

# **Convention Essays**



**SELECTED WRITINGS  
OF C.F.W. WALTHER**

# **Convention Essays**

Aug. R. Suelflow, Translator  
Aug. R. Suelflow, Series Editor



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## Introduction

It is an ambitious project to permit C. F. W. Walther (1811—87) to address English readers. Efforts to do so have occurred in the past from time to time. But this English edition constitutes one of the most significant contributions made to the study of the theology of Lutheranism in America within past years. The stereotype of Walther heretofore imposed upon him by those who were unable to read his German writings will now be significantly altered! It is to be regretted that a rich treasury of many other works from Walther's pen still await a future project.

Dr. Henry E. Jacobs (1844—1932), late president of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pa., said of Walther:

He is as orthodox as John Gerhard, but as fervent as a pietist, as correct in form as a university or court preacher, and yet as popular as Luther himself. If the Lutheran Church will bring its doctrines again to the people, it must be as faithful and as definite in its doctrine and as interesting and thoroughly adapted to the times in form, as is the case in Walther. He is a model preacher in the Lutheran Church ("Dr. Walther as a Preacher, *Lutheran Church Review*, III [October 1889], 319).

In each of the volumes a special effort was made to select the most significant and relevant materials and to have Walther speak contemporary English. We have further endeavored, wherever possible, to quote from the American Edition of *Luther's Works* and to utilize the Revised Standard Version of the Bible for Scriptural references. Quotations from the Lutheran Confessions were keyed to the Tappert edition of the *Book of Concord*. It was helpful to be able to consult some resources which Walther had in his own library.

Walther was an exceedingly involved church leader. A founding father of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, he served as its first president 1847—50 and 1864—78. He was Concordia Seminary's (St. Louis) foremost instructor from 1849 until his death in 1887, and served as its president 1850—87.

His concern for Lutheran unity is demonstrative. He conceived the "Free Conferences" in the aftermath of the confessional crisis in 1855. Later, in 1872, he was elected the first president of a new pan-Lutheran federation, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference.

The project to translate Walther into English received support from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1962, when a special committee was formed. When funds were not available, the project was transferred to Concordia Publishing House. It has now become a pioneer in publishing both Luther's and Walther's select works in English.

Walther's classic *Law and Gospel*, generally considered one of the most important books produced within American Lutheranism, deserves a volume of its own. In it we see him as theological professor, with his students gathered around him.

Another volume acquaints us with Walther the preacher. He made a great impact on his hearers, and much of his sermonic and homiletical material was published in German during his lifetime and in the years following his death. In spite of this, several thousand sermon manuscripts still remain untouched.

In a further volume we see Walther the convention essayist. None of these essays, presented to Western District conventions between 1873 and 1886, with their ever-recurring theme "To God All Glory!" have seen the English light of day until now.

Of particular importance were Walther's writings on the church, and one of our volumes brings a condensation of these. *Church and Ministry* (1852), *The Proper Form* (1863), and *The True Visible Church* (1866) give the theological foundation for the Missouri Synod's strong emphasis on the congregation and on lay involvement.

We include a volume of Walther's correspondence. It lets us see him in his intense and complex relationships with many different people. Concordia Historical Institute, with funds provided by the Aid Association for Lutherans, has in recent years transcribed several hundred original *Fraktur* letters. Only a few have been published in English heretofore, and we too can bring only a selection.

Finally we take a look at Walther the editor—one of his most important functions. Through *Lehre und Wehre* (from which we bring articles never before presented in English) and *Der Lutheraner* Walther exerted a strong influence toward orthodox Lutheranism.

The translators of this edition hope that readers and users will develop a new appreciation for this 19th-century hero of faith, but above all, that Walther, as the preceptor of Luther in America, will direct the readers to the very cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, his and our only hope.

Aug. R. Suelflow, *Series Editor*



## Translator's Preface

One of the strengths of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been its assiduous study of doctrine and theology. From its beginning it provided ample opportunities at conventions to study theology and issues of the day in the light of the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the writings of Luther and the Lutheran dogmaticians.

Dr. C. F. W. Walther, who spent countless hours in Scriptural studies, read Luther voraciously already at an early age, reviewed the confessional writings of the church, and read the early and Reformation church fathers, probably presented more convention essays during his lifetime than anyone else.

How he could do this in spite of his arduous administrative and many other responsibilities remains a mystery. He prepared no less than 45 to 50 major and minor essays.

One of the greatest achievements of any essayist is to be invited back repeatedly. Walther served as essayist at each Western District convention between 1873 and 1886. He began the first presentation in 1873, when he was 61 years old. The topic: "The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God, an Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine Alone Is True." Thirteen years later, 13 to 19 October 1886, a few days before his 75th birthday and only months before his death, he concluded the series with the words:

Now we are at an end with our theses discussed during the past 13 years, in which it was shown that our Lutheran Church in all of these doctrines gives all glory to God alone and never ascribes to the creature the glory which belongs to the great God. What belongs to God our church also gives Him fully. Now, may our dear God help us that we not only rejoice because we are members of such a church, but that we too may give Him all glory through our faith, confession, life, suffering, and death. Our life's motto must be: *Soli Deo gloria!* (To God alone the glory!)

His lectures are still relevant, addressed to situations or problems which continue to cause difficulties and confusion. Some were prepared in writing, while others were delivered from an outline and taken down in shorthand.

Critics have failed to understand why Walther quoted so extensively from outstanding Lutheran theologians of the past, and have called him a

“citation theologian.” This is unfortunate. Walther was a firm believer that the faith once delivered to the saints was unchanged and unchanging, revealed in the Word of God. Thus he sought continuity of belief throughout history. Nowhere did Walther attempt to “prove” doctrine with quotations from Luther or Gerhard. His greatest joy was to point to the harmony and continuity which existed between the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Lutheran church fathers.

The essays following deal with Holy Scripture, the origin of evil, divine providence, the universal grace of God, redemption, justification, sanctification, and the means of grace. Other topics presented at the conventions in this series had to be excluded for lack of space. As in other volumes of this series, we have made changes in the paragraphing.

May these selected presentations, offered in English for the first time, produce an equally great commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ. **TO GOD ALL GLORY!**

Aug. R. Suelflow





# Western District Convention, 1873

St. Peter's Church, Schaumburg, Ill., May 7—13

(*Proceedings*, pp. 26—80)

As the subject for the doctrinal discussions the convention selected the theses previously published in the *Lutheraner*. These theses, here following, include additional clarifications and remarks by the convention.

The topic is:

**The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All  
Glory to God, an Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine  
Alone Is True.**

The present task consists in this: to demonstrate that *the Lutheran religion is the only true one*, and this is shown from the fact that in all its teachings all glory is given to God alone. Namely, when we first of all consider what a religion is, also what a visible church is, and bring into focus the chief teachings of the Lutheran Church, it will become evident that the doctrine of this church is the only true one, since in all these teachings it gives all glory to God alone.

## Thesis I

*Since religion is the act and mode of honoring God, only that is the true religion which in all its teachings exclusively gives all glory to God.*

In our world there are a variety of teachings; but religion pertains to the relationship of man with God and deals with the kind of relationship which exists between man and God. Science, for example, deals with the workings of nature; the study of medicine with the nature of bodily illnesses and the means of healing them. Ask any person what religion is, and the answer invariably will be: It deals with the relationship of man with God.

This is mentioned at the beginning, since the term "religion" itself does not appear in the [German] Bible. The term, however, which is used instead in Scripture is "service to God" (*Gottesdienst*). Paul says in Acts 26: "According to the strictest party of our religion (in the Greek: *threeskeia*) I have lived as a Pharisee"; that is, the party of the Pharisees is the strictest among those of the Jewish religion. Here we have the

Scriptural basis that religion deals with what the relationship of man to God must be.

The following texts from Holy Scripture will support this thesis:

Isaiah 42:8: *“I am the Lord, that is My name; My glory I give to no other, nor My praise to graven images.”* Therefore God alone wants to have all glory. He wants to be honored only when one gives all glory to Him alone; to the degree, therefore, that anyone gives this honor to man, he preempts, as far as he is concerned, the glory belonging to God and thus casts Him from His throne.

Romans 1:21, 25 *“For although they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened . . . because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!”* Here Paul testifies that the first departure from [true] religion on the part of the heathen consisted in this, that they did not praise God, did not thank Him, did not give all honor to Him but rather to His creatures. Also the initial departure from the true religion in Paradise consisted of this, that human beings wanted to be equal with God and so robbed Him of His glory.

John 7:18: *“He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him is true, and in Him there is no falsehood.”* According to Scripture, therefore, one who claims to be God’s representative, but offers a kind of religion in which God is not honored is a leader of a false religion. What a cursed religion it therefore is when a human being through any teaching of his religion ascribes glory to himself. This passage—note carefully—is preceded by the words: *“If any man’s will is to do His will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God,”* and then concludes, *“or whether I am speaking on My own authority.”*

John 8:49: *“Jesus answered, ‘I have not a demon; I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.’”* Christ thus proves that He has nothing to do with the devil and that His religion is true; for He honors the Father. What a profound implication: Should you have formulated a teaching which does not honor God, this is an accursed devil’s doctrine; when you advocate a moral life and consequently seek the praise of men, such a doctrine should be stomped on as a Satanic concoction. This is what Christ wants to underscore in this passage: *How can I be of the devil, and teach Satan’s doctrine? For whoever honors God through his teaching, that person’s teaching is assuredly correct; in contrast, any teaching that does not honor God, and robs Him of His glory, is of the devil.*—We can clearly see that

the Christian religion is the true religion from the hymn of praise sung by the holy angels at the birth of Christ.

Luke 2:14: "Glory to God in the highest." Here is the declaration that, through Christ, God is given all glory, the glory of which Adam had once robbed Him. Thus this is the touchstone of any religion, whether it strips man of all his glory and ascribes all glory to God alone.

Romans 3:27: "Then what becomes of our *boasting*? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith." After Paul has set forth the basic Christian doctrine of justification, he asks: What remains of the glory and honor of man? He answers: It is excluded on the principle of faith. For the principle of faith or, what is the same thing, the Gospel, the Christian religion, divests man of all glory and gives it to God. Thus he [Paul] says of the father of all believers:

Romans 4:20: "No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God." Wherever works are emphasized, there God is blasphemed and demeaned; hence all religions except Christianity are nothing but sheer blasphemy. All other religions tell us: If you desire to go to heaven, then you must be pious and good, do good, become holy, etc. Such religion we all bring with us into the world; we are attracted by it, as we are constituted by nature; and our old Adam confirms it. But it is the devil's lie. Certainly in his state of innocence Adam was to be saved by good works; but this salvation was not to be of his own doing. He was not informed: If you serve Me, remain faithful, you will thereby earn salvation and get to heaven. Rather, he had a perfect created righteousness and holiness, a salvation already bestowed upon him, as a gift from the hand of God. But he could lose this salvation, which indeed he did.

Thus it is today. God desires to make us holy and righteous through faith in Jesus Christ; in the Christian religion salvation itself is inherent. This is at the same time also a proof that the Christian religion is true, since in regard to salvation it gives glory to God alone. It builds salvation not on human works but on Christ, since human beings are nothing and are totally dependent on God's gifts. Then God becomes great! Then God becomes All in All.

God created us without our help and has given us temporal life. If we desire eternal life, we [are inclined to] say: "We need to acquire this ourselves. We do not want to let God create eternal life for us." However, as God grants us temporal life without our help, just so we proceed from God's hand into eternal life. And when once we have attained eternal life, we will have nothing to boast of except God's mercy. Therefore, now after

the Fall, only that is the true religion which gives God alone the glory and man only shame.

This thesis has been formulated without regard to *atheists*, who claim: "There is no God; therefore we do not need to honor Him." But whoever believes there is an almighty God, from whom everything originates, will agree with this thesis. We disregard those who say: "Do right; fear no one," because they ignore the main point. If there were no God, they would be correct. But since God does indeed exist, one needs to fear, love, and trust Him above all things. One like that may well say: "I don't go to church." Our reply ought to be: You are neglecting the most important duty, namely, your duty toward God. Someday when you enter eternity God will ask: "What did you believe?" You will reply: "My basic principle was: 'Do right; fear no one.'" The verdict will be: "But you did not do right," and you will have to sink eternally into the depths of hell.

That the Christian religion is the true one, because it gives God alone all glory, can be seen from the words of Paul: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do all to the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 10:31). The primary purpose for which man exists is to glorify God. The second purpose is indeed that he serve his neighbor, but the objective of this should be the glory of God. The human heart, after the Fall, is so inclined that it suggests: Why does God so strongly demand that He receive all honor, a demand He punishes if made by men? But this attitude has its origin in the sinful depravity of man. Human beings, after the Fall, seek an honor which is not theirs. God punishes this, because they are thereby deifying themselves.

God, however, deserves all glory, which is rightfully His; He directs that such honor be given to Him, in view of His righteousness, holiness, and truth. He must do this because otherwise He would be contradicting *His nature*, if He did not make such a demand. It would also deny *our salvation*; for no man can be saved if he fails to give honor to God. That this is so we deduce from the previously cited passage Isaiah 42:[8]: "I am the Lord, that is My name"; that is, "I, Jehovah," which name demonstrates His divine nature. And a translation and clarification of this name is found in Revelation 1:8: "'I am the Alpha and Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" "

There is also proof for the veracity of the Christian religion in the fact that the *chief service* of Christians consists of praying, praising, and thanking; that they will laud and praise God in eternal life; and that the angels praised God at the birth of Christ.

We take no cognizance of *atheists* in this thesis because they say: "We prove that there is no God; you, on the other hand, that He does exist;

consequently we are equally justified.” Such talk reveals that they do not even have what the heathen possess. In no way can we agree to such an argument. Whoever does not know that there is a God no longer has the essential qualities of a human being.

We could prove the existence of God also from reason. Now, however, it is our purpose to carry on a discussion only with those who admit the existence of God; for whoever admits this thereby realizes that he must have a religion.

All heathen, philosophic, Mohammedan, and Mormon religions are false, because according to all of them man must do this or that in order to earn salvation. Only the Christian religion says the contrary, stands in opposition to all other religions in the world, and has human nature as its enemy. This nature is blind in its understanding, an enemy of God in its will, and a rebel against God in its desires. People listen approvingly when they are told: By nature you are good, your inner being is good. Follow the basic principles of good conduct, love and help your neighbor, in order to become acceptable before God. We Christians do not believe that. Only hypocrites believe, for example, that they attend church in order to *be* pious. We attend church, not really to serve God but rather that He may serve us there; not to create righteousness but to receive it from God. Three hundred fifty years ago this light was restored through that precious chosen vessel Dr. M. Luther, and where this light is removed, there a segment of Christianity is torn away.

The sectarians aver: “We do indeed honor God; but you must work out your salvation, pray, battle, and contend for it”; and they despise us who enter heaven slumbering. But their “glory” about which they prattle is a glory of their own. Roman churches also display the words: *Soli Deo gloria* (To God alone the glory), but the very opposite of what furthers God’s glory is taught in the Roman church.

