

# Theses on Open Questions

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*Church Fellowship was established in 1868 between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod, on the basis of agreement on these theses as drawn up by C. F. W. Walther.*

**THESIS I.** It cannot be denied that in the field of religion or theology there are questions which, because they are not answered in the Word of God, may be called open in the sense that agreement in answering them is not required for the unity of faith and doctrine which is demanded in the Word of God, nor does it belong to the conditions required for church fellowship, for the association of brethren or colleagues.

**THESIS II.** The error of an individual member of the church even against a clear Word of God does not involve immediately his actual forfeiture of church fellowship, nor of the association of brethren and colleagues.

**THESIS III.** Even if an open error against the Word of God has infected a whole church body, this does not in itself make that church body a false church, a body with which an orthodox Christian or the orthodox church would abruptly have to sever relations.

**THESIS IV.** A Christian may be so weak in understanding that he cannot grasp, even in a case of a fundamental article of the second order, that an error which he holds is contrary to the Scriptures. Because of his ignorance he may also continue in his error, without thereby making it necessary for the orthodox church to exclude him.

**THESIS V.** The church militant must indeed aim at and strive for complete unity of faith and doctrine, but it never will attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one.

**THESIS VI.** Even errors in the writings of recognized orthodox teachers of the church, now deceased, concerning non-fundamental doctrines or even fundamental doctrines of the second order, do not brand them as errorists nor deprive them of the honor of orthodoxy.

**THESIS VII.** No man has the privilege, and to no man may the privilege be granted, to believe and to teach otherwise than God has revealed in His Word, no matter whether it pertain to primary or secondary fundamental articles of faith, to fundamental or non-fundamental doctrines, to matters of faith or of practice, to historical matters or others that are subject to the light of reason, to important matters or others that are subject to the light of reason, to important or seemingly unimportant matters.

**THESIS VIII.** The church must take steps against any deviation from the doctrine of the Word of God, whether this be done by teachers or by so-called laymen, by individuals or by entire church bodies.

**THESIS IX.** Such members as willfully persist in deviating from the Word of God, no matter what question it may concern, must be excluded.

**THESIS X.** From the fact that the church militant cannot attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one, it does not follow that any error against the Word of God may be granted equal rights in the church with the truth, nor that it may be tolerated.

**THESIS XI.** The idea that Christian doctrines are formed gradually, and that accordingly any doctrine which has not completed such a process of development must be considered as an open question, militates against the doctrine that the church at all times is strictly one, and that the Scripture is the one and only, but fully sufficient source of knowledge in the field of Christian religion and theology.

**THESIS XII.** The idea that such doctrines as have not yet been fixed symbolically must be counted among the open questions, militates against the historical origin of the Symbols, particularly against the fact that these were never intended to present a complete doctrinal system, while they indeed acknowledge the entire content of the Scriptures as the object of the faith held by the church.

**THESIS XIII.** Also the idea that such doctrines in which even recognized orthodox teachers have erred must be admitted as open questions, militates against the canonical authority and dignity of the Scriptures.

**THESIS XIV.** The assumption that there are Christian doctrines of faith contained in the Holy Scriptures, which nevertheless are not presented in them clearly, distinctly, and unmistakably, and that hence they must be counted with the open questions, militates against the clarity, and thus against the very purpose or the divinity of the Holy Scriptures, which is offered to us as the divine revelation.

**THESIS XV.** The [opinion of] modern theology that among the clearly revealed doctrines of the Word of God there are open questions, is the most dangerous unionistic principle of our day, which will lead consistently to skepticism and finally to naturalism.