word of God.

### **III. REFUTATION OF THE VARIOUS PRETEXTS WHICH HAVE BEEN OFFERED IN THE DEFENSE OF UNIONISM.**

**1. In defense of unionism it has been objected that we should have patience with the weak.** To be certain, this is forcefully asserted in Scripture. In the description of a true teacher II Timothy 4:2 says: “Admonish with all patience.” But in this regard we must consider that it is not with our own human thoughts that we are to determine what it means to have patience with the weak. The proper way to have patience does not consist in that we make the weakness that still adheres to Christians the plumb line and measure of the Christian doctrine which is to be taught in the Christian Church. The Word of God forbids us to do this. We would be changing Christ’s instructions to his Church to “teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:20) Actually our new guideline would be: Do not teach everything that Christ has commanded in his Word, but instead confine your doctrine to that which can attain the recognition of the weak. In this regard the previously cited passage which describes a true teacher says not only “admonish with all patience” but “admonish with all patience and doctrine.” (II Timothy 4:2) Hence we deal with weakness in doctrine and confession in a proper, God-pleasing way if we seek to remove the weakness through patient instruction in the unabridged plumb-line of the Word of God. We must demonstrate great patience in this genuinely Christian activity. Instruction should not be abruptly broken off if success does not appear as rapidly as we had anticipated. Instead the instruction should be continued with great patience as long as Christian judgment would still indicate that there is still hope for the removal of the error. It must also be noted that when weakness ceases to be weakness and becomes false doctrine, it is to be dealt with accordingly. This becomes the case when those who are in error demand authorization for their error within the Church, seek to make propaganda for their error, to label divine truth as error, and call true teachers false teachers. In reference to this situation the Scripture offers the following advice:

A heretic (that is the kind of person who attempts to secure a following for false doctrine) warn once, and a second time, and then don’t have anything more to do with him because you know such a man is set in his wrong way and is a sinner who condemns himself. (Titus 3:10, 11)

The word of Titus 1:9-11 also applies here. In a description of the fitness of a true teacher it says:

He should cling to the Word which he can depend on, just as he was taught, so that by sound teaching he can encourage people and correct those who oppose him. There are many who can't be controlled, who talk foolishly and deceive, especially the Jews. They must be silenced. They are ruining whole families by teaching what they must not teach...

If the foolish talkers and deceivers prey upon the weak in the congregation, then the clear and evident exposure and refutation of the errors of these deceivers is the only way in which the weak can be rescued from their captivity to stubborn false teachers. In short, having consideration for the weak cannot include a weakening of divine truth. That would only make the weak weaker, and, as previously stated, would put human weakness in the place of the Word of God as the plumb-line of Christian doctrine.

**2. As you well know, it is widely asserted that we contradict Christian love when we refuse churchly fellowship with unbelievers.** Here again we must remember that we must determine what Christian love demands and includes according to the Word of God, not our own human thoughts. God's Word teaches very clearly that along with love for your neighbor, love for God also includes holding fast to the Word of God. Christ says this in John 14:23, 24 –

He who loves me will keep my Word (that is, hold fast to it and preserve it) and my Father will love him; and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. But he who does not love me will not keep my Word.

It is stated here as clearly as possible that love for Christ does not consist in the abandoning of his Word. Exactly the opposite is true. Love for Christ is demonstrated by holding fast to the Word. Love for your neighbor also encourages this same position in reference to the Word of Christ. When, we hold fast to the Word of Christ we offer poor sinners salvation, as Christ himself explicitly says, "So anyone who keeps my Word will not see eternal death." (John 8:51) Christ turns the world toward the gracious countenance of God in the Word, and Christ in that Word is the only way to approach God as our gracious Father. Therefore he who does not hold fast to the Word of Christ, but wavers by abandoning that Word, as much as in him lies, makes the only way of salvation for mankind wavering and uncertain. His actions are contrary to both the love of Christ and the love of his neighbor. Luther has frequently commented that to use the term love as a justification for abandoning the Word of God is a misuse of that word. He says, for example:

