

THE EVIL MODERN THEORY OF OPEN QUESTIONS

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By Pastor Bryce L Winter

Toowoomba Queensland

- I. ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE, TRUE OPEN QUESTIONS OR THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS (in the true sense of the term) ARE THOSE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS WHICH ARISE IN OUR STUDY OF SCRIPTURE DOCTRINES, BUT ARE NOT ANSWERED BY SCRIPTURE AT ALL OR AT LEAST NOT CLEARLY; AND THEREFORE SINCE GOD'S WORD DOES NOT ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS, THE CHRISTIAN MUST NOT ENDEAVOUR TO DO SO.
- II. HOLY SCRIPTURE CONDEMNS THE EVIL MODERN THEORY OF OPEN QUESTIONS WHICH ERRONEOUSLY TEACHES THAT DOCTRINES CONTAINED OR INDICATED IN SCRIPTURE ARE DECLARED "FREE" OR "OPEN", SO THAT EACH PERSON CAN PLEASE HIMSELF WHAT HE BELIEVES, TEACHES OR PRACTICES; HENCE SUCH PEOPLE REGARD SUCH DIFFERING OPINIONS IN MATTERS OF SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE AS NOT BEING DIVISIVE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.
- III. HOLY SCRIPTURE CONDEMNS THE FALSE ARGUMENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN ADVANCED IN FAVOUR OF THE EVIL MODERN THEORY OF OPEN QUESTIONS AS COMPLETELY INVALID, SINFUL AND WHICH ORIGINATE IN OUR BLIND, CARNAL, CONCEITED SELF-WILLED AND PRESUMPTUOUS FLESH.

THE EVIL MODERN THEORY OF OPEN QUESTIONS

Johann Conrad Dannhauer, the orthodox Lutheran teacher of Strassburg wrote the following words a few years before his death in 1666:

“Q. Curtius expressed himself correctly when he said: ‘YOU CANNOT DESPISE ANY POINT IN AN ENEMY WITH IMPUNITY (without injury, BLW); FOR IN DESPISING HIM YOU NEGLECT HIM AND SO STRENGTHEN HIM’. This very neglect in a former era gave birth to the ANTICHRIST (the Papacy at Rome, BLW) and, WHILE PEOPLE SLEPT, enabled him to sow his injurious seeds. Because of INDOLENCE (laziness, BLW), WEARINESS, or an EYE that is not SUFFICIENTLY TRAINED, the same neglect fails to see the tricks of the SYNCRETISTIC (UNIONISTIC, BLW) spirit which has lifted up its head in our time and is almost dominating present religious thought. In a short while, perhaps, the world will be surprised to see that IT in so short a time has become SYNCRETISTIC and, as a result, ATHEISTIC.” (Quoted by Dr. C.F.W. Walther in Lehre und Wehre, Foreword, Vol. XIV, 1868, Emphasis added).

After approximately three hundred years we see Dannhauer’s words literally fulfilled before our eyes. The great majority in the visible church today have become unionistic and atheistic. This has occurred because both the lay-people and the pastors of today have gone to sleep spiritually, have failed to become well-acquainted with the various methods of deception which the devil is using in his final effort to destroy the true Church of God. We must never forget that we are living in the time of GREAT CONFUSION in spiritual matters, as St. John points out in Rev. 11:13, where the GREAT EARTHQUAKE (the terrible doctrinal confusion in the visible church of the last times) occurred. Because of this there “were slain of the men seven thousand”, that is a large number of those who once truly believed in Christ became so confused and bewildered that they lost their faith and finally their salvation.

Since we are living in the last evil days of this world, we must not overlook the Scriptural fact that the ERA OF THE GREAT DECEPTION is upon us. Pastor F.G. Kleinig writes:

“In Matt. 24, the Lord places before us in a vivid manner the signs of the last times. Take your Bible and count how many times the word ‘deceives’ appears in that chapter. Revelation chapter 20 which also speaks of the ‘little’ period before the end, specifically mentions the fact that it is during that time that Satan, loosed from his thousand-year prison, will go out to deceive the nations in the four quarters of the earth.

“Today there is deception everywhere, in matters of politics, finance, education, etc., but especially also in matters of religion. All false prophets are deceivers. Also quite frequently Church Unions are based on deception. Also this Australian Lutheran Union is not free from deception. Time and again lay people from the LCA have told us when certain matters concerning the Union were explained to them: ‘Well we didn’t know that! Our leaders told us everything had been settled and the going was all clear, and now this!’ That was deception!

“Even some of the former ELCA leaders (e.g. The late Rev. F.W. Noack, Toowoomba, BLW) themselves have privately admitted that they also had been deceived with regard to certain matters!” (Answers to Questions on Church Fellowship and Other Matters raised by Bro. V.J. Schultz - by Pastor F.G. Kleinig, p.14).