The question hereby raised, whether Christianity as a whole merely goes beyond reason or whether it is opposed to reason, may be answered in this way: Christianity, in the main, has been contrary to reason since the Fall. It outrages all those whom the Holy Spirit has not enlightened to recognize that they need do nothing to earn salvation, nor should they share in any honor. Obviously Christianity embraces facets which are not contrary to reason; but the *basic essence of Christianity is always foolishness to human reason.*

Hieronymus Kromayer (died 1670) wrote:

The final purpose of religion is God’s glory. For this is not only the goal of all Christian endeavors, 1 Corinthians 10:31, but also the highest aspiration of faith and religion, whereby one can test, as the touchstone,

the teachings of all religions, so that a religion which through its corruptions attacks the glory of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, who is coequal with Him in essence and majesty, and the honor of the Holy Spirit, is not to be recognized as true, pure, and unadulterated. For true religion directs everything to the glory of God as its final purpose. During the sharp debate between Christ and the Jewish leaders regarding the veracity of teaching and religion, as to which of the two positions could claim to be right, Christ directed attention, among other things, to *this* aspect of His teaching, that it was bent on the glory of His heavenly Father, thus demolishing the Jewish speculations. (John 8:49)<sup>1</sup>

## Thesis II<sup>2</sup>

*Since a visible church is a community of people who “confess a common doctrine and religion,” therefore only that church is correct which in all its teachings ascribes all glory to God alone.*

In the first thesis we have heard *what the essential nature of the true religion* must be. What follows from this? What follows is that only that church can be the true one which in all its teachings gives all glory alone to God, since the church is nothing else than a community of people who “confess a common doctrine and religion.” The words “confess a common doctrine and religion” are taken from the *Book of Concord*.<sup>3</sup> Also, the Dietrich Catechism<sup>4</sup> raises the question: “What are the symbols?” and replies: “Such books which in the name of the churches which adhere to one doctrine and religion are acknowledged, approved, and accepted.” This does not require an extensive analysis; for this second thesis follows from the first. No one will deny that the visible church has always been a community of people adhering to one doctrine and religion. The church is distinguished from the state in that the church is bound together by religion, while the state is bound together by the requirements of this life. The state must concern itself with the relationship of man with man, the church on the other hand with the relationship of man with God, that is, with religion. This we discern clearly from Holy Scripture.

Psalm 26:8: “O Lord, I love the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwells.” The place of worship in the Old Testament was, as every Christian knows, the prototype of the church. The temple of Solomon, and the one constructed later, following the destruction of the first, was the prototype of the invisible church of God in the New Testament, and naturally therefore also of the visible church, for this is none other than the invisible, only considered from another perspective.

If the Holy Spirit designates as a church merely the *temple* where God’s glory dwells, how much more, in the New Testament, must the

*church*, or the congregation of people among whom God's glory dwells, be of that sort! Oh, what a precious truth, which we should lock deep in our hearts! All our activity, all our endeavor, is against and not for the church if it does not have God's glory as its goal. Alas, the wretched enthusiasts<sup>5</sup> torment themselves and seek to bring their followers to the point where they also torment themselves trying to earn God's grace, righteousness, and salvation—under the delusion of working for God's honor. But that is against the honor of God, and for the honor of men, and so opposes the church. They do not spread the kingdom of God; rather they attack it.

Whoever ascribes all glory to God and seeks to have people do likewise; and whosoever recognizes that man is less than nothing; whoever brings man to the point where he prostrates himself before the Almighty, and as a poor sinful beggar pleads for and awaits all things from God's hand—he builds the church! For the church is the place where God's glory dwells.

This is the touchstone: If God's glory does not dwell in our Synod,<sup>6</sup> it is not God's church. Insofar as it diminishes God's glory, to that degree it has besmirched itself. But the more it makes progress in giving all glory to God, the more it becomes the image of the true church of Jesus Christ. All of us must indeed cast ourselves down into the dust, when we, and especially we preachers, think about how we, with the best of intentions, yet have spoken and done so much that did not solely serve God's glory.

We have been amazed at our remarkable sincerity, but here and there have deflected the honor due our dear Lord and directed it toward man. Luther also complained, even shortly before his death, that it was so difficult for him to hold fast to the "through faith alone" and to acknowledge it clearly and apply it. What is this other than the lament: It is so difficult for me to give all glory to God and to take all glory away from man?

Man fell into sin because he wanted to be equal with God. His only way to rebirth and conversion is that he despairs of himself, not hypocritically but with the honest conviction that he is nothing but a broken vessel, yea, one, worthy of nothing more than to be shattered by God. However, he says: "God, be merciful to me!" Not he is born again who in the manner of the enthusiasts kneels, prays, and wrestles, so as to earn his salvation—this is a devilish comedy. God is indeed so merciful that He works even there, but He must usually wait to help until the hour of death. A sincere person among the enthusiasts then throws everything overboard, when the ship is sinking beneath the waves. Then he doesn't think of the camp meeting, the praying, and the shuffling on his knees. At such a time, he doesn't think: *You* can't miss; *you* certainly will get to

heaven. He casts this all aside and says: All this is dung. As Paul also says: "I consider it all as loss compared with the overwhelming knowledge of Christ Jesus." [Philippians 3:8 Luther's translation].

Thus it must be with us all, for there is no other way to heaven. Does God care how we have tortured ourselves? No way! Not at all! Consider how the heathen torture themselves. Note the self-denial, for example, of the Brahmins in East India. They would sooner die than kill a single fly, not to mention eating the meat of the sacred cows. In Hindustan, Indians cast themselves beneath the wide wheels of the Juggernaut, which, drawn by teams of oxen, comes rolling along like a hellish monster. The poor Hindu, throwing himself down before it, allows himself to be squashed like a snail, thinking: Now, into heaven! How is he worse than a fanatical spirit, groveling in the dust, trying to achieve his own salvation? He is certainly no worse. Would these gentlemen concede that such a one would be admitted into heaven? Well then, don't believe about yourself that your work-righteousness will get you into heaven.

Don't think that because of this the teaching about the seriousness of Christianity will suffer. By no means, for he who is a humble sinner, without honor, he starts to become really zealous. Those who attend to instruction with only half an ear, and therefore have the faith in their hearts like froth on their lips, remain godless people. Alas, it is therefore not so easy to give all honor to God. It creates serious conflicts for a person to remain steadfast in giving all honor to God alone. That a person battles, wrestles, and pleads he does solely *to overcome himself*. It would be the easiest thing in the world to get to heaven if we ourselves wouldn't constantly work against it. We don't need to persuade God to forgive our sins; God has already forgiven them. We don't need to work out our own reconciliation; He is already reconciled to us. We don't need to redeem ourselves; we are already redeemed. But *we* are the culprits who need to be conquered. Our enmity must be eradicated. Our flesh gives us trouble. From *this* comes the battle and the necessity for the struggle, that through such a struggle we first must earn our salvation.

The Jesuit Xavier,<sup>7</sup> hypocrite of a general, who served the Antichrist from the first day of his Jesuitic association until the day of his death, thus wanting to earn his own salvation, determined to show the world what could and should be done to gain heaven. He went into hospitals to visit patients with repulsive illnesses, and with his own lips sucked pus from their festering sores. He would then look about to see whether people had observed, and these thought: "This is holiness itself." Does God perhaps accept us into heaven as a response to sucking pus? They are devil's martyrs!

In the fifth century the stylites, the pillar saints, practiced a fearful holiness. They were unable to soar into heaven, and yet the earth was too evil for them. Consequently, they erected huge pillars. One, a Syrian monk named Simeon,<sup>8</sup> arranged to construct a 40-foot pillar. Ascending this, he sat at the top for 30 years, snowed and rained on, served food brought by the people, neither washed nor combed himself, and presumed that God should take such a crazy creature into heaven because of this comedy. It never occurred to him that, if God would have appeared, He would have chided: "What are you doing up here? You ought to be down here serving people. Why have I created timber? Surely, to build houses. Why do you live without shelter? March, get down, you wicked knave!" This fellow was not 40 feet nearer heaven, rather 40 feet down on the steps to hell.

But also we face serious difficulties in truly believing this. When our naive German brethren arrive in America and observe the saintly exterior of the sectarians, how sincerely they pray, weep, and sigh, they conclude this must be the true church. In Germany they had frequently seen clergymen who were belly-servers, whose chief concern was their income, their tenth, the tax, and everything pertaining to their parish. They spoke only of the price of grain, hogs, and the like. It is not surprising, then, that these poor people, observing the saintly appearance of an enthusiast, would conclude: "This is a totally different sort of person. He wants to save the people. Here is the true church." Woe unto him who is lacking in earnestness! But that a person demonstrates so great an enthusiasm, and is consumed by it, surely does not prove that he is a true prophet. In spite of this he may still rob God of all glory. Then he is lost, even if he daily preach himself half to death for 30 years. He is like one pouring his water into a container full of holes. Such a fellow already has his reward here on earth. And what is this? To hear people exclaim: "That is a holy man!"

God's law demands that we acknowledge Him as our God. This is the First Commandment. Whoever does not enter the kingdom of God through this door will not come in. It is pure hypocrisy and a miserable comedy when one endeavors to keep all the other commandments but fails in the first. Hence Luther in his clear, divine understanding of God's Word repeats the first in each subsequent commandment: "We should fear and love God." This is a constant reminder that the second through the tenth cannot be kept adequately without the first. We must strive to give God all glory, to make Him our *God*. Hence, at the pinnacle of all commandments stands the declaration: "I am the Lord thy God." Therefore Luther also says repeatedly: "In the First Commandment is embodied the entire Gospel, the entire faith"—for now, after the Fall, it is by faith alone that we again make God our God. All moral teachings rob our dear God of His

honor, but faith gives it to Him. Only such are good works, if I perform them with the thought: "Should I not serve my God?" But whoever thinks: "I must serve God so I will get to heaven," that person is attempting to keep the last nine commandments while ignoring the first. God knows full well why He made this commandment the first. Through this door we must pass, or be cast off by God.

Revelation 14:6-7: "Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give Him glory." We Lutherans are firmly persuaded that this prophecy was fulfilled in *Luther and the Reformation*. However, being a prophecy, we cannot absolutely require that others believe this. It does not belong to the articles of faith. But everyone must concede: Someday the renewal of the church will consist in this, that an angel, a messenger of God, will appear, saying: "Fear God and give Him glory." And it is truly in this giving of all glory to Him that the Reformation took place. This is stated in the prophecy. No one can deny this.

John 5:44: "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" The Savior therefore does not recognize as a believer one who takes honor from others, for faith is nothing else than giving God all glory. Faith is not a mixture of sweet and sour feelings, as the enthusiasts make it, but faith is solely this, that I offer all glory to God alone; that is, accepting everything from God, appropriating it, as is recorded in John 1: [12 KJV]: "As many as received Him." "Receiving" is a synonymous term for faith. When a person has arrived at the point where he does not want to do anything to make the dear Lord his debtor, but himself wants to be the debtor into all eternity and accept everything from God, then he gives God the glory. This person alone is a genuine Christian.

When Philippians 2:12 reads: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," the Holy Spirit continues and establishes the reason. One would expect that it would follow: "For a person must desire and bring about his own conversion." However, the Holy Spirit continues otherwise, namely: "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Working out our own salvation on our part is of such a nature that with our striving we sink ever deeper into the mud.

Luther writes: "For Christians should preach nothing but the glory of God, that is, to confess our impossibility and God's possibility even as Christ does here" (Matthew 19:26). ("Who then can be saved?" the apostles exclaim; but Jesus replies: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." The true Christian must realize that it is always

impossible for him to earn salvation, but that with God all things are possible. When a person believes this, he has been helped. As soon as I place my trust in God, believing that He is responsible for my salvation, at this very point He has already bestowed it upon me. God is an ocean, always overflowing; He seeks only an empty place.) “And,” Luther continues, “all the shameful obstructions . . . able to establish and inflate free will must be removed. . . .”<sup>9</sup>

The entire duty of man, according to Luther, is to contend with himself and others until death, so that free will, as the evil hound of hell preventing us from entering heaven, does not by any chance get the upper hand. Nothing of free will should any longer be found on our lips and in our hearts, for God alone exercises free will, and we are to accept from Him what He has ordained for us.

John Gerhard writes: “Every communion which adheres to false doctrines which attack God’s honor, and continually defends the same, is not a true church, even though it maintains a good appearance with twisted and badly interpreted passages of Scripture.”<sup>10</sup> What is taught may have ever so good an appearance. However, as soon as God’s honor is compromised by it, the church is false. Therefore all present church bodies, other than our Lutheran, are false. This is not to say that all communions which call themselves Lutheran are true churches, but only those which with Luther ascribe all glory to God and remove all honor from men.

Consider also how God’s honor can be narrowed through the *most insignificant* false doctrine. When a king, for example, would make a number of royal proclamations before his assembly of subjects, and one would respond: “This I don’t believe,” another: “That I don’t believe,” it would certainly not go well for them. But if man, this sinful worm (*Sündenwurm*), makes of God a liar, and says: “This is indeed stated in the Bible, but I cannot believe it,” this is supposed to be insignificant. Rather, it is an abomination! One may interpret the meaning of a word in Holy Scripture other than literally only when Scripture itself demands it. When the Savior says: “Tell Herod, that fox,” Scripture itself declares that the word “fox” in this case is not to be taken in a literal sense; for Herod was not a four-footed animal that goes after chickens, but a king. Here Scripture itself compels us to take the word “fox” other than literally.

But what do the Calvinists do? The Savior declares in the Holy Eucharist: “This is My body; this is My blood.” The Calvinists say: “This cannot be accepted as written.” Why not? They do not interpret the words through the Bible, but simply declare: “Well, who can believe this?” From this it can be observed that they do not want to believe *God’s Word*. They state: “Reason does not tolerate it.” This does not mean giving God the

glory, but dishonoring Him. And we should stand idly by? unite with them? with them reject God's Word? Never! Nevermore!

On this point the Iowans<sup>11</sup> sin terribly, in that they admit that our Lutheran teaching about Sunday is based on God's Word and yet declare that it is of such a nature that one may deviate from it. They indeed desire to console us with the fact that it is the only exception. However, Luther rightly states: Whoever denies God in one word, denies Him totally. In their opinion the church in Roman fashion should decide on matters of doctrine.

### **Thesis III**

*Only in the teachings of the Lutheran Church is all glory given to God alone; this is revealed, among others, from its teachings:*

1. *On the Word of God;*
2. *On the origin of sin, death, hell, and damnation;*
3. *On divine providence;*
4. *On the universal grace of God;*
5. *On the reconciliation and redemption of the human race;*
6. *On the justification of the sinner by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ without any merit of works;*
7. *On the necessity of regeneration and sanctification;*
8. *On the institution, validity, power, and unchangeability of the means of grace;*
9. *On conversion;*
10. *On petitions and prayers to God;*
11. *On obedience toward men in matters of faith and conscience;*
12. *On the election of grace.*

In this thesis it is stated first of all: Only in the teachings of the Lutheran Church is God alone given all glory. Before we support this thesis with a series of pertinent teachings, let us first share several testimonials showing that our forefathers were vividly aware, not only that the church needed to possess this attribute, but that the Evangelical Lutheran Church does indeed possess it.