Therefore don't talk to me about love or friendship when you want to pull down the Word and the Faith; for it does not say that love but the Word brings eternal life, the grace of God, and every heavenly blessing. We will only practice that same outward peace which we have with everyone else in the world with such a person. (IX, 831)

He says further:

Christian cannot ignore and tolerate the fact that your neighbor errs and sins. But rather you must rebuke and attempt to correct him wherever you can. (III, 228)

**3. This pretext derived from love also comes forth in another form.** It has been stated this way: Even you Lutherans admit that dear children of God are to be found in heterodox denominations. Your own confessions say the same thing. When you refuse to practice brotherly fellowship with the heterodox, your treatment of these children of God is contrary to the principle of love. To this, on the basis of Scripture, we say: all men who recognize themselves as sinners deserving of damnation and believe in Christ as their only Savior

and Redeemer are certainly members of the Christian Church with us. The same Holy Spirit who has kindled and preserved faith within our hearts has accomplished an identical work of grace in the hearts of these Christians who are found under the papacy and among the sects. They are members with us in the invisible, spiritual, body of Christ. They are a part of their respective denominations because of a weakness in understanding. It is still contrary to the will and command of God to practice fellowship with the papacy and the sects. These people find themselves in a false church.

In the church of the pope, as we have seen, the Christian doctrine of the forgiveness of sins by grace through the perfect sacrifice of Christ has been condemned and the whole structure of a heathen works' doctrine erected. Christians should abandon the church of the pope. In that dangerous environment, how easy it would be for them to be led to put their trust in their own works, or in the works of the saints, and thereby lose faith in Christ and salvation.

So also it is contrary to the will and command of God for the children of God to practice fellowship with the Reformed sects. In their official doctrine they fantasize about the revelation and operation of grace apart from the means of grace established by God. Therefore, as far as in them lies, they break down the bridge and stairway to heaven. They base faith and salvation on an alleged secretly infused grace which in despair and the fear of death proves to be a foundation of sand. We should not yield to them. Instead they must yield to us. The admonition of Romans 16:17, to avoid all those who do not continue in the doctrine of the apostles, remains valid for all Christians. We can also clarify this with a comparison to the rebellion of Absalom. When Absalom rebelled against his father David, he called together 200 men from Jerusalem, as we read in II Samuel 15. These men went with him innocently without an awareness of what was happening. They had allowed themselves to be deluded by Absalom's flattering words. In their innocence they believed that Absalom was in the right. It is the same situation with those Christians who find themselves within the camp of heterodox congregations. The comment of the Apostle Paul in regard to false teachers has taken place with them. "By their fine words and flattering talk they are deceiving the hearts of the innocent." But their innocence does not correct the evil. Evil can never be corrected because good people take part in it out of negligence or ignorance. Just as the rebellion of Absalom was not corrected because 200 men from Jerusalem in their ignorance made common cause with him, so also we would not be correct but acting against the express Word of God and the welfare of souls if we would practice churchly fellowship with the heterodox because there are genuine Christians in their midst who happen to be weak in Christian understanding.

**4. A further argument in defense of unionism states:** It is impudent presumption when individuals or whole denominations say, "We have the truth of God and those who follow another doctrine are in error, and we will practice no churchly fellowship with them." This rebuke of impudent presumption and pride has been raised against Luther and Lutheran churches time and time again by Reformed groups. The same reproach has been raised against us Missourians by other American Lutherans. We hear talk and more talk about "Missourian Infallibility" and "Missourian Papacy." Someone has said, "The Missourians are cock-sure," and that is certainly intended as a reproach and ridicule.