Based on a portion of one of the famous speeches of Churchill, Pastor Kleinig then drew the striking parody:

“Never before in the history of the former ELCA had so much been put over so many by so few!” (ibid.).

Therefore, if we are not to be confused or deceived in matters of God's Word and thus lose our faith, it is of the utmost importance that, on the one hand, all pastors of the ELCR, besides thoroughly indoctrinating our people in ALL the sacred truths of God's Word rightly divided, also draw attention to ALL the CUNNING tricks Satan is now using, explain them thoroughly, and earnestly WARN our people against them.

On the other hand, it is ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY that everyone of our lay-people busies himself with the Word of God, obtains a thorough sound knowledge of it, and on this basis judges carefully the doctrine and practice of the pastors. In this respect Pastor F.G. Kleinig WARNS:

“Any church-member of ours who today is indifferent towards God's Truth, who is lazy and not prepared to do some private ‘home-work’ with his Bible CAN ONLY BLAME HIMSELF if he becomes entangled in Satan's web and falls a prey to his hosts of false prophets, and in the end loses his own soul.” (Steadfast, January, 1968, Vol. III. No 1, p.3. Emphasis added).

Why does God permit Satan to attack Christ's flock with false doctrine and erroneous practices?

Two reasons are given in GOD'S WORD. In the first place God permits it TO PROVE or TEST HIS CHILDREN. St. Paul tells the Corinthians, “For there must be HERESIES (Greek: hairéseis, comes from the verb meaning to choose to be different from God's Word in what a person believes and practices) among you, that (Greek: gives purpose of these false doctrines) they which are APPROVED (Greek: dókimoi - those who have been put to a test, have overcome it and have been approved) may be made manifest (Greek: might become identified) among you” (1 Cor. 11:19). If no-one ever attacked the pure doctrine, it would never be clear as to who clings to God's Word. When false teachers arise in the church, then those who sincerely care for God's Word reveal themselves. If the pure doctrine were never attacked, Christians would soon become lazy and lukewarm. The more others depart from God's Word and attack it, the more a Christian is driven diligently to study it and with all his strength faithfully to cling to it. Dr. C.F.W. Walther writes:

“Heretics (false teachers, BLW), therefore, are nothing else than the grindstone of the Church, whereby it learns to use the Sword of the Spirit ever more keenly.” (Old Standard Gospels, Quoted in Steadfast, *ibid.*).

In the second place, GOD OFTEN PUNISHES THOSE WHO BECOME UNTHANKFUL FOR HIS WORD by sending false teachers. When it happens that God's Word is despised and ungratefully received, when earthly treasures are regarded more highly than the pure doctrine, when people become ashamed before the world of the heavenly truth, when nothing is done to maintain the orthodox Lutheran ministry, when the hearers no longer distinguish between truth and error, in His righteous wrath God removes from them the precious bread of life and gives to them the hard stones of man-made teachings. In this way God's wrath comes upon them as St. Paul writes in 2 Thess. 2:10-12, “Because they received not the LOVE of the truth, that they might be saved, for this cause God shall send them STRONG DELUSION (Greek: a strong deceiving power), that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

The evil modern theory of Open Questions was the fiery dart (Eph. 6:16) of Satan by means of which churches which once were orthodox were corrupted by the devil. With the corruption of the Scripture doctrine of church fellowship and the resulting spread of the evil modern theory of Open Questions hordes of false prophets flooded into the visible church.

As far as the ELCR is concerned the serious dangers which threaten its very spiritual life from this dreaded poisonous theory are as follows:

By means of the evil modern theory of Open Questions Satan is:

- a) trying to bring about many anti-Scriptural church unions, the final aim of which is the ECUMENICAL CHURCH (one world church);
- b) trying to get even the slightest error to be tolerated in our Federation and thus endanger the whole Word of God.

In order that we may be loyal and obedient children of God, be warned against this satanic attack and escape the wrathful judgement of the Lord, let us carefully study the topic of this Essay

THE EVIL MODERN THEORY OF OPEN QUESTIONS

We will devote our attention to THREE important THESIS

I.

Our first thesis reads:

I. ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE, TRUE OPEN QUESTIONS OR THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS (in the true sense of the term) ARE THOSE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS WHICH ARISE IN OUR STUDY OF SCRIPTURE DOCTRINES, BUT ARE NOT ANSWERED BY SCRIPTURE AT ALL OR AT LEAST NOT CLEARLY; AND THEREFORE SINCE GOD'S WORD DOES NOT ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS, THE CHRISTIAN MUST NOT ENDEAVOUR TO DO SO.