On this point Luther writes:

When the papists boast at length and exclaim: "Fathers, fathers! Church, church!" etc.—but because they not only fail to preach the Gospel, but also persecute and blaspheme it, only want to maintain their prestige, do not inquire at all regarding Christ's ministry of mercy and His *honor*, nor the salvation of lost souls, their boasting helps them as little as the boasting of the false apostles helped the latter. And again,] I

still know this for certain, that what I teach is not from men but from God. That is, I attribute everything solely to God and nothing at all to men. [And desire with all our heart, that all the world would recognize this unspeakable grace and goodness which our merciful Father has demonstrated through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Within this framework all our teaching, preaching, and writing is centered, and for this very reason, that we tender all glory and praise to God, and leave nothing good to the world, the world becomes our enemy.] I recall that when my movement first began, Dr. Staupitz, a very worthy man and the vicar of the Augustinian Order, said to me: "It pleases me very much that this doctrine of ours gives glory and everything else solely to God and nothing at all to men; for it is as clear as day that it is impossible to ascribe too much glory, goodness, etc., to God." So it was that he consoled me. And it is true that the doctrine of the Gospel takes away all glory, wisdom, righteousness, etc., from men and gives it solely to the Creator, who makes all things out of nothing. Furthermore, it is far safer to ascribe too much to God than to men. For here I can declare boldly: "All right, let the holy church, Augustine and other fathers, also Peter and Apollos, yes, even an angel from heaven, teach an opposing doctrine! Still my doctrine is one that preaches and worships God alone, and it condemns the righteousness and the wisdom of all men. Here I cannot go wrong, for both to God and to man I ascribe what properly and truly belongs to each."<sup>12</sup>

One may reflect on this: When sectarians and false Lutherans are hostile toward us for some other reason than that we give glory to God alone, then our reproach is nothing. This must be our reproach, that we give God alone the glory. As the ancient fathers already said: "A martyr is not made by suffering, but rather by the cause of the suffering." We agree: You are a good Lutheran, not because your opponents criticize your Lutheranism, but rather because they shun you for the sake of the things through which you offer all glory to God alone and strip man of all glory. In this lay also Luther's reproach. "Behold," said his enemies, "he turns all good works into infamy, is a foe of piety, says, 'God performs all.'" Replied Luther: "Really, that gives me a wonderful feeling; then all is well with me, for all depends on just this."

How gracious and friendly is our God toward our Synod, to have guided it so that we have been given occasion to enter more intimately into this matter. This is the salient point if we wish to call ourselves Lutherans, that we give God all glory and strip man of all glory. For this cause Paul was also slandered so vehemently. Everywhere false apostles were saying: "Alas, this Paul speaks only of faith; we are different people. We claim: One must be holy, really holy, keep the laws of Moses; that's a religion! But

this wretched Paul only shouts again and again: ‘Christ, faith, grace!’” Thus entire congregations were misled by these corrupt false prophets. When Paul returned, he saw that they had all fallen away from Christ and His grace. They were ashamed of the Gospel, ashamed of the Crucified One, ashamed to confess: “We are lost and condemned sinners, we live totally under grace.”

Indeed, say the children of the world about Christians: “Those are the poor sinners; some good life they must be leading!” So let the world jeer and deride us. That is our greatest honor. But when the world begins to remark: “One must respect these people; they are pious”—that is a very dubious honor. However, when it is hostile to us because we emphasize grace and always say: “Just rely on the Word, just rely on the Sacrament of the Altar”; when they as a result despise us as miserable people, let us respond: “Great, this is truly an honor; *God* is being glorified.” Let them trample us down into the dirt, if only they say: “It is true; they know how to speak much about the dear God.” Beyond that we don’t want to count for anything.

When Luther originally began preaching about faith, a dreadful unrest ensued, and Dr. Staupitz<sup>13</sup> became deeply disturbed. But this was his consolation, as evidenced above by Luther, that he knew that through this doctrine God was given all glory. There, he concluded, one may take a risk; God Himself will take the responsibility, since this involves His own honor. When Melancthon<sup>14</sup> exclaimed: “For God’s sake, what’s going to happen now? The emperor has issued a horrible edict.” Luther responded: “That doesn’t bother me; that’s God’s business. If He wants to get Himself pushed from His throne, I can’t keep Him on it.” So he let the emperor rave on, let the pope toss his lightninglike ban, let the mob shout and demonstrate. He went to bed and slept soundly. “I don’t have to salvage my honor,” he said; “I haven’t sought it. Should a scandal result from it, may God Himself take the responsibility.”

That’s the way one must be able to speak—just no human opinions! Hardly surprising, that the Unionists<sup>15</sup> do not adhere consistently to a specific doctrine, for they are not solidly convinced of any. They would be fools if they were to fight for a doctrine of which they do not know whether it is true. “Come, bury the hatchet,” they say, “And be peaceful; eternity will reveal who has been right.” Well, they can indeed remain silent; but whoever knows that a doctrine is the Word of God, he triggers a war with the entire world. And then he goes to bed and lets the dear God completely solve everything.

God is not a carpenter, cobbler, or the like. He is a *Creator*, and a Creator cannot use *anything at all* when He wants to make something. *He*

*must have nothing; then he can make something.* As He did over 6,000 years ago, so God functions similarly in this day. As soon as man says, “I want to *do* something,” God says, “I am in need of *nothing*, no material; *nothing, absolutely nothing; that is My material.*” God is All in All, and we are mere things, created out of nothing; that is, we are nothing without God. Therefore the apostle says: “In Him we live, move, and have our being.” No one need be fearful, for God’s sake, if he sees Lutheran doctrines, such as conversion or the election of grace, in which everything is ascribed to God, as long as he knows that in them God is given all glory and all glory is removed from man. This is the touchstone!

Gerhard writes: “That this judgment of Staupitz did not flow from prejudice, but rather from the source of truth, this the matter itself reveals.” Gerhard also reports that Emperor Ferdinand I said repeatedly: “Two things impress me about the Lutherans: first, that in all their activity they give God the glory; and again, that in their churches they regard the government honorably and preach accordingly” (*Confession catholica*, p. 67. See note 10.).

Höe von Höenegg (died 1645) writes: “Since in the papacy the honor due God was given to others, Luther determined to save God’s honor, when he loudly proclaimed: ‘Fear God and give Him glory’ (Rev. 14). . . . And that occurred through our Luther’s ministry, who not by the sword but through the Word, not through persecution but through preaching restored the honor due God and the manner and method of exalting Him in the church.”<sup>16</sup>

Joh. Christoph Koecher proposed the following as the 15th proof “that the evangelical Lutheran faith is a true, complete, and saving faith”: “Because it has as its primary goal the glorification of the supreme God and in all its teachings and practices exalts, communicates, and proclaims it.”<sup>17</sup>

Hieronymus Kromayer writes:

No other religion has so great a power as the Lutheran, since it not only refers everything to God’s glory but is also the only one that can bring peace to the conscience and offer spirit-reviving consolation. Concerning the first, this applies to all articles of faith, should one desire to analyze each of them in order. Therefore in the article of Holy Scripture we honor God for His goodness that in it He has revealed to us His entire counsel regarding our salvation; and we honor His wisdom in clearly setting forth the most profound concepts in it. In the article on Christ we honor His mercy, that He took pity on all of us and in His Son provided a marvelous means of restoring salvation. In the article on Creation and the image of God we honor His majesty and holiness, that He created man righteous, holy, and just, in His image. In the article on free will we

honor His grace, that in the conversion of man He alone supplies not only the desire but also its achievement. In the doctrine of the Law and justification we honor the same thing, namely that, since no one is able to perfectly fulfill the Law, He justifies us by faith. This teaching removes all glory from people (Eph. 2:8-9) and gives it alone to God (Rom. 4:2). (*Scrutinium* . . . p. 334. See note 1.)

How terribly God takes vengeance when one robs Him of His glory or does not want to give it to Him in any teaching is confirmed in the following sad and warning examples. In the year 1869 at the St. Louis Pastoral Conference, held in St. Charles, Mo., there was present a certain one who with all his being opposed the Lutheran *doctrine of the election of grace* and absented himself from voting. Not long afterward he defected to the *papacy*.<sup>18</sup> The Methodist Nast<sup>19</sup> claims he has achieved total sanctification, and as proof mentions that he has given up smoking. Does it not seem as if the devil is leading them along with a fool's rope? But that's how it must be: Whoever abandons true holiness must fall into such miserable stuff and think: "Now I am a perfected saint."

To the question why in the heading over the theses it was stated that it will be proved that the doctrine of the Lutheran Church is the only true one, since the second thesis states: "therefore only that *church* is correct which in all its teachings renders all glory to God alone," the answer was given: It is really immaterial, whether it is proved that the doctrine of the Lutheran Church is the only true one, or that the Lutheran Church is the only true visible church.

### 1. The Word of God

Now regarding the doctrine of *the Word of God* [Point 1 under Thesis III], it is commonly known that the modern, also would-be believing, theologians assert that the doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture has not been fixed, as they express themselves, by the Lutheran Church, that is, not firmed up; this article is said to be still in flux. It is said that in the 17th century a system of the doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture was indeed formulated, but had gone too far; today no one could any longer accept that doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture. It is said to have been left to our time to set up the correct teaching on this point. It is said that it would not have occurred to Luther to teach regarding Holy Scripture as, for example, a Quenstedt, a Gerhard, a Calov,<sup>20</sup> and other theologians of the 17th century.

Of this, only so much is true: Luther indeed did not leave us a scientific system of this doctrine. However, one only needs to read how he speaks of

Holy Scripture and one will see that he had exactly the same faith as Gerhard, Quenstedt, Calov, and other well-known theologians of our church confessed.

“Yes,” it is said, “but at least this teaching does not occur in the symbolical books.” For this reason the new theologians want to be regarded as good Lutheran theologians even though they do not teach that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. “True,” they say, “the Word of God is *in* the Bible; but there is also much in it which does not necessarily belong to Christianity; there the holy writers may have erred.”

If this is so, then man must search out what is God’s Word; then man must stand above Scripture; he must *decide*. When he decides, he positions himself above God, at least above His Word. This entire position, however, is false.

We teach thus in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “It is surely amazing that our opponents are unmoved by the many passages in the Scriptures that clearly attribute justification to faith and specifically deny it to works. Do they suppose that this is repeated so often for no reason? Do they suppose that these words fell from the Holy Spirit unawares?” (Art IV, par. 107 f.; Tappert, p. 122).

The Apology here avers, then, that one needs to remember while reading Scripture that the Holy Spirit has inspired Scripture and has set down everything *deliberately*. Here our church confesses that *every word, every sentence structure, every repetition* of any word, *every abbreviation*, the entire *manner* and *method of speaking* has its origin in the Holy Spirit, who has inspired *everything*, not only the truths, not only the meanings, not only the “what” but also the “*how*,” who has selected the words necessary so that the mind of God would be correctly revealed to us. That this is the teaching of Holy Scripture itself is clear to every Christian.

The Savior Himself tells the apostles that the Holy Spirit will reveal the “how” and “what” they are to preach (Matthew 10:19-20). The apostle also speaks “in words . . . taught by the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:13), and the prophets without exception state when they begin to write: “The Lord is speaking!” And when the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, it also states: “The Holy Spirit spoke” (Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; 28:25; etc.) The apostle Paul testifies that all *Scripture* is inspired by God. He does not say, “the Word of God” but “all *Scripture*.” Exactly as the holy men have written it, so the Holy Spirit inspired it. That our Lutheran church believed and confessed this already in the 16th century is proved by the reference, among others, quoted from the Apology. Anyone who pledges himself to the symbolical books and permits himself to be installed into the ministry and does not believe this teaching is a miserable scoundrel.

The Iowans justify their position when they claim that only those parts of the symbolical books are binding which are clearly expressed as a confession, and that alone constitutes the confession, but that those statements which appear as incidental bind no one. Through such a method they obviously can throw overboard the major portion of the confession. Our Lutheran Church has, however, demanded a pledge to her confession as it reads from beginning to end. And here this passage is pertinent, as it is expressed in the Latin: *Num arbitrantur excidisse Spiritui Sancto non animadvertenti has voces?* (that is: "Do they suppose that these words fell from the Holy Spirit unawares?"). But this statement could not have been made if it had not been the intention to show that it is indeed the Holy Spirit Himself who is speaking. It is not Isaiah, not Moses, not Paul who is speaking; but it is the Holy Spirit who is speaking. To a human being it will happen on occasion that he will unwittingly make a somewhat incorrect statement. But this never happens to the Holy Spirit. In short, this passage shows that the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture as set forth in the 17th century by our venerable dogmaticians is already inherent in the symbolical books.

The Confessions do not contain a specific article on inspiration because the papists did not at all deny this teaching then, nor do they today. The Augsburg Confession was meant to contain, first, those doctrines by which the Lutheran Church proved that it is the old catholic church and not a new one; second, those doctrines which were denied at that time. But where the churches were in agreement, those doctrines were not formulated. That is the reason why we have no specific article on the inspiration of Holy Scripture in the Augsburg Confession. Nonetheless, the doctrine of inspiration in its strictest form is contained in the Apology.

Luther, of whom it is said that he held a more liberal view than later theologians, wrote thus: "I beg and really caution every pious Christian not to be offended by the simplicity of the language and stories frequently encountered there, but fully realize that, however simple they may seem, these are the very words, works, judgments, and deeds of the majesty, power, and wisdom of the most high God" (*Preface to the Old Testament, Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 35, p. 236*). This was Luther's faith: each word of Holy Scripture is a word of God's supreme majesty. To his reason many a word in the Old Testament seemed despicable, but he scolds his reason for being blind and says: May God protect me lest I judge God's holy book according to my reason!

Luther further states: "Therefore there is no comparison at all between doctrine and life. 'One dot' of doctrine is worth more than 'heaven and earth' (Matt. 5:18); therefore we do not permit the slightest offense

against it" (*Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 27, p. 41).

More is dependent, therefore, on one letter and one tittle of Scripture than on heaven and earth. By "one tittle" one understands a small jot or sign. A tittle, for example, is a dot over an *i* or the minicurve over a *u* [in German Gothic script]. For the Hebrew and the Greek language has, in addition to the symbols of script, small hooks, and Luther says that a single such marking in the Bible is more important than heaven and earth.

These are often immensely important. In the fourth century, for example, there was a great controversy between true and false Christians as to whether Christ was *homoousios* to the Father, or merely *homoiousios*. The question was whether a small "i" (iota) should be inserted in the word *homoousios* or be left out; and in the Greek the "i" is merely a tiny little mark. But if it were inserted there would be a major change. Without the "i" the word reads *homoousios*, that is, in German, "of one substance with the Father"; with the "i," however, it reads *homoiousios*, that is, "of similar substance with the Father." The godless Arians said *homoiousios* and urged that the small marking be inserted; then they would be satisfied. But the others, the correct Christians, said: The small marking shall not be inserted. Also, because of this small marking many had to lose their heads.