What, then, is the situation? Can we poor fallible men actually know divine saving truth? Yes, thank God! But how? In what way? Our Savior points out the way when he says in John 8: "If you live in my Word you are really my disciples and you will know the truth..." (John 8:31, 32) But then how does it happen that so many who call themselves Christians and Christian teachers are ignorant of the truth and remain in doubt? The Scripture also explains this in I Timothy 6:3, 4 when it says: "If anyone will not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ... he is proud and doesn't know anything. He has a morbid (that is, sick) craving for arguments and debates." God has prepared his Word, the Holy Scripture, in such a way that we not only can recognize divine truth in it, but must recognize it, as long as by faith we stay with the words of Scripture and do not allow our eyes to be closed to those words. Error in Christian doctrine is possible when, first of all, one sets aside the Word of God and determines doctrine with his own thoughts: No error is possible as long as one's view is fastened to the Word of God and no space is allowed in the heart for thoughts other than those which result from the clear Word of Scripture. Is this knowledge also possible for the laity, that is, for all Christians?

Absolutely! In John 8, speaking of all Christians, not only teachers or those with special gifts, Christ says: “If you continue in my Word... you will know the truth.” He warns all Christians, “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing.” (Matthew 7:15) And in Romans 16:17 all Christians are admonished to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned. All of this presupposes that the truth can be known and distinguished from error. The Savior teaches the same thing in John 10 when he says, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.” But they will not follow a stranger but will flee from him because they don’t know his voice.” (John 10:27, 5)

Every comment which speaks against the knowledge of the Christian in regard to divine truth is a completely dreadful comment. As Luther and our confessional writings often recall, these comments can come only from those who have never experienced the fear of conscience over their salvation, or those who have forgotten that fear. There is no greater terror on earth in this life than the fear of conscience. Every other fear, whether it be the pangs of love or even the sword and the funeral pyre are minor by comparison. We cry out for truth and knowledge when we are struck by the recognition of the damning judgment of the Law of God. Without knowledge we must perish in despair. But we do not have the kind of Savior who would allow us to die in ignorance. Instead he has satisfied our need for truth and knowledge. When Pilate asked, “What is truth?” Jesus responded, “I was born and have come into the world in order that I might witness to the truth.” He who receives the witness of Christ – that is, Christ’s Word which we have in the Word of the holy apostles and prophets – knows the unshakable truth. Then the basic question, the question of how we are set free of our sin’s guilt before God and receive a peaceful conscience is decisively answered: “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, makes us clean from all sin.” (I John 1:17) “But if instead of working you believe in him who makes the ungodly righteous, your faith is counted as righteousness.” (Romans 4:5) “Now that we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1) When the Holy Spirit enters the heart of the Christian with faith in Christ the Redeemer the believer recognizes the word of his apostles and prophets as the inerrant Word of God, a lamp to his feet and a light for the path of his life. He who denies the Christian’s certainty of truth destroys the whole of Christianity. Luther called the Roman doctrine of doubt and uncertainty an “atrocious monster”, “*monstrum incertitudinis*.” The image is not too severe. Consider it for a moment. God’s Son became a man, reconciled God with man through his blood, and gave them his Word so that they might know truth and salvation by faith in it. The Roman doctrine of uncertainty nullifies all of this. Luther writes against Erasmus:

How often, I ask you, does the apostle Paul demand that ‘*plerophoria*’ (as he terms it) - that most sure and unyielding assertion of conscience? In Romans 10:10 he calls it ‘confession’ saying, ‘with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.’ And Christ says, ‘Everyone who confesses me ‘before men I will also confess before my father in heaven.’ (Matthew 10:32) Peter bids us give a reason for the hope that is in us (I Peter 3:15). What need is there to dwell on this? Nothing is better known or more common among Christians than assertion. Take away assertion and you take away Christianity. Why, the Holy Spirit is given them from heaven, that they may glorify Christ in him and confess him even unto death - unless it is not asserting when one dies for one’s confession and assertion... The Holy Spirit is no skeptic and it’s not doubts or mere opinions that he has written on our hearts but assertions more sure and certain than life itself and all experience. (XXVIII, 1676, 1680)