A. IMPORTANCE OF CORRECT UNDERSTANDING OF THE EXPRESSION

Pastor Kleinig frequently quoted the old axiom: "Two people may use the same words and may both subscribe to the same doctrinal statement; but whether they mean the same thing by that statement may be quite a different matter." Dr. C.F.W. Walther instructed his students:

"These two things, then, are required of you: the same doctrine in the same terms and the same mind and judgement." (Law and Gospel, Walther, p.277).

So it is of the utmost importance that we understand the correct meaning of the term "OPEN QUESTION". Even the former UELCA acknowledged a double use of the term. Prof. Riedel writes:

"The term is used by our friends of the ELSA, as well as by us. They themselves acknowledge 'open questions'. But as the saying is: 'If two persons do the same thing, it is not the same'. What they (ELSA, BLW) mean thereby IS VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE MEAN..." (Statement of Controversy, Riedel, 16, 20-21. Quoted in Brief Statement of the Chief Doctrinal Differences existing between the ELSA and the UELCA, Dr. W. Janzow, p.6).

B. IN THE TRUE SENSE OF THE TERM WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES MEAN BY THE TERMS "OPEN QUESTIONS" AND "THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS"?

God's Word defines true "Open Questions" as questions which Scripture leaves open or unanswered. "Theological Problems" are such problems as cannot be solved on earth because God has not given us the solution in Scripture. Here the Scripture theologian must teach only what Scripture teaches, no more, no less. Wherever Scripture does not speak, the Scripture theologian dare not put forward his own ideas. Every true teacher of God's Word must learn not only to speak what God's Word speaks, BUT ALSO TO KEEP SILENT where God's Word does not speak. In child-like faith the Scripture theologian in true humility is to bring his reason into subjection to the Word of God and learn to say, "Nescio - I don't know", where Scripture is

silent. This definition of "Open Questions" is very important, because only Scripture, and not man's pet ideas, is to decide what is to be taught in the Christian Church. Holy Scripture ALONE is the spiritual teacher of men. Christ Himself commands that disciples of His are to be brought into His fold by baptising and by "teaching them (the hearers, BLW) to observe (Greek: teerein - keep strictly) all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20).

He who has not learned this art of silence and dares to speak where God's Word is silent is condemned by Jer. 23:16: "Thus said the Lord of Hosts, 'HEARKEN NOT (Hebrew: do not listen to or heed) unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you; THEY MAKE YOU VAIN (Hebrew: mahbilim - to make you yield yourself to vain delusion; seduce you to false confidence; befog, deceive); they speak a vision of their own heart (Hebrew: they speak the sinful thoughts of their own mind) and not out of the mouth of the Lord."

If we take upon ourselves the right to answer what Scripture does not answer, we ask people to accept our OPINION as divine truth. Thus we would be REJECTING those Scripture passages which forbid us to add anything to God's Word (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; 1 Peter 4:11).

C. AGREEMENT OF OLD MISSOURI AND ELSA

This was the official position of the old ELSA as Dr. W. Janzow testifies:

"Those questions in the domain of Christian doctrine may be termed open questions which Scripture answers either not at all or not clearly. Since Christian doctrine may not be augmented or developed by men, inasmuch as all are to continue in the Word and doctrine of Christ and His chosen Apostles, John 8:31-32; Acts 2:42; 2 Thess. 2:15; open questions must remain open questions" (Brief Statement of the Chief Doctrinal Differences, etc., Janzow, p.6). This was taken from the wording of section 44 of the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod, 1932.

Dr. C.F.W. Walther teaches the same when he writes:

"There can be no doubt about the existence of 'open questions'. God's Word expressly says, 'Ye shall add nothing unto the Word', Deut. 4:2; 12:32; cf. Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18. Whatever is not contained in, nor decided by, God's Word, cannot be placed on a level with God's Word nor added thereto.... Therefore, in the sense of the term just mentioned, open questions are all those doctrines which are not decided in the Word of God either in a positive or negative way.... According to the limits which have just been outlined, open questions.... are all the so-called theological problems, or questions which force themselves upon the student as he studies the Christian articles of faith, but for which there is no solution in the Word of God." (CTM, 1946, p.485, emphasis added).

D. EXAMPLES OF TRUE OPEN QUESTIONS

Among the true Open Questions the orthodox Lutheran teachers place the following:

- a) We cannot answer the question how sin originated, since all creatures, including all the angels, were originally created "very good";
- b) Nor can we answer the question how, as the Formula of Concord puts it, "one was hardened, blinded, given over to a reprobate mind, while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again?" (Triglotta, p.1081,57).

Every attempt to answer these questions will always be wrong. Especially does the Formula of Concord warn against answering the latter; for to attempt to do so must lead either to Calvinism (denying universal grace) or to Semi-Pelagianism and Synergism (the denial of sola gratia).