In conclusion Luther writes: "God forbid that there should be one jot or tittle in all of Paul which the whole church universal is not bound to follow and keep!" (*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 36, p. 25). Modern theologians claim: "Certainly there are written expressions containing *mistakes*, *errors*, *oversights*, partly *historical*, partly *astronomical*, partly related to *physics*, partly to *mathematics*, partly to *chronology*." They look for errors everywhere; but, in spite of it all, God's word remains firm. This is a trick of the devil! One cannot aver that such people are consciously trying to overthrow the entire Word of God. They simply do not realize that the devil is behind them and is influencing them. If the Christian cannot say: "Every single letter is God's Word," then in the hour of death he may well say: "It truly says that we are made righteous by faith; it truly says: 'Christ is my Life'; but—it could also be otherwise!" If then he doesn't know that he can depend on each word, he is lost.

Gerhard also states: "In the article of Holy Scripture we (Lutherans) honor God for His goodness, in revealing in Holy Scripture His entire counsel regarding our salvation; and honor His wisdom in that He, the creator of thought and language, has spoken clearly and distinctly, to the end that we can revere Holy Scripture as the decree of Almighty God and

King of kings, and offer praise to His majesty” (*Confessio catholica*, pp. 40—41. See note 10.).

Thus especially in *two ways* do we Lutherans demonstrate that we give all honor to God in the doctrine of Holy Scripture. *First*, we assert: Everything man needs to know for his salvation is recorded in Scripture; we need nothing additional. *Second*, we assert: Holy Scripture is so constituted that every human being can personally take from Scripture everything necessary for the assurance of his salvation. He needs no pope, no council, no church, no pastor—in brief, no one. He is able to discover everything on his own. Thus we give God the glory and say: “My God, I rely on You alone, not because my preacher preaches this, not because of the Synod, but rather because I have come to know it myself from Your beloved, precious Word. I am dependent solely on You, great God.”

As soon as one denies the clarity of Scripture, as do the papists and enthusiasts, God’s glory is robbed and one declares, in effect, to the dear Lord: “Dear God, You have given people a revelation which does not make them understanding and wise.” If God had given His Word in such a way that men would be dependent on scholars for an interpretation, He would not be the wise God. A revelation to man which does not reveal anything is an absurdity.

Following are testimonies indicating what, first, the *papists* and, second, the *Calvinists* teach.

*Gerhard* writes: “Whoever despises the government’s public notices is judged to be attacking the honor of the government itself; similarly, one who thinks and speaks disrespectfully of the Holy Scriptures, those holy public notices of divine truth, will rightly be judged to be slighting God’s honor. This is being done by the *papists* in numerous ways:

“1. They make the authority of Scripture dependent solely on the *authority of the church*.” (The church they say, alone can unlock its meaning; otherwise one can never discover its meaning. How frightful! Our dear God is said to have given us His Word, but only a certain number of people have the key to it. These they call the church. This so-called church is a robber of God, taking from Him the honor that He gave us His Word, a blessing for which we ought to be thankful to Him and not to the church.)

*Gerhard* continues: “2. To the certain and immovable Word of God presented in the canonical books they tack on the *apocryphal* writings, which contain doubtful and false statements.” (This is extremely important. We indeed include the apocrypha in our Bible books too: for example, Jesus Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, the Maccabees, etc.; but the superscription states that they are not to be regarded as equal to Holy

Scripture, but are merely good to read. From these, one can see what the Jewish church believed from the appearance of the prophets until the time of Christ, which the common folk otherwise would not know. However, they also contain many falsehoods. It says in them that the witch of Endor brought the real Samuel from the dead; that a certain Rhazis did a great heroic deed by his suicide; that Judas Maccabeus had done honorably by sending 2,000 drachmas to Jerusalem as a sin offering; and that it was a good and holy opinion to pray for the dead for the forgiveness of their sins. Naturally, when the Roman priests read about the 2,000 drachmas they reasoned: That's a great passage, which we better not strike from the Bible. Then they kept one eye on the 2,000 drachmas, and the other on purgatory. In the Book of Tobit a despicable witchcraft is tolerated. Even if the Apocrypha contain very much that is valuable, these are indeed serious faults. The Roman Church, however, presses for the acceptance of the Apocrypha equally with the Book of Isaiah or the Psalter, because from them it thinks it can prove purgatory, its witchery at dedication ceremonies, and the like. Meanwhile, anyone who knows history is aware that the Apocrypha have never been recognized by the church of the old covenant. From the orthodox Jewish church we have received the Old Testament, but in this testament there is no Jesus Sirach, no Book of Tobit, no Books of the Maccabees, and the like. The church of the Old Testament indeed possessed these books, but they were not acknowledged as divine books. They were not originally written in Hebrew, but in Greek. Some of them are available only in Latin. In short, the papists lie when they claim the Apocrypha are as much God's Word as the other books. We do not recognize them, and we honor God in not attributing books to Him which He did not make. For it is gross godlessness when someone authors a book and places another's name on the title, perhaps "Luther," But that is a small sin compared to writing on it: "This book is from God," when it is only written by human beings from their own spirit.)

Gerhard writes further: "3. They force the church to accept *traditions* with the same respect as the written word of God." (The papists resolved at the Council of Trent<sup>21</sup> that traditions must be received with equal honor as the Word of God. They call their traditions the Word of God. Although they distinguish between the written and unwritten Word, they maintain that both are divine and holy. Their horrible robbery of God consists in this, that they equate their uncertain traditions with God's Word.)

Gerhard continues: "4. They deny the *clarity* of Scripture." (Thus they demean God's glory. If God would write an unintelligible book, He would either be foolish, giving a book no one could understand—in other words only wanting to fool people with it—or He would be as inept as we

are, who frequently write or speak something no one can understand. In denying the clarity of Scripture one denies God's wisdom. Therefore it is blasphemous to say that Scripture is obscure.)

Gerhard further writes: "5. They deny the *completeness* of Scripture." (The papists claim one must have more than Scripture. But if Scripture, given by God, were an uncompleted job, then God would no longer be God.)

Gerhard continues: "6. They persistently deny that Scripture is *the only guide* in doctrine and in doctrinal disputes in the church." (They insist that not only the Bible but also the decrees of councils, the resolutions of the church, and what we generally discover in the church fathers are the guidelines.)

Gerhard continues: "7. They arrogantly deny that the Holy Spirit, through Holy Scripture, is the *Judge*." (Lutherans have always confronted papists with the fact that Scripture, not the pope or councils, is the judge. They make light of it by saying, "Your judge does not even have a mouth, and yet can speak; he is merely a dumb judge made of paper; the printers and typesetters make him out of printer's ink!" All this, certainly, is a blasphemous joke. When we regard Holy Scripture as judge this is figurative speech. That is, in this we do not want to say that the Bible is a person, but that it judges just like a person; for the Holy Spirit speaks through Holy Scripture. To deny this concerning Holy Scripture means to deny it concerning God Himself.)

Gerhard further writes: "8. They prevent the *laity* from *reading* the Bible." (This is abhorrent and terrible! In this case Christians would really have no Word of God at all; God would have given His Word only to priests and clergymen. The lowly laity would have to stand before clergymen with maws agape, inquiring, "What has the good Lord written down?" Thus, they would be dependent entirely on clergymen rather than on God's Word.)

Gerhard writes finally: "9. They insult Holy Scripture by *slanders and blasphemies*." (*Disputationes . . .*, pp. 24 ff. See note 10.). (They say, for example, "The Bible is a book of heresy; for all heresy has originated from the Bible." If they mean to say by this that our Lutheran Church had its origins in the Bible, they are correct. The pope is an enemy of the Bible because it is the Bible which exposes his strategy—and we have caught on to it. They also say, "The Bible is a dead letter," or "it is like a wax nose; it can be made broad, or long, or formed like an eagle nose, or in any form; shrewd people can make of it what they wish." They say this in their blindness! The most simple person, who may not in his whole life have learned to read, not to mention write or add, if he is a true Christian, faced

with false teaching which he is asked to believe, asks, “Where is that written?” When then a passage is read to him, he can reply with great facility, “You are lying; this teaching is not recorded there.” Scripture is so clear that one can find clear passages for everything a Christian must believe to attain salvation.)

An example not pointed out by Gerhard is that the papists denigrate God’s glory by placing their Vulgate not only on an equal level with the original text but even elevating it above the original. In the Roman church it is not permissible to quote the Hebrew and Greek texts in contradiction to the Vulgate even though the former comes from the holy writers. The papists claim that the pope saw to it that the Latin Bible did not falsify anything, but one could not be certain about the status of the Hebrew and Greek texts. While we Lutherans highly treasure our Lutheran Bible translation, because it renders the original text in German so marvelously, we nevertheless (if there were a controversy and someone ventured to say, “Luther did not express himself correctly”) would never maintain, “What Luther has written is written!” No way. Luther was neither a prophet nor an apostle, who could not err. “Very well,” we would say, “back to the original text!” We place Luther’s translation *under* the original. The original text has precedence; Luther’s translation must be tested and corrected according to the original text.

What, now, do the *Calvinists* say in regard to the doctrine of Holy Scripture? John Gerhard writes:

Up until now it has been shown how God’s honor is attacked by the Calvinists with respect to His essence and attributes; now we need to show how they impugn His glory with respect to *God’s Word*. To be sure, they want to be recognized as being in complete agreement with our churches in the article of Holy Scripture and want to join us with combined efforts in battling the papistic enemies of Scripture; the fact is, however, that also in this respect it can be truly demonstrated that they attack and weaken the integrity and credibility of Scripture and consequently also that of God Himself.

The advocates of union assert: “You Lutherans are chronic disturbers of the peace; you refuse to join with the Reformed, even though they agree with you, for instance in the doctrine of the Word of God.” Would to God this were so! But precisely here they are not one with us. When we testify, “The Bible is God’s Word, verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit,” they assent to this. Then when we apply this doctrine by saying, “The Savior says: This is My body; this is My blood—recorded clearly and distinctly, which no one can deny—they offer evasions and excuses. It is apparent,

they do not believe that these are words of God's wisdom. (Note also what was stated at Thesis II, under the quotation from Gerhard.)

Gerhard continues:

1. The apostles, the writers of the Holy Spirit, are said by some of the Reformed to have had *errors* and *lapses* in their writings. Conrad Vorst,<sup>22</sup> while avoiding mentioning the name of Socinus,<sup>23</sup> published a book in whose foreword, on p. 104, he declares of the evangelists and apostles: "It might have happened that they at times" (in their interpretation of certain passages in the Old Testament and the subsequent explanations of the same) "had committed insignificant errors." In the same writing, p. 15: "Even though in a few minor matters, which are of no great import (since it is possible that one may have better remembered the truth of such events than another), they perhaps wrote somewhat or also *very* differently from one another." This same person writes in his reply to the reasons given by Dontelock:<sup>24</sup> "He could glean much of this kind from Calvinistic teachers, where they express the opinion "that the writers of the New Testament had *lapses of memory*, erred in minor matters, had made some unsuitable quotations." . . . Francis Junius<sup>25</sup> argued in the first book of *Parallela sacra*, p. 1053: "Luke injected the name Cainan in the genealogy, and thus added to the account so as to conform to the accepted *lore of the nation*. Although we" (as he says) "grant that in actuality this was an error, one can take the position that the nation had this view and that Luke accommodated himself to this idea generally held among the people. Luke really recognized this as an error, but a kind of error that may have compromised historical *fact* but did not contradict the catholic *faith*."

The Calvinists operate much like our modern theologians. They all say it is quite possible for an evangelist to have believed a passage from the prophets to be a prophecy about Christ, but he could have been in error; the teaching is undoubtedly correct, but he was in error in believing that this or that passage relates to Christ or is a reference to the new covenant.

Our newer theologians usually claim that the Bible is not the kind of book from which one can learn about science, astronomy, mathematics, or geography. They say the Bible was not designed for such purposes; hence, it could easily have occurred that in such areas errors may have crept into the Bible. Alas, if we had such a Bible, the devil could claim in every temptation: "You cannot depend on it." No, if we cannot believe in the entire Bible as God's Word—this is speaking boldly, and yet it's the truth—we may as well unhesitatingly throw the Bible into the fire. Then it would be of no use to us, no, none at all. We can use only such a Word of God where we ourselves do not have to search for the Word of God, but of which God Himself states: "This is My Word!" But if He would suggest:

“You have an intellect, you are an intelligent person; search it out yourself!”—in such a situation I would be depending on my own judgment and not on the Word of God.

Gerhard writes further:

2. Neither can we understand how it agrees with the authority and credibility of Scripture when Calvin in his *Institutes*, Book 4, ch. 17, par. 23, calls those “hair splitters” (*aucupes syllabarum*) who in the words of institution insist on the words as they read (*Disputationes . . .*, pp. 125, 569 f. See note 10.).

For Lutherans the Scriptures are the only norm, rule, and guide for all of faith and life. Catholics, on the other hand, place tradition and the authority of the church above Scripture. The Jesuit Kratzer, in opposing Heilbrunner<sup>26</sup> at the Regensburg Colloquy,<sup>27</sup> stated: “The Holy Spirit Himself may intrude and say, ‘You, Kratzer, are wrong; Heilbrunner, you have carried away the victory’; then I would immediately step over to your position.” By this he wanted to say that the Holy Spirit does not speak through Scripture, but must appear personally and offer this statement as a direct revelation. He did not acknowledge the authority of Holy Scripture as the only judge and norm of all doctrine.

Above all, we must affirm with all our being: Are we really willing to ascribe all glory to God and thus bear the distinctive mark that we are true Lutherans? If so, let us hold fast to the pure old doctrine regarding the inspiration of Holy Scripture given us *verbally* through the Holy Spirit. Should we concede the least iota, then we shall have lost the game; and all other matters which may in themselves be good teachings shall have lost their intrinsic worth. If I should deny the foundation, what value is there for me in preserving that which is built on it? Therefore, if we possessed all the teachings of the Lutheran Church, they would be of no value if we at the same time permitted anyone to deprive us of this one teaching, that the Bible has been given to us *word for word* by God. Had the Bible not been inspired by God, our Lutheran teachings would not be true; for Lutheran teaching is nothing else than a repetition of what is stated in the Bible. That is the reason why we can so confidently and cheerfully affirm: “All of you are wrong; we alone are right.” Not because we are unusually clever people; absolutely not. In no way do we consider ourselves more clever and better educated. On the contrary, we would rather believe other people to be more clever and educated than we. That we can so confidently and joyfully face the whole world and all sectarians saying: “You are wrong; we are right,” stems from this, that we have accepted everything recorded in the Bible. If we should admit: “Perhaps we also are in error,” this would compromise God’s glory, indicating that He had probably deceived us. No,

as serious as we are about rendering to God all glory, so earnestly we must adhere to the confession: "We possess the true doctrine; all others are imprisoned in falsehoods, blindness, and darkness." This we dare claim without boasting, since we know: Lutheran teaching is nothing less than the crystal-clear passages contained in Holy Scripture. The teachings of the Lutheran Church dare never be determined by reason, nor by the heart—that may feel as it will.