The fact that there are passages in Scripture that are dark and difficult to understand has been advanced in defense of doubt and uncertainty. This is still being done today. Certainly there are such passages. But he who cannot understand the dark passages best follow the advice of Luther. Luther said, “Whoever cannot understand the darkness had better remain in the light.” God has constructed his Holy Scripture in such a way that the whole of Christian doctrine in all its parts is presented in these clear passages. These passages do not contain darkness but can be understood by the educated and the uneducated alike. Because of this quality of Holy Scripture all Christians are able to beware of false prophets when they come in sheep’s clothing. The

reason for dark passages in Scripture is not so that faith may be based upon them. Instead, as the fathers of the early church have correctly said, the dark passages have been included so that their presence may prevent boredom in the reading and study of Scripture. In this context, others have objected; we agree that all Christian doctrine is openly presented in the clear passages, but even the clear passages are interpreted differently by the various denominations. That also is certainly true. That is why our dear Savior has instructed us to actually base our faith on his Word itself, not on an interpretation of that Word. He says specifically, “If you continue in my Word you are my disciples indeed, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” This freedom includes freedom from every human interpretation of the Word. The business of a true interpreter or exegete does not consist in that he clarifies the word of Scripture but that he leads the listener or reader to the word of Scripture itself. Or, if they have deviated from that Word, he leads them back to the word of Scripture, so that their faith may be based on the bare words of Scripture and them alone. Every interpretation, even the interpretations of the best exegetes, is always darker than the word of Scripture. Therefore it surely follows that every interpretation must be tested as to whether or not it is correct, by the word of Scripture itself. Although this truth is self-evident it is often forgotten. That fact is the source of all error through which the Church has been plagued and divided. Therefore Luther, the reformer of the Church, sent by God, summoned the Church back to the naked bare words of Scripture, the “nude scripture” as it is said in Latin. Luther writes:

It is certain that the Scripture, without any glosses (that is, without any interpretation), is the sun and the whole light from which all teachers receive their light and none other. (XXVIII, 1293)

Luther called those who would debate with their own glosses or interpretations instead of the bare words of Scripture “fools and insane.” He says literally:

How should they have overcome the father of heretics when they do battle using their own glosses? They are insane fools. But where the clear Word is used, no glosses allowed, and all reason held captive, then the evil spirit himself and all heretics must retreat. (op. cit.)

That study which serves in conflict is that a man is well versed in the Scripture, as St. Paul says (Titus 1:9), to fight mightily and abundantly with clear words, like a bare drawn sword, without any glosses or interpretations. (op. cit.)

Luther says of himself, “I have killed and drowned all of my enemies with the texts and the foundation of the Holy Scripture.” (XX, 6,7) He advises:

“When I was young, I trained myself with the Bible, reading it frequently to make myself familiar with the text. I also learned to recognize within it where particular texts were located and could be found when they were referred to. I became well versed in the texts. Only then did I study the other writers.” “But,” Luther continues, “I really had to take my eyes away from them (the writers) and put them aside because they could not satisfy my conscience. I was compelled to return to the Bible for security, for it is much better to see it through your own eyes than through those of a stranger. (XXII, 54)

The sainted Dr. Walther used to say that among all human teachers none could make the truth more clear than Luther, because Luther led the reader back to the bare words of Scripture and in this way set them free from all human authority (including his own). Let us reiterate it once again. All error, through which the Church has been plagued and divided, results from the displacement of the words of Scripture themselves with human interpretation. If we were to give our approval to such people then we would be permitting, as Luther says in this powerful comment,

those who would lead us away from Scripture to obscure the faith put themselves over the standard, and they themselves become our idols. (V, 336)

Therefore Luther advises all Christians to memorize a number of Bible passages for use in times of temptation and in the hour of death. For in the hour of death neither the pope nor Luther will be with you. (IX, 1235f.)

**5. A further argument** which has been advanced in the defense of unionism, and which has made a great impression, could be stated in this way:

If Christians are to practice church fellowship only with those with whom they agree in every article of Christian doctrine, we will never achieve unity in the Church, and certainly not the kind of unity which will gain the respect of the world. In order to present the necessary united front over against the world nothing is more necessary than to realize that different approaches and parties are more or less justified and God-pleasing.