In Luther's day some posed the foolish open question, "What was God doing before He created the universe?" Luther's answer was very apt: "He was making switches to use on foolish people who ask such questions." That is why Dr. F. Pieper writes:

"since Scripture furnishes no information on these open questions and theological problems, it is foolish to spend much time and energy on them" (Christian Dogmatics, 1, p.95, emphasis added).

Dannhauer tells us the resulting benefits to those who foolishly try to answer these questions:

"The one milks the billy goat, and the other holds a sieve" (ibid.).

To sum up: all those who try to answer real open questions (a) disagree with Scripture, because they refuse to abide by it, 1 Peter 4:11; (b) are unscholarly, because they pretend to know what they cannot know. The knowledge of Christian truth is gained only by continuing in the Word of Christ. Whatever is outside of this is nothing but conceit and ignorance (1 Tim. 6:3). Let us heed Luther's warning:

"There are two hindrances to the Gospel: the first is teaching false doctrine, driving the consciences into the Law and works. And the second is this trick of the devil.... he sneaks in from the rear; raises useless questions and gets men to contend about them and meanwhile to forget the chief thing." (ibid, p.96).

While these theological problems come into the area of non-fundamental articles of faith, yet it is a grievous mistake to draw the conclusion that all non-fundamental doctrines are true open questions. Dr. Walther writes:

"For although all so-called theological problems may be counted among the aequivoce (this refers to two statements which on the surface appear to be the same but when carefully examined are different, BLW) so-called non-fundamental articles, you cannot reverse this order and consider all non-fundamental articles problems." (CTM, 1946, p.486).

This difference must at all times be kept clear to avoid confusion.

Such Scripture theologians like Luther deserve to be praised when they speak where Scripture speaks and where Scripture does not speak humbly step aside and keep silent. Luther said on one occasion:

"What I do not know for certain (from Scripture), I will teach no-one." (SL XX: 1062).

II.

Our second thesis reads:

II. HOLY SCRIPTURE CONDEMNS THE EVIL MODERN THEORY OF OPEN QUESTIONS WHICH ERRONEOUSLY TEACHES THAT DOCTRINES CONTAINED OR INDICATED IN SCRIPTURE ARE DECLARED "FREE" OR "OPEN", SO THAT EACH PERSON CAN PLEASE HIMSELF WHAT HE BELIEVES, TEACHES OR PRACTICES; HENCE SUCH PEOPLE REGARD SUCH DIFFERING OPINIONS IN MATTERS OF SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE AS NOT BEING DIVISIVE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

A. EVIL MODERN THEORY OF OPEN QUESTIONS DEFINED

In our day there are many questions that God has clearly and definitely decided in His Word which the liberals declare to be "Open Questions."

What are those doctrinal points that at the present time are declared “Open Questions”? To enumerate all of them would fill pages. For the time being we shall list only those which concern the Australian Lutheran scene. As in the former UELCA and now in the LCA the following are placed among the open questions: the doctrines of the Church and ministry, the Office of the Keys, the future millennium, the doctrine of Sunday, the Antichrist, first resurrection, conversion of Israel, church government, predestination, kenosis, inspiration, creation and the word “day” in Genesis 1.

Prof. Riedel in 1926 defines their understanding of “Open Questions” as follows:

“Truths contained or indicated in Scripture, concerning which we as Lutherans who take their stand upon Scripture and Confessions have as yet not attained a unanimous understanding, which, moreover, are not considered justifying severance of Church-fellowship for the very reason that combined and continuous efforts on the part of those of one faith are necessary in order to apprehend and define them according to the Analogy of Faith and Analogy of Scripture - such truths, in short, we denote as ‘Open Questions’....

“.... ‘Open Questions’ is but another name for ‘different opinions’ regarding certain Scriptural teachings.” (Statement of Controversy, Riedel, p.16, 20-21).

Another leading UELCA man, Schmetzer wrote:

“‘Open Questions’ may be divided into two classes: Those belonging to the realms of hope, such as the millennium, Antichrist, conversion of Israel as a nation, the passing away of the earth, and the hope that the Lord will deal with heathen and Jew at the judgement according to the same grace offered in the Gospel; and those belonging to the realms of faith, in which the things are acknowledged by all, but in which more the terms and definitions are in dispute. In this sense the following are ‘open questions’: The Church, the ministerial office, church government, predestination, kenosis, inspiration” (Berechtigung, p.3-4).