Lutheran doctrine has never been determined by the church fathers. But what the fathers teach on the basis of Scripture, that we accept. Our doctrine has never been established on the basis of the teachings of the entire church if it teaches other than the Bible teaches. Or, if someone approached us claiming he had new revelations, that would be of no help; we would simply respond: "Thus it is written in the Bible." Then let the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians come, or even Spiritists who would wake the dead or at least try their witchery—we would only laugh at such foolishness; even though one would prefer to weep over it! But we laugh insofar as it does not impress us. We have no fear of being wrong, as do the poor sectarians who swing back and forth. Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, they all shake and worry. Why? Simply because they do not trust the Bible. We Lutherans trust the Bible; whatever is recorded there is settled. Methodists, Papists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Spiritists, Shakers, and Quakers—let them all come. Just keep your shenanigans away from us! We have our Bible. Thus we can confidently lie down on our deathbed. There you will stand and confess: "The Lutherans were right; they have not departed from the true way, for they have used the Word of God to illuminate their feet and be a light on their path."

Truly, all depends on this, that we remain firm and immovable; else we are lost. The devil is already seeking entrance into our Synod through the Iowans. They say we should give up this gem; we should, as Luther puts it, sit on a monkey's tail and say: "The 17th-century doctrine of inspiration is no longer usable in our day." Truly, it is not only the teaching of the 17th, nor even of the 16th century, but that of the apostles and prophets themselves. If they had added their own to this Word, they would have been, perish the horrible thought, the worst of godless fellows. Then they would have had to say: "This is apparently what the dear Lord meant." But instead they declared: "Thus says the Lord; thus says the Holy Spirit." The Savior Himself adds to a passage cited by Him: "Scripture cannot be broken." First He says: "Is it not written . . . You are gods," etc., and then He Himself adds thereto: "And Scripture cannot be broken" [John 10:34-35]. With this He declares: It is indeed unusual that governments are called

gods, but in spite of this, "Scripture cannot be broken." This we also declare. Whatever is written, that stands firmly for us. Let the new theology continue to develop; it will develop right into hell. It wants to rob the poor Christian of his final comfort, as he depends on the Word of God. We honor God for giving us His Word. And if all books were to lie, *this* book does not lie.

This faith of our Lutheran Church is also translated into its hymnody. Our entire hymnal is proof that it gives all glory to God in the doctrine of Holy Scripture. For examples: "I cling to what my Savior taught and trust it, whether felt or not." "One little word can fell him." [*Editorial note:* Walther quotes from several hymns, especially "Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Hast Prepared," *The Lutheran Hymnal* 306:2-5.]

## 2. The Origin of Sin, Death, Hell, and Damnation

That only in the teachings of the Lutheran Church is God given all glory is revealed also in [Point 2 under Thesis III] its teaching on *the origin of sin, death, hell, and damnation*.

That precisely this doctrine has been selected stems from the fact that the Synod of Iowa has made accusations of Calvinistic leanings against the Missouri Synod. Following the lead of Luther, we have asserted that it is God alone who prepares man for salvation and finally brings him to salvation; that the free will of man is not active in this; that man is undeserving of the gift of salvation from God, and he does nothing for which our good God accepts him into heaven; that from eternity God sees nothing in man whereby He is induced to assert: I foresee that this man will be thus and so, and therefore I will especially choose him.

The teaching is Luther's. Luther condemns the opposite teaching in his precious writing *The Bondage of the Will*. We too do not wish to accept this opposing doctrine, as we have publicly confessed. This was a major source of irritation to the Iowans. They insisted that what we proclaimed was pure Calvinism. They said that if we teach that God saw nothing in man worthy of being chosen for salvation, we would also have to assert that God sees nothing in man worthy of damnation. We were accused of teaching that as man has earned nothing to merit heaven, so according to our doctrine it cannot be his fault if he is condemned, as the Calvinists maintain. The Calvinists say that people are saved or condemned because of the eternal divine decree. This teaching we condemn with all our heart. We confidently and steadfastly believe—and are prepared to suffer death on this account, as long as God keeps us in His grace—that all who have been chosen by God for salvation have been chosen according to free grace and free mercy; that God saw nothing, absolutely nothing in them for the

sake of which He determined that they be saved. We hold firmly, that there is no cause in man whereby he can be saved; rather the only cause can be through God's eternal mercy and the precious atonement of Jesus Christ. Any third cause for salvation, which may be attributed to man, we reject.

Reason certainly tells us: "If it is true that the elect have been chosen only by the grace of God, it follows that when people are not saved, but damned, it can come only from the fact that they have not been chosen for salvation by God." Reason can conclude nothing else. We Lutherans distinguish ourselves from sectarians and Calvinists in that we do not arrive at this conclusion. Holy Scripture teaches that we are chosen by grace, according to God's plan, by decision of His divine will. Nowhere is there the slightest evidence anywhere that we have been elected according to God's foreknowledge that we would be good people. Everything is attributed to God's grace and God's mercy. And the person who has been brought into heaven must say: "Dear Lord, You alone have brought me here; if it had gone according to my merit, according to my will, I would now be, like the others, in hell. I owe it all to Your mercy; You have chosen me, a lost and condemned person." However, those whom God has not elected have not been chosen, and are not saved, because even though our good Lord has opened His grace also to them, they have brazenly rejected it. They did not want to accept it. God sent His Son into the world for them, and on their behalf instituted the ministry which proclaims reconciliation. He sent the apostles into all the world, established the office of the ministry, instituted Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and absolution for them—all to no avail. The Word was powerful enough; but they fought against it not only with their natural resistance, which God always takes away, but with willful resistance, as Stephen accused the mob in the Supreme Council at Jerusalem: "You always resist the Holy Spirit." That people are saved is purely the result of God's mercy; that people are damned is alone man's decision, man's deliberate evil, and cannot be attributed to God in any way. This we insist upon. This is also written in our symbolical books.

Luther so wonderfully delineated all this in his writing against Erasmus, *The Bondage of the Will*. Luther's book on free will, the Iowans claim, is totally false, containing pure Calvinism, for in it the dear Lord is logically made the agent of damnation. And yet, they want to be regarded as good Lutherans. Hence they claim that Luther had later retracted this writing; although they do know or should know—one cannot really decide which—that Luther to his death not only never retracted *The Bondage of the Will*, but rather considered this writing his best work next to the Small Catechism and his *Church Postil*. These are good books, he says; that he

must admit—but not in a boastful way. When the Iowans thus assert that this book is heretical, they must also conclude that Luther died a heretic. But this is totally false. In this writing we find the true, clear, Biblical, evangelical teaching. Indeed, free will is not allowed even a hair's breadth. It is swept out of every corner by Luther. Hence, anyone who hangs on to the smallest leaven of Pelagianism would surely crack his skull against this writing, would be angered by it, and exclaim: "This is a horrible book!" It is indeed true: In it Luther writes so powerfully and sharply that one often feels that lightning has struck—until the lightning has vanished and one observes: "The man is really telling the truth; it is the saving teaching, which places the poor soul on the wings of God's mercy." It is true: On occasion he speaks in terms similar to Calvin; but let no one be deceived thereby. When two persons express similar ideas, they may not be in agreement by a long shot. Luther, in this instance, does not propose to teach an absolute predestination; but he insists that nothing, absolutely nothing be attributed to man. That we recognize already from the heading of the book. It does not say, "Concerning Predestination" but *The Bondage of the Will*. This must be noted carefully; otherwise you don't really understand Luther. Luther just wants to deny the existence of man's free will in spiritual matters; therefore he leads everything, but not sin, back to God.

Now that an accounting has been given as to why the teachings of our church regarding the origin of sin, death, hell, and damnation are here considered as a proof that only through the teaching of the Lutheran Church is all glory given to God, let us hear what the Augsburg Confession, the Formula of Concord, and Luther himself write about these matters.

#### Augsburg Confession:

It is taught among us that although almighty God has created and still preserves nature, yet sin is caused in all wicked men and despisers of God by the perverted will. This is the will of the devil and of all ungodly men; as soon as God withdraws his support, the will turns away from God to evil. It is as Christ says in John 8:44, "When the devil lies, he speaks according to his own nature" (Art. XIX; Tappert, pp. 40 f.).

Here our Confession declares: The origin of sin does not lie in God—to state this would be monstrous blasphemy, transforming God into the devil himself—but in the evil will of the devil and then in the will of man that has become evil through the devil's deceit.

This is also stated in Art. XI of the Formula of Concord:

God is not the cause of sin, nor is he the cause of the punishment, the damnation. The only cause of man's damnation is sin, for the "wages of

sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). And as God does not will sin and has no pleasure in sin, so he also does not will the death of a sinner and has no pleasure in his damnation. . . . Concerning “the vessels of mercy” he says specifically that the Lord himself “has prepared them unto glory.” He does not say this of the damned, whom God has not prepared but who have prepared themselves to be vessels of damnation (Solid Declaration, par. 81 f.; Tappert, pp. 629 f.).

The Augsburg Confession merely tells us that God is not the cause of sin; the Formula of Concord draws the necessary conclusion following from this, that the good Lord is not the cause of death, not the cause of hell, not the cause of damnation; rather, all this is the consequence of sin, which God did not produce. Hence it is blasphemous talk when rationalists say: “Surely, the dear God created man with the inclination toward sin.” The first human beings already wanted to ascribe the cause of sin to God after the Fall. Adam laid the blame on Eve, and Eve upon the serpent. “Why,” asked Eve, “did You create the serpent?” And Adam wanted to say, “Why did You give me this Eve?” That is ingrained in our nature: we would rather pass the blame on to God. And He will, to be sure, answer well for Himself.

In this citation it is also stated that God has spoken differently in regard to the vessels of mercy and the vessels of wrath (Romans 9:22-23). Regarding the vessels of wrath, v. 22 reads: “made for destruction”; however, concerning the vessels of mercy, v. 23 reads in the original Greek *proeetoimasen*, that is, “prepared beforehand for glory.” That is strange! Has there been a possible lapse on the part of the Holy Spirit that He initially says regarding the vessels of wrath: they are prepared (in Greek *kateertismena*); but regarding the vessels of mercy: they are precommitted (*proeetoimasen*). By this He wishes to say: Certainly, no one will enter hell unless he is “made” for it. But such a one does it to himself, making himself a vessel of wrath. This is not the case with the vessels of mercy; they do not make themselves fit; through election by grace they are prepared from eternity. Man’s salvation is exclusively a gift of God; in the case of damnation he is exclusively on his own. God has no share in this. Whoever is saved must give God the glory; whoever is lost must cry out, “Woe is me!” against himself alone.

It is a gross untruth when the Iowa Synod claims that Luther’s writing concerning free will contains Calvinistic tendencies; that is contradicted in the following passage of that document: “God does not deplore the death of his people which he works in them, but he deplores the death which he finds in his people and desires to remove from them. . . . For he wills all men to be saved [I Tim. 2:4], seeing he comes with the word of salvation to all, and the fault is in the will that does not admit him, as he says in Matthew

23[:37]: ‘How often would I have gathered your children, and you would not!’ ” (*The Bondage of the Will, Luther’s Works*, American Edition, Vol. 33, pp. 139—40).

Say the Iowans: Luther teaches that God did not intend all people to be saved, did not desire to have them in heaven, but ordained them to sin and damnation. However, Luther here writes clearly and distinctly: “God desires to remove the death which he finds in his people . . . For he wills all men to be saved . . . and the fault is in the will that does not admit him” (*ibid.*, p. 140). This is to be well noted. If we are condemned, the fault is not that God fails to assist, but that our will is delinquent. *His* will is our salvation; *our* will, unfortunately, is our undoing, while we in our blindness think it is our salvation. In response to a writing like Luther’s, Calvin would have said: “That I can never subscribe; that is heresy.” And now one would remake Luther into a Calvinist! If anyone is not reading our current theological periodical (*Lehre und Wehre*), let him by all means not allow himself to be deceived by the hue and cry of the Iowans. They lie when they label us Calvinists. We hate Calvinism as the teaching of the devil, since it deprives the poor sinner of his greatest comfort, namely that the entire world is saved and he can count himself among its people. We separate ourselves from this ghastly teaching; and then these Iowans appear claiming, since we adhere to the teaching of the eternal and free mercy of God and therefore remove everything from man, “You are also Calvinists.” The Bible testifies, on the one hand: “It is pure grace”; and on the other: “And you would not.” There we hear what the source of salvation and condemnation is.

Luther writes further to Joh. Lang in the year 1522:<sup>28</sup>

Why do you argue over the evil which God does? I see that you have nothing else to do but involve yourselves in such destructiveness of Satan. Satan needs no assistance, nor any type of action or deed, except God’s decision to withhold action. For this reason we do evil, because [God] desists from working within us and permits our natural man to do in arrogance what he desires. Otherwise, where He Himself functions, nothing but good will follow. And this nonintervention of God Scripture calls hardening of the heart. For the evil cannot *occur*, since it is nothing, but comes only when nothing good takes place, or is prevented from happening.

Everything taking place in the world does not happen without God. The good Lord is not like a clockmaker who, after putting together a clock, abandons it, goes his own way, and no longer concerns himself with it. On the contrary, after He created the world, He continues to preserve it and is

everywhere active in it. He is, if one wants to use an extreme illustration, like the steam power in a gigantic machine. As soon as the steam is gone, the machine comes to a dead stop. Should God withdraw Himself from the world even momentarily, the whole machine would stand still. He not only sets the sun, moon, stars, and the vast universe in motion, but all that moves has motion because God is the moving force.

Even the thief who enters through the window at night and reaches for the money purse could not bend his five fingers if the dear God at that moment ceased to be the driving power within him. For we are not gods, only shadows, nothing; the dear God must be within us and supply the power. As long as the world stands there have been those who dispute this, and say: "If it is true that 'in Him we live and move and have our being' [Acts 17:28], then God Himself must perpetrate evil." Naturally, reason cannot think otherwise. Calvin says that is indeed true. Luther, however, states in the reference above: "Why do you argue over the evil which God does? I see that you have nothing else to do than involve yourselves in such destructiveness of Satan." Just at this time when the entire church is bleeding from a thousand wounds, modern theologians are devouring and wasting their entire life seeking out a minor point which is no more than the most insignificant marking, while we are facing so many vital issues, affecting the salvation of millions of souls, which theologians should research and write about.

Luther continues: "Satan needs no assistance, nor any type of action or deed, except God's decision to withhold action." God indeed does not do the evil in man; people do evil without Him. The thief needs God only in *supplying life* in his hand; but he has no need for God in his *desire to steal*, that instead of putting his hand to the shovel he slips it into his neighbor's purse. God does not give him this idea, but He has given him his hand. The thief has *misused* God's life-giving powers and applied them to evil. It would indeed be most unusual if a father were to give his hand to a godless child, and not withdraw it should the child use this father's same hand and with it slap him in the face. But that is God's way. He furnishes man with power until his death and does not withdraw it, in spite of man's continuous misuse of it in fighting against God. Truly, now is the time of grace, patience, and long-suffering. When this time runs out, we will see with consternation how great God's justice and holiness is. As we now are amazed at His patience, and cannot understand it at all, we would then by the same token not understand His wrath, had we not been blessed with spiritual insight.