Men commonly think this way but God does not think this way in his Word. God does not desire various approaches in his House, the Church (I Timothy 3:15). He desires only that one approach which teaches all of and only that which Christ taught and commanded (Matthew 28:20, John 8:21, 32). There are, of course, many differences among Christians which can be held without sin or damage. These differences apply first of all in the area of every day life. There are Christians of all skin colors, white, black, yellow, and others. There are educated and uneducated Christians. There are differences in language and lifestyle. There are Christians in the republics and in the monarchies; in the Republican and Democratic parties and other political parties. In addition, there are also differences among Christians without sin in the area of the Church – namely, in the area of the so-called *adiaphora* or “*neutralia*” as Luther occasionally called them (XXVII, 667). That is, those things which Christ has neither forbidden nor commanded but has left to his Christians in their liberty. The churchly ceremonies belong here; for example, whether the communion liturgy is sung or spoken, whether candles or crosses are placed on the altar or not. For such things, says the Formula of Concord in Article Ten, the Church in each time and place makes the rules. In the same way it says in Article Seven of the Augsburg Confession, “It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian Church that ceremonies established by men be the same everywhere.” The outward structure of the congregation also belongs in this area. A congregation decides for itself whether it will stand alone or align itself with other congregations in a larger organization, like a synod. But in one area all Christians, whether they are white, or yellow, or black, or copper colored; whether they are American, or German, or English, or French, or Russian, or Chinese, or Japanese, or Indian, must all agree and have no differences among them – that is, doctrine and the faith. All of Scripture teaches that which the apostle Paul sums up in I Corinthians 1:10 - “I urge you, dear brothers, in the Name of our Lord Jesus, that you all say the same thing together and let there be no divisions among you, but hold fast to one another in one mind and in a single meaning.” Also not only individual Christians, but all Christians should confess one and the same doctrine. When the Christian faith is examined Christians should not have one saying this and another saying something else, but all should say the same thing as if they had one mouth. Furthermore, if they say the same thing they should not mean it in different senses but in one and the same sense. In addition to the same words they should also all have the same thoughts. But then when it is said that unity can never be achieved in the Christian Church this way, that is a foolish remark. Christian or churchly unity is indeed precisely a unity in doctrine and faith. The Word of God, and those who through the Word of God work faith in human hearts in the Word, accomplish Christian unity, and no one else in the world, as Luther used to say (XIX, 345). “Only the Holy Spirit,” Luther says, “teaches oneness in faith, in knowledge, in doctrine, in confession, and in related matters.” But the Holy Spirit does not do this immediately but through his own Word, namely in that Word through which he has spoken by the holy apostles and prophets, and given the Church its only foundation for faith (Ephesians 2:20). Where this Word is taught, there is the Holy Spirit, in and with the Word, working faith thereby and gathering the hearts and minds of men around the Word of God. That and nothing else is Christian



unity. Every gathering around another center, whether that be the heart shrine of the papacy, or the immediate revelations of Calvin and Zwingli, or the pious self-consciousness of modern theology, is human deception and nonsense.

“The papist church,” says Luther, “seeks its unity in terms of external unity with its idol, the pope; while inwardly disseminating a most complicated system of error, by the will of Satan.”

And as far as the Reformed enthusiasts are concerned, the gathering around the “letters” of Holy Scripture is despised and the Church is gathered around the “spirit” without any external Word. The reformed are divided into so many sects that one is therefore almost compelled to conclude that there must be a great many “holy spirits.” And the modern theologians who would gather around their own pious self-consciousness admit themselves that as a result there will be “endless differences” among them. In short, only that unity which consists in this, that the Holy Spirit draws hearts to his Word, the Word of the apostles and prophets, is real and deserves the name of Christian unity. This is the unity which God desires in his Church and which is profitable for us men. We saw that God desires this unity in his Church in the first thesis where we were specifically reminded that only the Word of God and no human word is to be taught and believed in the Church. In the second thesis we saw specifically that this unity is intended for our salvation (that is, including my own) and that in deviation from this unity our salvation itself is at stake. The goal of the Christian Church is heavenly, not earthly. The Christian Church is an association for salvation. Therefore, through the teaching of all that Christ has commanded, the Church should lead men to the gracious working of God and out of hell into heaven. What would happen to our salvation if we were to unite with the unitarian groups (including the lodge) which so plainly deny that faith in Christ, the crucified, is the only way to heaven? What would happen to our salvation if we were to unite with the papacy and its religion of work righteousness? The judgment of Galatians 3:10 would then apply to us: “There is a curse on all who depend on doing what the law says...” What would happen to our salvation if we were to unite either with those who deny the universal grace of God, extended to all men, or with those who deny that men are converted and saved by grace alone? We have seen that when these unscriptural doctrines are taken to heart the Christian faith cannot be created and preserved. All those who have united themselves with these errors must tear them from their hearts if they wish to be certain of the grace of God and salvation.