B. HOLY SCRIPTURE CONDEMNS AND REJECTS THIS SINFUL THEORY

According to Scripture we reject this sinful theory because it is unionistic, indifferentistic and violates the Word of God. We cannot consider or treat any doctrine that is clearly taught in God’s Word or that contradicts some clear Word of God as an “Open Question”, even though the doctrine may be a non-fundamental one. The evil modern theory of ‘Open Questions’ is condemned by Scripture as follows:

1. Holy Scripture sternly commands all Christians to keep the WHOLE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE pure and free from even the slightest error. “Stand fast (Greek: be constantly standing firmly) and hold (Greek: be holding fast to) the TRADITIONS (Greek: teachings)” (2 Thess. 2:15). “That good thing which was committed (Greek: in trust) unto thee keep (Greek: guard and keep unadulterated)” (2 Tim. 1:14). “Continue (Greek: be remaining) thou in the things which thou hast learnt” (2 Tim. 3:14). Doctrine is not kept in its purity when the evil modern theory of ‘Open Questions’ rules. False teachers are tolerated so that error mingles with the truth.
2. Such an evil theory militates against the office of “rebuking”, whereby false doctrines are reprovved and condemned, a duty which God has imposed upon all faithful teachers, Titus 1:9, 13; 2 Tim. 4:2; 3:16; Matt. 5:12ff; 16:6.
3. God’s Word demands that there be no divisions in doctrine or practice and that all Christians in a church body be perfectly woven together in the same mind and in the same judgement, 1 Cor. 1:10.

4. Such an evil theory is very dangerous, because when such errors are left unchecked and are not removed, they spread, strengthen the erring in their errors and eventually truth is completely put to death, Gal. 5:9; 2 Tim. 2:17-18.
5. The evil modern Theory of 'Open Questions' militates against all those words of Scripture which command us to rebuke and sever prayer and church fellowship with all persistent errorists, Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 6:14, 17; Gal.1:8; 5:12; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Tim. 6:3; Titus 3:10; Amos 3:3; Matt. 5:18-19.

Who can read these Bible passages without realising that Holy Writ clearly rejects the evil modern Theory of 'Open Questions'? What else is the use of this evil Theory than a flagrant contradiction of the words of the Holy Spirit? Is it not a terrible thing to declare that what the great God has decided is still undecided? to grant man freedom to contradict when the great God has spoken? Is it not truly terrible to sift what God has given us in His Word and say: "THIS you must believe, confess and teach; THAT you may reject"?

Therefore with Dr. C.F.W. Walther we of the ELCR confess:

"(a) No error, nothing that is contradictory to the Word of God, may be granted the right of existence in the orthodox Church; (b) no-one in the orthodox Church has any permission to depart from the Word of God even in the smallest point, whether he does so negatively or positively or indirectly; (c) every departure from the clear Word of God within the Lutheran Church, even though it should consist in nothing more than denying that Balaam's ass spoke, demands that steps be taken to correct such departure; (d) finally, when all instruction, admonition, warning, threatening and manifested patience are fruitless and ineffective and the respective person or communion refuses to renounce the contradiction of the clear Word of God, **EXPULSION OR A SCHISM WILL HAVE TO FOLLOW.**" (Quoted in CTM, 1946, p.497).

The position of old Missouri in 1940 basically was the same as the following shows:

"We have testified from the beginning of our synodical life to the present day and hour that we are not permitted to distinguish between things in the Bible that are to be believed and others that need not be believed. We have always and say today that anyone who denies even a fact so remote from the doctrine of salvation as, let us say, the fact that David slew Goliath or that Ruth was a Moabitess, **CANNOT HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH US**, for the simple reason that such a person denies what is plainly stated as a fact in the Bible" (May 28, 1940, Lutheran Witness, quoted in Baal or God, p.308).

C. THE EVIL OPEN QUESTIONS THEORY AND THE UELCA

Pastor Kleinig remarks that the basis of the Immanuel Synod was the evil "Open Questions" Theory. Dr Stoltz states:

"These (characteristics of the Kavel line) are.... a definite conviction that among those who adhere to the Lutheran Confessions there may be differences of opinion (Open Questions) which do not necessitate severance of fellowship." (English Version of VELKA, p.157ff).

Pastor G.J. Rechner of the Immanuel Synod in 1888 stated:

"We regard it as essential that we accept as our authority St. Augustine's dictum: 'In essentials unity, in doubtful things liberty, in all things charity'. Except we regard our differences as 'Open Questions', how can we possibly hope to reach agreement in the matters that separate us....? Who of us is going to decide as to who is in the right? Who is to be the Pope that through his authoritative sentence is going to settle the dispute? You say this, we say that: who is going to decide as to who has the correct Scriptural

exposition?" (Official Protocol of Intersynodical Conference, signed by Pastors G.J. Rechner, J.G. Auricht, P.J. Oster, K. Dorsch).

Pastor Kleinig, commenting on Rechner's reference to the saying attributed to Augustine mentions that it is quite uncertain whether he ever made it. Then he quotes G. Buchmann:

"To all appearances this statement is twelve hundred years younger than Augustine, to whom it is here and there ascribed" (Geflügelte Worte, 27 ed. 1925, p.444).