Luther continues: "For this reason we do evil, because [God] desists from working within us and permits our natural man to do in arrogance

what he desires. Otherwise, where He Himself functions, nothing but good will follow.” This is an important point; for the dear God is a sun of blessing. The sun needs to do nothing to bring on darkness; it needs only to cease shining, and darkness will appear. Where it continues to shine, there is brightness and light. Such a sun of blessings is our dear God. Where God is active, there is pure light, pure goodness, pure salvation, pure joy. However, when God in His anger desires to punish, He does nothing. Just when He does nothing, there is lamentation. When He permits man to remain in his misery, man sinks down step by step, from evil to evil, from destruction to destruction.

Luther continues: “And this nonintervention of God Scripture calls hardening of the heart.” Mark these words well! Calvin understood “hardening of the heart” as an actual activity of God in the human heart; hence, “making hard.” No, says Luther, one can indeed say: “God hardens”; but this must be understood to say nothing else than that God ceases to operate in a person’s heart—then he will harden himself. We of course are speaking of the kingdom of grace and of the Spirit. When the sun fails to give off rays, it becomes dark! Or when it hasn’t rained for a long time and water no longer runs on the soil, the ground hardens by itself. As Scripture says: “The earth under you shall be iron” [Deuteronomy 28:23]. The cause of this is that the rain has done *nothing*. So it also is with God, when he ceases to work in man. As soon as God no longer works in him, he is lost. His sinful spirit drags him from one sin to another and he becomes hardened.

Luther continues: “For the evil cannot *occur*, since it is nothing.” Evil really is not a specific thing. It is not something visible. One may see things which have come into existence because of sin; but sin is a nonentity, which “comes only when nothing good takes place, or is prevented from happening.” The Calvinists are extremely careful in their confessions, so that one may not easily detect their blasphemy; however, their theologians have been chattering off the record. They come right out and say: God is the cause of sin, yes, even the working cause, and if not in the primary cause, then surely the incidental, concluding, ordering, provoking cause. They do not say this in their confessional writings:

[Luther says:] “God does not deplore the death of his people which he works in them, but he deplores the death which he finds in his people” (*The Bondage of the Will, Luther’s Works, American Edition, Vol. 33, pp. 139—40*). God is active, as those before us expressed this in their elegant way, in the substance (*materiale*) but not in the form (*formale*) of sin, that is, every transaction in which we engage is *in itself* neither good nor bad, but it depends on the intent. For example, when a murderer takes someone’s

life, he gets the gallows; when a judge does exactly the same thing as the murderer, it is not a sin. To the contrary, he does a good deed and carries out his calling; and if he does it in faith, God will even reward him! Further, blasphemous words are not sin *in themselves*; for when we, as an example, read in the Bible the blasphemies spoken by people, we do not commit sin. In such reading we emphasize how degraded those human beings were, how this festered in their depraved, miserable souls so that they dared spew such froth against their Creator. It then follows: God does all the things human beings do, with the exception of sin, which is of the devil. God preserves everything He has created, but not sin. Whatever God created of the devil, that much is good; for whatever God does, is and remains eternally good. Thus our flesh, a creation of God, remains good. But sin, which hangs on our flesh, is not of God's doing. For Scripture says specifically; "Thou art not a God who delights in wickedness" (Psalm 5:4). This is an important passage.

Strange is the passage 2 Samuel 24:1, which states: "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He incited David against them, saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" "Look," say the Calvinists, "here God Himself provoked him." But that is the way of spiritually afflicted heretics. When they discover a passage which seems to be suited to their prejudices, they no longer explore the Scriptures further, to discover whether it is to be accepted just as it reads. Obviously, if there were no other related passages, we would also say: "We accept this, as written." But the Holy Spirit, who is wise, has inspired another prophet with yet a second passage. 1 Chronicles 21:1 reads as follows: "Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel." It is marvelous that in the one passage it reads that the wrath of God provoked David; while in the other, that Satan caused him to number the people. But this is no contradiction. Rather, if we consider both passages, we arrive at an extremely important, insightful, and awesome teaching, namely this: When a sinner sins, he is not tearing himself away from God in such a manner that he stands independently next to God as a separate being who can do as he pleases. No, the dear God does not permit the reins of world leadership to be taken from His hand, but retains them in all eternity. Not a single hair on the head of a child of God shall be curled if He does not permit it. Because of that the Holy Spirit can say: "The anger of the Lord . . . incited David . . . saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" God was so angered by David's unfaithfulness that He determined to *permit* the devil to incite David to number the people. As a result a terrible judgment would follow. The devil could not have accomplished this by himself He could not even take control of swine; when the Savior expelled an entire legion of devils from a

demoniac, they had to respectfully plead that they be permitted to enter the swine.

Hence we perceive: Since the devil cannot even exercise control over a pig without God's consent, how much less over a human being, or even still less over a child of God! The Holy Spirit teaches in these passages that if anything occurs, whether good or evil, it does so under divine rule, in accord with either God's grace or God's anger. Whoever does not believe this does not firmly believe that there is a God. Believing that there is a God does not mean believing that up yonder somewhere an old man sits in a grandfather's chair observing: "I have to check now and then to see what those people down there are doing." No, God is the Immeasurable, the Incomprehensible, who permeates the entire world, who is everywhere, and who is God everywhere, who moves, operates, causes, upholds, and governs all things. Whoever does not believe in a living, almighty, infinite God—he has nothing but an idol in his heart. Therefore the Holy Spirit truthfully said in one passage: "Satan . . . incited David," and in another: "The anger of the Lord . . . incited David."

Question: What does the Augsburg Confession mean when it says: "As soon as God withdraws His support, the will turns away from God to evil"? (Art. XIX; Tappert p. 41). Answer: As soon as God by His grace does not work in person, such a one can do nothing but sin. A human being is comparable to a falling stone. If it were possible to step to the ends of the earth and drop a stone, it would fall into unending space, fall continuously until something came to stop it. It is similar with a human being. When the dear God does not work in him, he falls from sin to sin. If an unconverted person does not fall into murder, adultery, whoredom, and stealing, he owes it to God; for had God withdrawn His merciful hand from him, he could soon have come into a situation where his wicked heart would have fallen also into these abominations. When we realize this, we will not be proud of our uprightness but rather confess: "O gracious God, You have hitherto protected me; do not withdraw Your hand from me, or else I will be lost." "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" [Matthew 15:19]. All of this comes out. So it was in there. In the heart of all people it *has its seat*. If God would not keep His protecting hand over us, we would be lost.

Here are several quotations from the Reformed confessions, namely from the resolutions of the Synod of Dort.<sup>29</sup>

Here it is stated: "The synod rejects the false views of those who teach that God by His mere righteous will leaves no one in the fall of Adam and in the universal condition of sin and condemnation, or passes by him in the sharing of the grace necessary for faith and conversion."<sup>30</sup>

This is accepted by all strict Calvinists. They reject the teaching that God does not totally pass anyone by and that He offers grace to all and leaves no one mercilessly in his misery. They claim this to be the true teaching, that God's mercy is directed only to the elect, that God does not desire the salvation of the rest, does not want to rescue them from their inevitable destruction, but rather desires that they remain in the sin of Adam according to God's will. They claim that God wanted to demonstrate to the entire world how righteous and angry He is against sin. Therefore He created people, knowing they would fall, and reasoned: Some of them I will save, but of the others I will make an example. Them I will send no Savior and offer no grace. What else do the Reformed teach than that the dear God is a cause for their continuance in sin and their not being saved from death, hell, and damnation? In their confessions they express themselves rather circumspectly, so as to camouflage themselves a bit. But when one examines their words carefully, one sees their conclusion that *God*, in the final analysis, is at fault. He is a Being so sovereign that He could arrange such a tragic drama, in which He creates millions upon millions, of whom He condemns a portion to hell, to demonstrate how righteous and angry He is because of sin, while He wants the other portion in heaven, in order to reveal His grace and mercy. But none of this, rather the exact opposite, is recorded in Scripture, as we shall hear when in the thesis before us we shall especially discuss the doctrine of the universal grace of God.

In the Dort resolutions it is stated further: "That in time a certain number have been blessed by God with faith, but some have not been so blessed—this emanates from His eternal decree. For God has a foreknowledge of all His acts from eternity, Acts 15:18; Ephesians 1:11" (Canons of the Synod of Dort, Ch. I, Art. 6; Schaff, Vol. III, p. 582).

But this proves nothing. They thereby make the dear God as impotent as a human being. We too are able to predict certain events, and some quite accurately. Indeed, a godless person who resists conversion knows well he will go to hell. But this does not apply to God. Luther testifies of Him: "What we humans see lengthwise, God sees crosswise." That means, if we desire to look into the distance, we will encounter fog, which prevents us from seeing into the beyond; but for God one thing is as near as another. Hence He knows in advance, not only what His intentions are, but also the intentions of others. Indeed, He even knows what might occur under other circumstances. The Reformed deny this, which prompts them to say that foreknowledge is synonymous with predetermination.

Those resolutions state further: "In harmony with this decree He graciously opens the hearts of the elect in spite of their hardness, and

inclines them toward faith; the nonelect however, in righteous judgment, He leaves in their pride and arrogance” (ibid.).

Hence when they say “in righteous judgment” they actually say nothing. For if God would act only according to His justice, He could not save the others either. For we are all of one and the same mold; by nature we are all lost sinners. If therefore God does not convey His universal grace upon the individual, or rather does not share it, then it must be concluded that there is an additional factor, namely that man absolutely does not want to accept grace.

Finally in the Swiss Confession we read: “God has decided to reveal His glory thus, that He has decreed first to create man pure and holy, then to permit his fall, and thereafter to show mercy to a segment of the fallen and hence to elect them. The others He determined should remain in their lost condition and finally be given over to eternal damnation.”<sup>31</sup>

It is therefore horrible that the Iowans place us in the same category with the Calvinists. Against them it should be noted how one can proceed from a perfectly valid doctrine, and under the influence of reason can conclude with such an abhorrent one. The Bible states, for example: The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Again: The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord; the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty; the Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal. When mathematicians handle these matters, they come up with three gods, three lords, three almighties, and three eternals. “Surely,” they say, “what else can we say than three times one equals three? That’s it!” We respond: “The Bible does indeed say: The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; but it does not say: Three times one equals three, and therefore they are three gods. On the contrary, it says that there are three Persons, each of whom is God, Lord, Almighty, and Eternal, but that there is only one divine Being, and hence only one God, one Lord, one Almighty, one Eternal.” Therefore away with arithmetic, when it comes to God’s Word and divine matters! The ass was not permitted to join in ascending Mt. Moriah—and reason is the ass!

### **3. Divine Providence**

We now approach Point 3 under Thesis III: *Only in the teachings of the Lutheran Church is God alone given all glory; this is revealed, among others, in its teaching on divine providence.*

To prove the truth of this thesis every doctrine could have been cited without exception, since each teaching has this objective: God alone shall have all glory. The reason this one was chosen rather than several others is due to two factors: First, because all human beings, without exception, are

by nature atheists. By nature the doctrine inheres in all people that there is no God. An even though all people by nature assert that there is a god, they do not believe in a living God, and the world appears to them to be without God. They live under the impression that they can do as they please, while God is standing idly by. That, however, is horrifying. Where that is believed, people believe only in an idol—and *that* each person does by nature, until he is converted. Then there is a radical change. Wherever he may go and stand, wherever he looks, hears, and feels—everything, everything reminds him of God. He sees God everywhere, is sensitive to God everywhere, discovers God at work everywhere.

Second, this teaching has been chosen because we are living in terrifyingly atheistic times, in which everything is attributed to nature instead of God. Everything is said to be regulated by the eternal laws which are inherent in nature. Those dear Christians who speak and think so highly of the laws of nature do not realize how they have let themselves be deceived to blasphemous propositions and ways of speaking. A Christian should surely see God active everywhere, as the apostle Paul says: “In Him we live and move and have our being” [Acts 17:28].

Since this teaching is a very far-reaching and broad one . . . we want to reflect on only two aspects. First: Over which areas does God’s providence extend? Or, about what does the dear God concern Himself? What does He take care of? The other: What influence does God have over everything that happens in the world? To what degree is the dear God involved in whatever happens in the whole world? To what extent does God work or, as the old theologians said it, concur in all actions?

J. Rambach writes:<sup>32</sup> “Objects of divine providence are without exception all created things, visible and invisible, live and lifeless, heaven, earth, and sea, and all that is therein. As He has created all things, so also His providence extends over all. He sustains: 1. the invisible creatures, the angels; for the good [angels] cannot rule without His wisdom, or exist without His power; the evil [angels] cannot harm without His permission, and He sets limits to their evil. 2. the visible creatures, which include not only human beings, who are His most precious creation, but also all irrational animals. In Egypt, frogs and lice obeyed His commands.”

How often has God made grasshoppers His armies! An atheist in his blindness indeed insists that this speaks slanderously of God. But this is God’s greatest honor, that no mosquito in the universe can move without Him; for outside of God there is nothing that can say to Him: “You do your thing, I’ll do mine.” God says to him: “You are a zero as soon as I cease to operate in you and for you.” And this applies equally to the archangel as well as the smallest frog, yes, the tiniest mosquito, the tiniest mite and

moth. Truly, this is a most blessed teaching! A person who has rightly comprehended it goes through the world in an entirely different manner. He sees the dear God everywhere with the eyes of faith. Part of a Christian's makeup is that he does not walk through the world like a cow. A Christian, walking through a meadow, sees the hand of God everywhere—how He beautifully clothes the lovely flowers, how He places power into grain, so that man and beast are sustained by it.

Rambach continues: "He extends His providence over all kinds, over all species, yes, over all separate entities or individuals in each kind. For example, God is concerned not only about the kind of creatures called birds, but also for each species—storks, swallows, sparrows, yes, for each single specimen, for each individual stork, swallow, and sparrow."

Whoever does not believe this, is not a Christian. Each swallow, each sparrow has a life history; if a sparrow had the gift of intellect and could speak, he would tell us about the wondrous things God did—that he [the sparrow] found food daily, retained his trustfulness, slept peacefully, awakened joyfully, and sang: "Where is my food?" If we could understand his language, a book could be written about each sparrow. God cares for each individual, tiny sparrow. Truly, we must believe this; else we do not believe in a living God, a Creator, a Governor, a Preserver of all things; else we are nothing but miserable atheists who eliminate the dear God, the Center of all things, from the world. We must strengthen ourselves in this faith in this shameful, atheistic period, so that we do not unwittingly let ourselves be deprived of the living, omnipotent God.

Rambach continues: "He is concerned not only that trees remain, grow, and are preserved, but as well for each tree, branch, and its leaf."