It is truly foolishness to believe that deviation from any of the smallest part of Christian doctrine is in the interests of the Christian Church or serves to improve the Church. Christ also certainly has an interest in the betterment of the Church along with its expansion. He has purchased it with his own blood and wants all people to come into it. If deviation from his Word were the best method of conquering the world, he would not have given his church the command to “teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” Instead his instructions would perhaps have been, “Wait and see how much of my doctrine obtains the agreement of men.” The instructions which the apostles and prophets of Christ have given to Christians and preachers would also have to be stated differently. The apostle Paul would not have warned Christians to “avoid them” (namely those who have deviated from the doctrine and caused divisions and scandals in the Church.) Instead, on the contrary, his warning would perhaps have said, “Stay with those who have fallen away from the doctrine of the apostles or you who remain constant in that doctrine will be guilty of division and scandal.” Furthermore, the Apostle Paul, in his letter to Titus, would not have described a proper pastor as a man who holds to the Word that is certain and can be taught to stop the mouths of the opponents. It is more probable that the instruction to Titus would have been similar to this: “Strive to be the kind of preacher they have over in Crete and be silent over against the opponents.” The prophet Jeremiah would not have said, “Why do you mix the straw with the wheat together? says the Lord,” but, “A mixture of straw and wheat is completely in place, says the Lord.” To restate it once again – we deceive ourselves if we think that unionism, that is, church fellowship with false doctrine and toleration of the same, is God-pleasing and beneficial to the Church.

The Church is always strongest when in every situation it remains with the Word of God. That should be self-understood by all Christians when they consider that in reference to holding fast to all the Word of God

they not only have the command of Christ, but also his promise. “Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” Church history demonstrates the same thing. This is especially true in the history of our own synod. When the synod was founded some definitely predicted its early demise because of its “exclusiveness.” Thank God our fathers were not misled. We read on page 55 of the Proceedings of the Western District, 1870:

Certainly more of God’s goodwill and blessing comes to the Church from a decisive witness and preaching than from every experiment in church politics and unscriptural unionism. Or would the Lutheran church in America be better off without orthodox Lutheran synods? There would be hardly any orthodox Lutheran churches in this land today if, for the past twenty-five or thirty years a few Lutherans had taken their faith and sat in a corner. Instead there are now thousands upon thousands of Lutherans here who have come to life in Christ. Confessional church papers are being circulated. Lutheran educational and charitable institutions have now been set up which are blossoming. All this our gracious God has accomplished through a faithful witness and confession of the truth from the mouths of orthodox Lutheran Christians. And when these fruits have already been produced from such a comparatively small group of churches, (as ours presently are), what a vast potential there is for the whole Church at large.

And this recognition that unity in the Church consists in unity of doctrine and faith and that therein lies the strength of the Church was also passed over to individual members of the old American synods through the witness of the fathers of the Missouri Synod. Dr. Krauth, who had earlier advocated unionism himself, later recanted, and described unionism as the weakness of the Christian Church, and the teaching and confession of all of divine truth as the strength of the Church. He answered the question, “Wherein does the unity of the Christian Church consist?” as follows:

That question was answered three centuries ago by the Reformers, and fifteen centuries before that in the New Testament. True unity is oneness in faith as taught in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are one with the church of the apostles because we hold its faith; one with the church of the Reformers, alone because we hold its faith. Outward human forms are nothing; all things are nothing if there be not this oneness in the faith. With it begins, in its life continues, in its death ends, all true unity. There can be, there is, no true unity but in the faith... The one token of this unity, that by which this internal thing is made visible, is one expression of faith, one ‘form of sound words’, used in simple earnestness and meaning the same to all who employ it ... You may agree to differ; but when men become earnest, difference in faith will lead first to fervent pleadings for the truth and, if these be hopelessly unheeded, will lead to separation. All kinds of beliefs and unbeliefs may exist together under the plea of toleration; but when the greatest love is thus professed there is the least. Love resulting from faith is God’s best gift. Love that grows out of opposition to or indifference to faith, God abhors. There can be no true love where there is not also true hatred – no love for truth without abhorrence of error... In Christ we can alone find unity. Only when we meet in this center of all true unity, will we have peace. And we can be in Christ only in a faith which accepts his every word in his own divine meaning and shrinks with horror from the thought that, in the prostituted name of peace and love, we shall put upon one level the pure and heavenly sense of his Word and the artful corruption of that sense by the tradition of Rome or the vanity of carnal reason.” (Bente, *American Lutheranism*, II: 184f.)

Dr. Krauth also acknowledges that he escaped his earlier “thoroughly established” but “extremely immature opinions” with the assistance of the fathers of the Missouri Synod. May God grant that we, the present members of the Missouri Synod, be given the grace that we take the position of the synod’s fathers to heart and faithfully hold fast to it.

We should briefly mention that unionism appears in various forms. First of all, sinful unionism is present when a union document contains pure doctrine but alongside it also false doctrine. In this case true and false doctrine are actually declared to be equally valid, and therefore the document ceases to be a confession of the truth. If we permit error to stand next to the truth, then we have taken back our confession of the truth because truth has the characteristic of demanding exclusive validity and excluding error. Over against error truth is “exclusive.” We deceive ourselves if we think that we can hold to the truth as truth when at the same time we provide error a place next to the truth. Luther provides a description of this situation in his well-known admonition to George Major:

Whoever really regards his doctrine, faith, and confession as true, right and certain cannot remain in the same stall with such as teach, or adhere to, false doctrine ...A teacher who remains silent when errors are taught and nevertheless pretends to be a true teacher, is worse than an open fanatic... He is either a secret bedfellow of the enemies, or a skeptic and a weathervane, waiting to see whether Christ or the devil will prove to be victorious; or he has no convictions of his own whatever and is not worthy to be called a pupil, let alone a teacher; nor does he want to offend anyone, or say a word in favor of Christ, or hurt the devil and the world. (XXVII, 1180)

Furthermore, sinful unionism and a shameful playing with divine things is present when in discussion designed to restore unity, ambiguous expressions are used. That is to say, expressions are used which could be understood both rightly and wrongly. For example, the papists will allow the use of the phrase that man is justified and saved “by grace.” However, they understand the term *grace* to indicate that which they call *infused grace*, namely, the holiness and good works of men. On the contrary, when discussing the area of the attainment of justification and salvation, Christians understand the term *grace* to mean the gracious disposition of God, or God’s mercy, which exists in the heart of God because of the merits of Christ, as proclaimed in the Gospel, and acquired by men through faith. Hence when the papists say that men are justified and saved by grace, they mean that man is justified and saved through his own holiness and good works, namely the works of the law. When Christians say that man is justified and saved by grace, they understand thereby what the Holy Scriptures teach: “So we then maintain that men are justified without the works of the law, by faith alone.” (Romans 3:28) And, “You are saved by grace through faith and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9) This is just one example among many of how words which sound the same can have completely different, yes, even contradictory, doctrinal significance. Hence, when ambiguous words are used in discussions designed to help restore Christian unity - whether the ambiguity is intentional or results from a lack of knowledge about the subject with which you are dealing - we have then deceived others and ourselves. We will not have accomplished Christian unity but only a union of truth and error that is forbidden by God. In reference to the use of ambiguous words Luther says:

Fabius taught that one must avoid ambiguous works like a hidden reef, for if one occasionally uses them he could be misunderstood. But to speak ambiguously by design, deliberately, is not mere misunderstanding but is worthy of righteous hatred... This is also the case in the area of religion which is truly the most important subject of all. When one is accustomed to speaking ambiguously in religious matters the result is a completely confusing Babel which no one can understand.” (XXVIII, 1996)

Thirdly, unscriptural unionism is present when a denomination acknowledges the confessional writings of the orthodox (that is, Lutheran) church in its constitution but tolerates false teachers undisciplined in its midst. We said “tolerates undisciplined.” Every occurrence of false doctrine does not make a denomination unionistic. Powerful false doctrine was active in the apostolic church. The old saying, “Where Christ builds his Church there the devil will build a chapel,” was also valid for the church of the apostles. The devil also sought to spread the foundation-destroying error in the church of the apostles that the Word of the apostles was not the

inerrant Word of Christ, and that man is not saved by faith alone in the vicarious atonement or” Christ, but is also justified before God through the works of the law. The resurrection of the dead itself was called into question. But the apostles did not allow error to go its own way undisciplined. Instead they admonished as a command of God that Christians should avoid all those who did not teach the Word of the apostles (Romans 16:17), and refuse brotherly fellowship to all those who do not bring the doctrine of Christ. (II John 10, 11) Also in the time of the Reformation, when the Word of God shined forth powerfully like a great light, Luther was already forced to complain: “May God and our dear Lord Jesus Christ grant it. There’s a change in the weather coming...Dr. Andreas Carlstadt has fallen away and has become our most evil opponent.” (XX, 132) And this kind of “weather” occurred much more in the Church of the Reformation prior to and even more after Luther’s death. Luther was so unhappy with this disturbing of the unity of doctrine that he proclaimed: “God be my witness, I would rather, if it were possible, have bought off this disunity with my own body and blood” (VII, 2051). Luther also desired to deal with those who have fallen away from Christian doctrine with all patience so that Christian unity might be restored, “in the hope that we may soon come to one fellowship.” (XVII, 2052). But he desired no church fellowship as long as unity in doctrine had not been obtained. He says: “That peace and unity through which one loses the Word of God is not for me” (IX, 831). From its very beginning to this time within our own Missouri Synod individuals have also come forward with false doctrine. But we have not become a unionistic fellowship on this account because we have opposed the error from the Word of God, and thereby have either won back the errorist or excluded him from the fellowship of our church. May God preserve us in this position of opposing unionism. We want to do this because of the example of our fathers, in the so-called “free conference .” In this conference doctrinal differences were dealt with in patience, friendliness, and humility, working toward the restoration of unity. But we can only practice and maintain church fellowship with those who are in agreement with us on Christian doctrine. We clearly recognize that in this position we are dealing according to God’s will and serving the best interests of the church. But this awareness will only be preserved among us (and where it would disappear almost, once again be restored among us) when we allow the Word of God to dwell among us abundantly in our churches, our schools, and our homes. We, as teachers and preachers, should particularly be warned that in our busy schedules we do not fall away from the daily study of Christian doctrine. We have been given Christian doctrine by the Holy Spirit and the word of the apostles and the prophets, the inerrant Word of Scripture. The Holy Spirit is in this Word, and he teaches us over and over again to recognize it as the Word of God, to hold it as the highest truth, and to love it with all of our hearts, teaching it purely and completely for the salvation of souls. In so doing we honor and obey Christ. This is certainly a most important matter. Long ago in the Middle Ages the crusaders cried “God wills it! God wills it!” That was, of course, the zeal of fanatics in propaganda for the papacy and its soul-destroying doctrine of works. When we, by God’s grace, contend for the inerrant doctrine of God’s Word and avoid church fellowship with false doctrine, we might well also cry for our mutual encouragement, “God wills it! God wills it!” This is not religious fanaticism but, in fact, a proper Christ-desired defense of his church here on earth. “Help us, O Lord! Allow us to prosper well.” Amen.