We have already noted the UELCA's position on this matter. Dr. Hebart on page 283 of his history of the VELKA states:

"Truths contained or indicated in Scripture (Pastor Kleinig here adds: mark, not human opinions, but Scripture truths) concerning which we Lutherans grounded in Scripture and Confession have as yet reached no unanimous agreement, and which are not regarded as divisive of church-fellowship for the reason that we have agreed to work together in order to apprehend and formulate them in accordance with the analogy of faith and Scripture, such truths contained or indicated in Scripture we, for the sake of brevity, designate as 'Open Questions'."

Here lay the basic difference (among others) between the ELCA and the UELCA before the union in 1965: The UELCA agreed to disagree, agreeably; and the historic position of the ELCA before 1965 was: first unity in doctrine and practice, then union. Realising this Pastor Dorsch (ELSA) at the conclusion of the Intersynodical Meeting of March 1, 1888 declared:

"We see it useless to hope for a union at present. Before we can hope to unite, we must first of all reach agreement on the principles of Scripture interpretation."

D. EVIL OPEN QUESTIONS THEORY AND THE THESIS OF AGREEMENT

Even the ELCA in 1948 changed Romans 16:17 so as to apply it only to those whom you could prove were non-Christian, thereby establishing in their midst the evil "Open Questions" Theory.

Seeing that the evil modern Theory of "Open Questions" was the chief difference which divided the two churches one would have expected a special article in it, condemning it. But no; the term "Open Questions" is not even mentioned in that document. Veiled allusions to it are made in several places. In Thesis 1, 4(e) it is cunningly stated:

"In case of differences in exegesis (Scripture exposition, BLW) that affects doctrine, agreement on the basis of God's Word must be sought by combined, prayerful examination of the passage or passages in question."

Now we will let Pastor Kleinig continue:

"So far, so good. But now listen carefully to what follows: 'If this does not lead to agreement, because no unanimity (complete agreement, all being of the same mind and the same judgement, compare 1 Cor.1:10) has been reached on the clarity (clearness) of the passage or passages in question, and hence on the stringency (binding nature) and adequacy (sufficiency) of the Scriptural proof, divergent views (remember this refers to doctrine) arising from such differences of interpretation are not divisive of church fellowship.' (emphasis ours).

"Here we surely see the cloven foot-prints of the devil. This quotation from the Theses of Agreement is quite a startling and at the same time satanically clever statement, for it provides full play for the notorious 'Open Questions Theory', which not only permits, but also legalises and condones differences in doctrine in the same church body, and not

only flatly contradicts but also abolishes the rule of Scripture THAT YE ALL SPEAK THE SAME THING, 1 Cor. 1:10.” (Answers to Questions on Church Fellowship, etc., p.2-3).

Again, in regard to certain practices, as for example united prayer with people of heterodox denominations, these things are placed ‘into the area of casuistics’ (a cover-word for ‘Open Questions’) and are left to the conscience of the individual.

The terrible thing is that a number of otherwise conservative Lutherans have failed to detect this evil theory. Rev. K. Marquart who previously quoted the above statement of Hebart’s then goes on to write:

“The anomaly was corrected, by the way, in our Theses of Agreement, which clearly state that all doctrines of Holy Writ are equally binding’ (1/4) and that no differences, even in Bible interpretation, may be tolerated if they in any way impair the teaching of Scripture and Confession.” (A Christian Handbook on Vital Issues, p.434.)

Pastor Thos. Dudley in an article of the Reporter, the official journal of the Federation of Conservative Lutherans, states that “there is nothing inherently wrong with the Theses of Agreement.” Among other errors, it contains this devilish “Open Questions Theory”.

We now hand over to Pastor Kleinig who examines the so-called safe-guards to this thesis and points out the loopholes, which many conservatives fail to see:

“Now it would appear that someone, probably a member of the ELCA Committee, had some qualms of conscience concerning that ungodly statement in the above-quoted paragraph, for the following was then added:

‘Providing that

- (1) there be readiness in principle to submit to the authority of the Word of God;
- (2) thereby no clear Word of Scripture is denied, contradicted or ignored;
- (3) such divergent views in no wise impair, infringe upon, or violate the central doctrine of Holy Scripture, justification by faith in Jesus Christ;
- (4) nothing be taught contrary to the publica doctrina (public doctrine) of the Lutheran Church as laid down in its Confessions;
- (5) such divergent views are not propagated as the publica doctrina of the Church and in no wise impair the doctrine of Holy Writ’.
(Underlinings ours, F.G.K.).

“Right from the outset we would like to say that all these provisos or safeguards, as they are called, are quite beside the point and cannot solve anything unless there is first of all complete agreement on the authority and clarity of the Word of God, especially on that concerning the passage or passages in question. But the very fact there are ‘divergent views’ with regard to the DOCTRINE contained in the passages in question indisputably shows that such complete agreement is not in existence. What one holds to be clear and certain, another regards as unclear and uncertain.