Although there are billions and billions of leaves in the entire world, there is no individual tiny leaf for which God is not concerned. Whoever doesn't believe this, has no God. For believing in God does not mean that one assumes that some Being exists who, immensely huge, created the world and also occasionally reaches into it—no indeed, everything, everything, even each tiniest speck of dust, He holds in His hand and governs; for if the dear God did not concern Himself about the least, the immense could not exist. Consider this: If one had the responsibility for a large building, but one stone was missing in a critical spot, and he would say, "I am concerned only about the whole, not for this single stone," this would not help him if suddenly the building would collapse and he wanted to hold it up by himself. Some people have held that God concerns himself only about the whole, but ignores the minutiae. That is unbounded stupidity.

Rambach continues: "Each of these is under His dominion, as Christ

teaches in Matthew 10:29. A sparrow is one of the most despised and apparently worthless of birds, but yet Christ says that not one of them will perish, be shot or harmed, except by the Father's will."

Hunters often return home saying: No luck today! They perhaps think it was due, among other things, to the powder—but actually it was God who did not permit any bird to be shot. Unbelieving hunters don't accept this, but we Christians believe it. And if one would assemble all the cannons of the world and shoot them—the sparrow would not be hit, if its time had not come.

Rambach writes further: "Luke 12:6: 'And not one of them is forgotten before God.' "

What a marvelous word: The dear God gives thought to each sparrow; He does not forget a single one. And yet people are so foolish that they think: "Would God so burden Himself and think of all these sparrows?" Remember, God is so great a God that He does not have to add in order to see how many sparrows He actually has. Even we, for example, can count four windows of a home at a glance, and estimate the number of window panes; but God looks and sees millions upon millions before Him and knows their exact number, without calculating. Rambach continues: "Even the tiniest, most despised, and most useless is subject to divine government and providence. Christ assures us of this in Matthew 10:30: 'Even the hairs of your head are all numbered'; so that none can fall out except according to the Father's will. That which we value highly, we count."

A beautiful observation! The Savior says: "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered." By this He does not say: God works out a problem of addition, and so counts them; rather, God considers important everything He created, considers it valuable, and is concerned about everything without exception.

Rambach goes on: "This demonstrates exact knowledge and the industriousness that is necessary to maintain things. As the sunlight does not despise the lowliest worm, neither does God's providence."

God could have arranged things in such a way that the glorious sun with its brilliant light would fall only on the eye of immortal man; but no, He has so planned it that, as often as the sun "comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber"[Psalm 19:5], its golden beam falls on the eye of the lowliest worm; yes, paints in gold and silver each minute grain of dust. Thus He has, in a manner of speaking, written before our eyes in clear letters: "I care for all, daily My goodness embraces all things, I am concerned about everything."

Continues Rambach: "We need to mark well that this includes also

the most insignificant things. Unlike an earthly king who by means of a general decree provides for each of his subjects, although there are many thousands whom he does not know personally. God knows the least and cares for them, as Christ, the mouth of truth, assures us. Nonetheless, reason suggests that it is hardly consistent with the majesty of God that He should lower Himself to the level of the most insignificant of His creatures. The heathen Pliny<sup>33</sup> was of the opinion that the divine majesty would be tainted if it was concerned about despised things. But these are foolish thoughts, even though the great churchman Jerome held to them.”<sup>34</sup>

[Here Walther has the following footnote:] Jerome writes: “It is repulsive to extend God’s majesty to the point where He knows at every moment how many mosquitoes come into existence, how many die, how many bedbugs, fleas, and flies are on our earth, how many fish are swimming in the water. We are not such foolish flatterers of God that we, while indeed holding that His power pertains also to the lowest creatures, condemn ourselves by saying that His providence in relation to rational and irrational beings is one and the same” (*Commentary on Habakkuk*, 1). [End of footnote.]

It is difficult to conceive how a theologian could have spoken thus. It is sad! He speaks as if it demanded a most difficult mathematical solution of God to know how many insects exist at the moment in the wide world—while His vision encompasses all, from beginning to end, without Him first being required to reflect on it. The dear God requires no problem solving as is true of people, for He knows all things intrinsically, the present, past, and future; He exists in the eternal now. God’s omnipresence and omniscience must have been very dark for Jerome.

Because of this Rambach adds: “By this means His glory will be greatly enhanced, namely: (1) the glory of His infinite kindness, when with the arms of His providence He embraces the lowliest worm as well as the most prominent angel. If it was not unsuitable for God to create them, why should it be unsuitable for Him to preserve them?”

This is most important! Otherwise we have to become atheists and materialists and say, “All this has evolved from the primordial slime; in this the dear God is not a partner.” What a repulsive, blasphemous teaching!

Rambach continues: “(2) the glory of His power and wisdom. This is no less evident in the creation of a mosquito than of an elephant; also in their preservation.”

If one were to argue which requires a greater measure of skill and power to create, a mosquito or an elephant, one would almost have to conclude that to create a mosquito requires greater skill and power. The mosquito has eyes, ears, mouth, and a mass of organs; and in this tiny

being is a kind of soul, a life, which pervades this little creature, an ability to do something or not to do it. All its members are interconnected in an inexpressibly marvelous manner, constituting a whole organism. The most skillfully designed ocean liner appears slovenly in contrast, and can't be compared at all. For the mosquito can move on its own, has life, and this life pervades all of its extremities. It can even sing, can even sting. That tiny thing can persecute man, and man is mighty grateful if he can escape it. The elephant panics when a swarm of bees attacks it. The huge helpless beast is afraid of the tiny insect. Shouldn't we, as human beings, be ashamed that there are people who fail to marvel at this and, like dumb cattle, simply ignore this grand design and do not bow their knees before God saying: "O God, how great You are! You have created millions upon millions and sustain them daily—creatures we despise as nothing, as pests—and therein is hidden Your highest wisdom, and Your supreme power."

[*Editorial note:* We omit another short quotation from Rambach. Walther continues:]

One would hardly attribute the power to think to a bee, for example that it would say to itself, "In two or three months it will snow, then winter will come; flowers will disappear; you must bring in a good harvest, or you will face hunger; what will your children do then?" No, the dear God guides the bee in so beautifully building its hive; and if man would not interfere, the bee would get along very well. Who says to the bee, "Gather wax, and so much honey, and bring it together in cells?" Certainly it is the dear God, who directs; else no animal would provide for itself.

God also instructs the beaver to build its house just so that he will not drown in it. An interesting article appeared recently in the *Abendschule* on this subject.<sup>35</sup> A new philosopher named Hartmann, who by the way rejects a personal God, described the caterpillar of the emperor moth. It soon spins a cocoon for itself which can easily be opened from the inside but resists attack from the outside. This philosopher adds: "This is the unconscious instinct in the animal." Indeed, what this atheist writes is unconscious foolishness!

Rambach continues: "Among creatures there is no intrinsic difference; the distinction depends on our point of view; for example, one may believe that a worm is on a much lower level than a lion. From our perspective, the latter is certainly at a higher level than the worm; however, setting aside our subjective view, the lowliest worm is in its way as marvelous as a lion."

Absolutely true! A mosquito is as skillfully put together as a lion. Through their microscopes scientists observe with amazement what all is involved in the mosquito's little leg, what minute veins it has. If all people would agree to spend their entire lifetime in an effort to create one single

mosquito, they would not accomplish a thing with all their skill, wisdom, and power, and would be put to shame. Therefore let those be accursed who deny the existence of a living God, while they everywhere see themselves surrounded by an immeasurable power and wisdom, and they in contrast are nothing but powerless dust!

Rambach continues: “For it consists merely of a specific combination of parts, from which the body is constituted. But this is not a problem for God, as it may seem. His limitless knowledge cannot be overloaded or exhausted.”

Regarding this same point we add several testimonies from Luther, who writes:

Even so, you are wrong in the use you make of this example, and in condemning as unprofitable the public discussion of the proposition that God is in the hole or the sewer. Your thoughts about God are all too human. There are, I admit, some shallow preachers who, from no motives of religion or piety, but perhaps from a desire for popularity or a thirst for some novelty or a distaste for silence, prate and trifle in the shallowest way. But these please neither God nor men, even if they assert that God is in the heaven of heavens. But where there are serious and godly preachers who teach in modest, pure, and sound words, they speak on such a subject in public without risk, and indeed with great profit. . . . Therefore, a godly mind is not shocked to hear that God is present in death or hell, both of which are more horrible and foul than either a hole or a sewer. Indeed, since Scripture testifies that God is everywhere and fills all things [Jer. 23:24], a godly mind not only says that He is in those places, but must needs learn and know that he is there. Or are we to suppose that if I am captured by a tyrant and thrown into a prison or a sewer—as has happened to many saints— I am not to be allowed to call upon God there or to believe that he is present with me, but must wait until I come into some finely furnished church? (*The Bondage of the Will, Luther’s Works, American Edition, Vol. 33, p. 47*).

Just let someone fall into a hidden pit; he will believe in this article quickly enough! How many precious martyrs have been cast into the most horrible pits, and how many were forced to drink manure drippings until they died. What? Should they have thought, “The holy, pure God will not be with me in this stench”? He certainly can be there; that does not pollute Him, as little as the sun is polluted while shining into the pit full of manure. As the golden sun, which casts its rays into the cesspool of manure as well as into a spring of clear water, is not dirtied in the former, nor purified in the latter, so God—that bright Sun—remains bright all over and is nowhere polluted or darkened.

[*Editorial note:* Walther quotes Luther to the effect that God Himself

works in creation and preservation *That These Words . . . "This Is My Body," etc., Still Stand Firm . . . 1527, Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 37, pp. 57 f.*). Walther continues:]

God does not use instruments in creation and preservation; He does this solely and alone. For governing He uses intermediaries, but creating and preserving are the prerogative of God's great majesty. In His creation and preservation He must be personally present, creating and preserving His creatures in every inner as well as outward detail. The Savior, for example, in healing the sick son of the nobleman (John 4:47-50) from afar off, did not do this by conveying His power to that place, but rather Jesus, who was visible in this place, was invisibly present also in the home where the sick youth lay, and there healed him. Had Christ not been omnipresent, He could have worked only where He was visible. So it is also with our dear God.

Luther continues: "Therefore, indeed, he himself must be present in every single creature in its innermost and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power" (ibid., p. 58).

Note the statement: "God with His power." Not: "power without God." That would be foolishness. But man would rather believe such foolishness than believe in the living, infinite, omnipresence of God. However, Luther offers proof from God's Word.

Luther continues: "For it is he who makes the skin and it is he who makes the bones; it is he who makes the hair on the skin, and it is he who makes the marrow in the bones; it is he who makes every bit of the hair, it is he who makes every bit of the marrow. Indeed, he must make everything, both the parts and the whole. Surely, then, his hand which makes all this must be present; that cannot be lacking" (ibid.).

If God were not ever present, ever active, nothing would develop. Most people think when they see a tiny green blade, and note considerable growth eight days later, that this has simply happened by itself. Oh, we blind people! This doesn't just happen by itself. If the dear God were not present everywhere, not a single seed would sprout, no sprout would develop into a stalk, and no stalk would ever bear a leaf, a flower, a fruit.

[*Editorial note:* Walther continues to quote Luther, who speaks of God's omnipresence. Walther comments:]

The entire world is filled with God. But the tragedy is that man does not believe this, as we stated at the outset. We human beings are by nature all atheists; that is demonstrated daily and hourly. Would anyone cling to one idle thought, or speak evil words, or commit ungodly acts, if he truly

believed: "Here stands the dear God?" In no way would he do this. A living Christian is fearful, like Joseph, to do anything contrary to his God. He knows God is always with him: He sees all, He hears all. God is not approximately aware; no, He is personally present. Whoever does not believe this, does not believe in God.

During these deplorable, blasphemous days we must courageously stress this article. The dear Christians seem to stress especially the Second and Third Articles, but the First they have too often shaken off their shoes. But we need to study also this article until our dying day; it is the foundation for the Second and Third. Many people do not believe the First Article correctly; when they then come to the Second, their reason rebels against it. But whoever accepts in faith the mighty wonders of the visible creation, he will not take offense when, for example, he hears: "The body and blood of Jesus Christ are in the Lord's Supper."

[*Editorial note:* Walther continues to quote the same writing of Luther's, to the effect that "the Divine Majesty is . . . entirely present in every individual thing" (ibid., p. 59). Walther comments:]

It is not the correct faith if someone is of the opinion that there is a portion of the dear God everywhere, as we always are at only one point with one part of our body.<sup>36</sup> We are indeed composite beings; but with God it is otherwise. He is not only everywhere, but He is everywhere entirely. And yet there is no multiplicity of gods, even though the dear God is everywhere entirely "Truly," you say, "how can I comprehend this?" Indeed, this is beyond human reason. But it is true; for God is not a being of spirit and body, with a foot here and a hand there. He does not occupy space, cannot be divided, is a simple being; where He is, there He is entirely. Is God in a little seed, then there is not merely a tiny portion of the dear God in it. The dear God Himself is in each little speck of dust, and the entire God. The entire God is also in us, in each part as in the whole. This is the omnipresence of God. Most people think the dear God is a kind of spirit, comparable to the air. As it is spread throughout the entire world, so people think God also diffuses Himself as a spirit and spreads Himself through the entire world. These are, however, nothing but wrong, foolish conceptions, constructed by reason. No, where God is, there He is totally, and He is everywhere.

Luther continues: "But now, his power is one and simple and is not divided, as if he made the husk of the kernel with his fingers and the pith of the kernel with his feet. Thus the entire divine power must be present throughout, in and on the kernel. For he alone makes it all. On the other hand, the same Majesty is so great that neither this world nor even a thousand worlds could embrace it and say, 'See, there it is!' " (ibid., p. 59).

God does not need to go somewhere to be there; He is everywhere already. Therefore Jesus did not descend from heaven as on a stairway; He was already in the entire world. He only began to be in the world in another form, namely as the God-man.

In another writing Luther says:

We say that God is no such extended, long, broad, thick, high, deep being. He is a supernatural, inscrutable being who exists at the same time in every little seed, whole and entire, and yet also in all and above all and outside all created things. There is no need to enclose him here, as this spirit dreams, for a body is much, much too wide for the Godhead; it could contain many thousand Godheads. On the other hand, it is also far, far too narrow to contain one Godhead. Nothing is so small but God is still smaller, nothing so large but God is still larger, nothing is so short but God is still shorter, nothing so long but God is still longer, nothing is so broad but God is still broader, nothing so narrow but God is still narrower, and so on. He is an inexpressible being, above and beyond all that can be described or imagined (*Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, 1528, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol. 37, p. 228).

When it is noted: "Nothing is so small but God is still smaller," Luther intends to say: If God wanted to be in the seedling, you might say: That is too small for Him. I would reply: He could be contained in a lesser object. He can be everywhere; He needs no room, no place, no extension. For us something may easily be too small or, contrariwise, too large. A church where several hundred can be present is much too large for one person. With the dear God it is otherwise. Nothing is so large that God is not larger; nothing so tiny that God cannot be in it entirely without having to become smaller or cringe together. The Reformed ask: "How can the body of Christ dwell within a host? He would be forced to squeeze Himself into it." What foolish reasoning! His body is not that of an ordinary man, rather the body of a great, immeasurable, eternal God, who can be wherever He wills.