“So let us have a close look at these provisos or safeguards, which we shall quote once more:

‘Providing that

- (1) there be readiness in principle to submit to the authority of the Word of God’;

“Comment: Whenever this time-honoured phrase ‘submit in principle’ is used, we may be quite certain that such submission is not ‘in all things’. We recall that at the beginning of this century, when the Hermannsburg Mission controversy occupied the centre of the stage in the Lutheran Church in Australia, the cry of the Heidenreichs and some of their supporters was: ‘Yes of course we agree in principle, but not in this particular case’. Today even such people as the ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses’ will readily ‘in principle’ submit to the authority of Scripture, provided they are permitted to interpret the Word in their own way!

“So then proviso (1) is quite worthless!

(2) ‘thereby no clear Word of Scripture is denied, contradicted or ignored’;

“Comment: But supposing no ‘unanimity’ can be reached on the ‘clarity’ of the passage or passages in question, what then? Again, nothing would be solved, and the matter remains an OPEN QUESTION!

(3) ‘such divergent views in no wise impair, infringe upon, or violate the central doctrine of Holy Scripture, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ’;

“Comment: To say the least, this sounds remarkable indeed! Did not the framers of this so-called ‘safeguard’ realise that ultimately every deviation from the Word of God does and must affect the ‘central doctrine of Holy Scripture’? Did not St. Paul under inspiration warn Gal. 5:9: ‘A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump’? and again in 2 Tim. 2:17: ‘Their word will eat as doth a canker’? The only thing we can say in this connection is ‘Poor show!’

(4) ‘nothing be taught contrary to the ‘publica doctrina’ (public doctrine) of the Lutheran Church as laid down in its Confessions’;

“Comment: This proviso indeed exhibits the cunning of the devil! At first sight it sounds so orthodox, so self-evident, so correct! The Book of Concord of 1580 which contains the Confessions of the orthodox Lutheran Church indeed guards purity of doctrine! But we must not overlook the fact that the Lutheran Confessions deal mainly with points of doctrine which had been in dispute prior to and up to that time, namely 1580! But they contain no special and separate articles on such matters as the ‘Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture’ or on ‘Evolution’, ‘Creation’, ‘Church Fellowship’ and other items which the devil up to that time had not yet raised within the visible Christian Church. Now comes the important question: Since these matters are not dealt with and settled once and for all in and by the Lutheran Confessions, is it then permissible to raise and debate these matters today?

“It would certainly seem so; for ever since the formation of the LCA these matters have been debated there, and are not really settled yet. Ever and again the appeal is made to ‘brotherly love’ to bear a little longer with such as hold ‘divergent views’. But it is a ‘brotherly love’ which Luther calls by its right name! In his famous Exposition of Galatians he writes: ‘Cursed into the depths of hell be that kind of love which wants to exist at the expense of purity of doctrine, before which everything must give way, be it love, or apostle, or angel from heaven, or whatever else it may be.’

“In 1932 the formerly orthodox Missouri Synod adopted a very fine Statement known as the Brief Statement, drawn up by one of their best ever Scripture theologians Dr. Francis Pieper. In this Brief Statement all the false doctrines which Satan has introduced into the visible Christian Church since 1580 are dealt with in a very efficient manner and rejected, especially also the false teachings with regard to the Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture, the Creation, as well as Church Fellowship.

“If anyone wants to convince himself as to whether the Australian Merger has the correct Scriptural teaching on these matters, let him try to get the LCA to adopt the Brief Statement as part of its doctrinal confession. We can guarantee a negative result!

- (5) 'such divergent views are not propagated as the publica doctrina of the Church and in no wise impair the doctrine of Holy Writ'.

Comment: But what guarantee is there that this will not be done? Can it be expected that a teacher in the Church who is convinced in his own mind that his 'divergent view' is right will remain silent about it? Did not the Lord Himself say: 'Of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh'? (Luke 6:45; Matt. 12:34). And has this not been done already? A Seminary professor some time ago claimed in a public lecture in Adelaide that the Creation story as related in Genesis 1 is not to be regarded as literal, but is to be taken pictorially! That means, that God's own record of the Creation did not really happen in the manner as recorded in the first chapter of the Bible!

"Then, in a Brochure entitled Basic Studies in Christianity and printed by the Lutheran Publishing House in Adelaide another Seminary professor declares that the Pentateuch, ie. the first five books of the Bible were 'written down by various writers'; this evidently is a reference to the liberal and modernistic J.E.D.P. theory, which claims that what we regard as the Five Books of Moses were not written by Moses at all, but by various unknown writers, labelled J,E,D,P by the liberals; furthermore, the claim is made that the Pentateuch was not completed till about 1,100 years after Moses' death.