Let us now hear wherein the providence of God actually consists. As John Gerhard explains it: "The divine providence over all things consists in two functions—preservation and governance. Created things are not maintained by themselves and by their own powers, but "by His Word of power" (Hebrews 1:3); "in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17); in God "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). As the existence of its rays depends on the sun, as its shadow depends on the body, so all creatures are dependent on divine providence."

Gerhard continues: "Rays (the sun's rays, that is) would not exist without the sun, from which they radiate; there would be no shadows if there were no bodies that cast shadows. Just so it is with the existence of all

things. . . . The good Lord has not created all things so that they can exist by themselves, but so that they continuously, into all eternity, are dependent on Him. For God will not share His honor with anyone; He wants to be Creator, Preserver, Governor over all things, and remain so to all eternity. . . . ”

Gerhard continues: “Preservation is nothing less than the continuation of being. . . . As all creatures have received their being, their attributes and their creative powers in creation and generation from God, so they are preserved by Him in their existence and action. . . . What is more natural for the sun than to rise daily? But it is God who permits the sun to rise (Matthew 5:45).”

As in most world languages, we use familiar expressions such as: “The sun rises, it is raining, it is hailing.” But that is an incorrect way of speaking, which Scripture explains by usually saying: “God allows the sun to rise, God rains, God hails.” Says the Savior: “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” [Matthew 5:45].

Gerhard again: “Although all things by nature received certain characteristics, they do not express these, nor can they express them, if they are not, if I may say so, upheld in their being and life by the power of God. Psalm 104:29-30: ‘When Thou hidest Thy face, they are dismayed; when Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the ground.’ Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4 read: ‘Man does not live by bread alone, but . . . man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.’ From this we not only learn that God could maintain and support man without natural means, but we are reminded that when God withdraws His word by which bread was first created and received the power to nourish, this same bread could in no way sustain man. The constant influence of the creative and supportive word is necessary so that the bread can express its implanted power to nourish.”

Some would reflect: “It is only natural that bread can nourish me but that a stone is neither digestible nor can increase my supply of blood.” But why is this? We Christians know: It comes from the fact that more than 6,000 years ago God placed His blessing on the bread. When there is bread in abundance, one is readily satisfied; but in times of famine people complain about hunger no matter how much bread they eat; if they see anything edible, they would like to eat it. Such a famine occurs when God withdraws His blessing; should He withdraw it completely, the very best wheat we raise would not nourish us, would not satisfy our hunger. For the

*blessing* inherent in the grain nourishes us. Only a blind heathen believes that the grain by itself provides the nourishment.

Gerhard continues: “Man is not healed by herbs, but by the word of God which implanted such power in them from the beginning and which even today continues to add such power.”<sup>37</sup>

Unbelieving physicians contend that medicinal herbs have this power, and that one need not believe in a God. But were God to withdraw His blessing, results would be negative.

Fecht writes: “If God were to withdraw His hand from any facet of life but for a moment, it would immediately revert to nothingness.”<sup>38</sup>

Having dealt with God’s universal preservation, we now approach the last part of the article regarding His providence, which deals with divine *government*. And in this we want to discuss only the essentials, namely what is particularly important if we want to recognize the glory that comes to God through this doctrine.

Gerhard writes about this point: “Divine providence cooperates in the good actions of people in a different way than in their bad actions.” It is presupposed here that God cooperates in all actions, whatever they may be; or, as the old theologians say: concurs, influences, or works with all that happens in the world—except for sin. Now the good actions fall in two categories, namely the civically good and the spiritually good in God’s sight.

In respect to this distinction, Gerhard writes the following: “In civically good transactions, divine providence operates so that it not only gives support and strength to such ventures, but at times even arouses the unregenerate to support them, directing them to worthy goals even when this is not their purpose. Thus it is recorded that God called Cyrus and grasped his right hand (Isaiah 45:1-3).”

This is highly important so that we not think that what the world is doing—especially the great deeds which take place in the state and among nations—is totally controlled by human beings. This is again an atheistic view of world events. God controls everything and has His divine eye over all. If God is opposed, no war can break out; if God does not will it, no peace can be concluded. And conversely, if God is opposed, no man can initiate a war; if God so wills, nations must conclude a peace. God gives war, God gives defeat. Whoever credits the victory to artillery or well-trained soldiers is basically an atheist; as atheists in recent times have always declared: “We know well who will be victorious—whoever has the best soldiers, artillery, etc.” But history demonstrates that the largest armies often have not succeeded against a small force. That happened only because God did not want the smaller army to be defeated. Xerxes had to

retreat from Europe with his million troops, after he had come to overrun the whole territory. Other tyrants, on the contrary, have been successful, even when the circumstances were such that we assumed they would go down to defeat. Why? God used them as scourges. When we Christians read the newspapers, we ought not to look to men, who are only instruments, but to God, who still rules the world.

Suppose we see, for example, that in the political realm things are in a sorry state, as we Americans observe all too often. We will not solve anything by scolding about it, but rather we must contritely beat our breast and say: God gives favorable times when He wishes to bless, and bad times when He decides to punish. Therefore, no revolutions; rather repentance! For “He puts down the mighty from their thrones and exalts those of low degree” [Luke 1:52]. We are always too inclined to look only to people. In former times the Jews probably did not believe that the dear God had grasped the hand of Cyrus, that powerful Eastern ruler. Therefore Isaiah had to tell them. But in our day we have all of Holy Scripture, and through it the key to world history; consequently the lowliest Christian stableboy can make a better judgment than the most prominent historian, if the latter is not a Christian. Whoever does not believe the Gospel, to him the entire world is an unsolved mystery. In our time we have observed in the first and second Napoleon that there is a God who rules the world. At first it was assumed that all depended on the monstrous military genius of the first Napoleon, who, it appeared, wanted to bathe the whole of Europe in blood; but behold! because people did not recognize him as the scourge of God, the dear God had to arrange it so that no people but snow, ice, and the sleety Russian weather defeated him.

Gerhard continues: “God commands and encourages spiritually good deeds in such a way that He Himself works them through the Holy Spirit, since by ourselves we are incompetent to think, much less to do, anything (2 Corinthians 3:5).”

Note this well! Spiritual good is not accomplished through our own power. As long as a person does not have a new spirit and a new heart, everything he does is nothing but sin in God’s sight, even if it is good in the sphere of civic activity. The conversion of man is brought about by God alone; a person does not cooperate at all. Man cannot make a decision on his own, as the Iowa Synod teaches, but rather God brings him to a decision, converts him, gives him new birth, awakens him. God Himself makes of him a new person.

Now then, Gerhard continues: “After we have been reborn through the Holy Spirit, we are led in such a way as to also become active, that is, the will of man operates not through the powers given by nature, but rather

through the power given by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and then is an active, cooperative instrument” (Vol. 2, p. 70. See note 37.).

This also is true: Whoever has not arrived at this, namely to work with the Holy Spirit, is not a Christian. Whoever bases his Christianity on occasionally attending church and there letting God’s Word impress him, awaken him, frighten or comfort him, and then gets up and leaves, remaining essentially unchanged—he is not a Christian. A Christian is one who through God’s Word and Spirit has been so transformed that he himself now works together with God in all spiritual good; for only then will God cooperate. It must not be forgotten that no one can ever work together with God through his own natural power, but *only* through the Spirit and the power which he has received in his conversion.

Now we come to a highly important issue, namely: To what extent is God a co-worker with evil actions?

Gerhard tells us: “God neither orders, nor desires, nor supports, nor does He move anyone to evil actions. We therefore assert that God cooperates in evil actions, first, insofar as He foreknows, or rather knows and observes. Nothing escapes His vision, which is more penetrating than the sun.”

In recent times it has been often stated that God does not have any advance knowledge of evil, for if He did, it would then be necessary that the evil would happen; but if that were true, it is said, then people would not be responsible. And some godless murderers cannot grasp the idea that God can foreknow what someone will or will not do. Here we must remember that God is impenetrable. Even though we are unable to muster logical reasoning as to how God can foreknow something that is done freely by human beings, and not under compulsion—enough; God knows it. Very correctly Gerhard says: “Or, rather, knows and sees.” He wants to say: With God, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as *foreknowledge*; He has no present, no past, no future. What He knows He knows. Only for us is it a foreknowledge; in His eyes everything is already there. Hence, this statement about the Son: “Today I have begotten You” [Psalm 2:7]. *Today!* He does not say: “Early in eternity,” for then we would think there was an “earlier,” when He had not yet been conceived, hence did not yet exist. This “begetting” is from eternity. What happens continuously has already happened. If Scripture would say of something that it once happened, one could easily take it as referring to an incident which occurred once and did not reoccur, like creation; but the begetting of God’s Son is an eternal, that is, a constant, continuous happening. For in eternity there is no “today” of the kind before which was a “yesterday” and after which is a “tomorrow.”

Gerhard again: "This foreknowledge, however, does not impose a necessity of doing evil deeds. God's providence operates in that it sustains nature, for in Him we move (Acts 17:28). It is the remarkable patience of God which sustains all, even the energies and movements of such who most flagrantly blaspheme Him. He is so patient because of the intercession of the Son, and this goodness of God invites to repentance."

With this Gerhard is saying: If God's Son had not, so to speak, made a covenant with His heavenly Father from eternity, and the Father had not agreed: "Go, My Son, and redeem the sinners," God would immediately have had to cast the world of Adam and Eve into hell after the Fall; He would not have been able to view it with long-suffering, but would immediately have had to destroy the world. It would have disintegrated in the heat of His wrath. Hence also a part of the angels, who have no Savior, were cast into the abyss of hell immediately after they had sinned. Mankind, however, was preserved because of the intercession of God's Son in their behalf. He said to His heavenly Father: "You cannot and may not destroy them; I will redeem them. I will become a man, will take upon Myself their sins. I want to do for them what they have not done, and suffer for them what they have deserved to suffer for their misdeeds; I want to drain the last drop from the cup of Your wrath." Replied the Father: "Very well; the world shall remain until the last one is born whom I have elected to salvation." As soon as the last elect is born, the last pillar of the world will have collapsed. God, in His wrath, cannot permit the world to remain longer than that. Therefore Luther has said so beautifully: "Christians are the legs of the world; hence they must also wade in the mire." Yes, it is an amazing long-suffering of God that He continues to sustain the godless, that He preserves the tongue with which they blaspheme Him, sustains the ear which hears cursing, keeps the eyes which commit adultery and fornication, maintains the hands with which they steal, preserves the gullet through which, worse than cattle, they pour down intoxicating liquors, keeps the feet with which they travel the way of destruction, preserves the fist which kills a brother, sustains the body which ought to be the temple of the Holy Spirit but has become the temple of idols. Oh, the inexpressible forbearance of God!

God is not bound by the so-called laws of nature. An example of this is the three men in the fiery furnace. And when God allowed the prophet Jonah to be cast into the sea, He did not permit him to drown, but brought him into the belly of a whale. And when the Hebrews had to pass through the Red Sea, the water lost its property of always requiring bounds and stood erect like a wall. In this God proved that He is the One who continuously sustains the laws of nature; without Him nature does not

have them. When God presents the example of Jeroboam's withered hand in Scripture, He thereby wants to tell us: "Behold, when I withdraw My hand, you also need to take back yours."

To continue with Gerhard: "Consequently, if we would be destroyed as soon as we commit sin, we could not turn to repentance (Romans 2:4); therefore when man by his impenitent heart stores up God's wrath [Romans 2:5], he is therefore sustained, so that God can demonstrate the full measure of His wrath against sin in the consequent punishments, to the honor of divine justice (Exodus 9:16)."

The more a person resists divine grace, the more he invites God's wrath, so much the more he stores up against himself a measure of God's wrath against that day. Many a one is preserved who thereby will only receive a greater damnation, while another is suddenly taken away.

Gerhard continues: "It is moreover necessary to carefully distinguish between the movement and the activity itself, and the *wrongness* of the activity. The act as action is not in itself sin, else all actions were sin; rather the errors and omissions related to the action is where the sin lies. However, these errors and omissions do not originate from a universal cause, but rather from an immediate cause, namely the will of man. Augustine illustrates this in the example of limping, which does not follow from the moving power of the soul, but from the sprain of the ankle" (Vol. 2, pp. 82—88. See note 37.)

A similar illustration is also used by Luther. The fact that a horse limps is not the fault of the rider, but due to the lameness of the horse. When a horse is lame it will limp, even though the best-trained rider is in the saddle. No one will say: "Hey, what are you doing? Your horse is limping." The rider will answer: "Why blame me? I'm not forcing it to limp." Thus, says Luther, it is with all creatures. God is the rider. If the horse which God rides is well, everything is well—these are the Christians, the children of God. If the horse is crippled, the dear God may be ever so good a rider—the horse will limp. Consequently, God is at all times the moving force in all people: He certainly generates the good; but He does not generate evil, for the evil is already there. This is at the same time a justification for Luther's entire book *The Bondage of the Will*. If there are other passages where Luther speaks as though he believes that God is doing the evil, it only appears that way. Just think back to the example of the lame horse.

Much more could be said concerning the relationship of God to evil; here we are concerned only with God's part or participation in evil. This is the difficulty and that in which God's honor must be defended. One could say: God concurs with evil insofar as He forbids it, restrains it, punishes it,

turns it into good, shortens it, and diverts it from what the Evil One desires. Here we are dealing with upholding God's glory. We Lutherans firmly believe that God never is indolent, looks idly by as a mere spectator, whether what happens is good or bad. But we also believe, as God is our guide, that God has absolutely no part in evil. We will have no share in the Calvinistic theory which intermingles our dear God with evil.

Question: How do we preserve God's honor when we say that God permits evil when we human beings would be punishable if we would do that? Answer: That we thereby make ourselves liable stems from the fact that we people have the duty, as God's subjects, to prevent all evil, since it is in opposition to God. We owe this to God and our neighbor; but God owes no debt to any creature. Who would dare demand this of Him? Who would dare call Him to account for this? We must all confess: "No, Lord, You are not guilty, for You are subordinate to no one."

On the other hand, God will in eternity reveal that He has turned all evil into a good conclusion. In this life we note this in a few instances, e.g., the selling of Joseph into slavery. That was a dastardly deed, and yet Joseph assured his brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" [Genesis 50:20]. Again we note this in the most infamous of crimes, the deed of Judas Iscariot, the traitor. No other deed has had a more happy ending than this. Thus the Lord demonstrates from several examples even in this life that He is so amazingly ingenious that He can turn evil into something good. And in eternity we will be amazed; and even though the damned in hell will not be singing, "Glory to God in the highest!"—yet even with respect to hell, all the saints will praise God and exclaim: "You are not only Everlasting Love, but You are Eternal Holiness. Your wrath burns into the depths of hell; You are the Lord of lords. Woe to him who turns himself against You! Totally crushed, he finally lies under Your feet. *Praise God! Praise God in heaven and in hell!*"