"After referring to the 'various writers' of the Pentateuch the Adelaide Professor also makes a somewhat disparaging remark about 'others holding that Moses was the author of the whole Torah!' concluding this statement (as you see) with an exclamation mark, which in this connection signifies as much as 'Well, just fancy that!'

"Furthermore, the Lutheran, official Church paper of the LCA, of 26 March 1973 contained the address delivered by a third Seminary professor on the occasion of the opening of the new school year at the Seminary. In that address the speaker twice made reference to the 'Second Isaiah', a term applied by the liberals to the last twenty-six chapters of the book of the prophet Isaiah, which these fellows claim was not written by Isaiah, but by some unknown writer. However, since they do not know this writer's name, they conveniently call him the 'Second Isaiah'. But the fact is that in the New Testament a number of Old Testament passages which occur within the last twenty-six chapters of the Book of Isaiah are very definitely ascribed to the prophet Isaiah, and not to a mythical 'Second Isaiah'. Compare Isaiah 40:3 with Matt. 3:3; Isaiah 53:7-8 with Acts 8:28, 32-33.

"Now supposing such professors are then confronted with 'Holy Writ' to show them that their 'divergent' views do 'impair' Scripture but they then reply: 'The passage you show us lacks 'clarity', hence it does not convince us that we are wrong', where do we go from there?

"Moreover, what would professors who hold such 'divergent' and liberal views teach their students?

"That the principles enunciated in Article 1, paragraph 4(e) of the Theses of Agreement were in operation already before the actual amalgamation of the UELCA and the ELCA is clearly evidenced by the Minutes of a Pastoral Conference held at Concordia Memorial College, Toowoomba, Qld., on August 15th-17th, 1966. This was one of the last Pastoral Conferences of the now defunct ELCA Qld. District, and was attended by the Rev. Drs. H. Sasse and H. Hamann Jnr., both of Adelaide. Both of these learned Doctors held forth with regard to their ideas concerning 'Inerrancy of Scripture', 'Creation', 'Genesis 1-3' and related issues. When one of the Pastors present asked one of the learned Doctors whether according to his (the Doctor's) view it would be permissible to take also the Fall account in some figurative sense, so that there might not have been a real tree with real fruit, or a real snake involved, the learned Rev. Doctor (according to the Conference Minutes) answered in the affirmative and also questioned whether there was a real Garden of Eden. 'These things are quite possibly figurative' he said. To the astonishment of some of the pastors present the learned Doctors

maintained that all these views are permitted by the Theses of Agreement, and, of course, not church divisive. Do you notice Satan's cunning trap, Article 1 paragraph 4(e), in action?

"Also as the Minutes point out, even though some of those pastors present 'declared that they had never before understood the Theses to permit such views', they did nothing about it (they really could not, since they had already accepted the Document of Union which embodies the Theses of Agreement); on the contrary, they expressed (by resolution) their thanks to the Rev. Doctors Hamann Jnr. and Sasse for their presence and the profitable discussion!

"And, to top it all, the rather stupid Chairman of the Conference expressed his pleasure regarding the discussion, and also spoke of his thankfulness for the great degree of agreement which was more than he had hoped for at the outset!

"Well, there you are! And whosoever still has hopes that things will improve in the Merger, is either very ignorant and lacks 'spiritual judgement' (Compare 1 Cor. 2;14-16) or he simply refuses to heed what God has to say on this matter, and thus brings himself under the condemnation announced in such passages as Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; Heb. 10:26-27. But, then, that is their business, and they will some day have to face up to it!

"So then the provision for 'divergent views' in doctrinal matters without in any way endangering church fellowship was well and truly laid down in the Theses of Agreement, and under these circumstances, each of the five so-called 'safeguards' which were unctuously added to paragraph 1, 4(e) are plain 'humbug', and each one of them is actually a 'dud'.

"Moreover, that the 'Open Questions' Theory of the former UELCA, and which allowed for 'divergent views' in matters of doctrine, was actually sheltered by paragraph 1, 4(e), is very plainly shown by a section of the former UELCA's official Statement read at Albury Convention of the ELCA in 1959. There we read the following:

'We earnestly beg you, therefore, to consider whether the present situation is not analogous to that provided for in Thesis 1, 4 of our Theses of Agreement.... We submit that the provisions laid down in this Thesis in section (e) are applicable to the question of co-operation dividing us.... We now ought to be able to affirm conjointly in this matter of co-operation, as it affects us, 'divergent views arising from such differences of interpretation are not divisive of church fellowship'.

"Again, in 1963 the then President-General of the former UELCA wrote concerning a statement made in that year by a pastor of the former ELCA:

'The writer (the above-mentioned pastor) states that the theory of "Open Questions" is unscriptural. He should read his Theses of Agreement, which also have something to say regarding this matter'.

"The UELCA President-General was of course referring to Article 1, 4(e), which safeguards once and for always the principle of the 'Open Questions'.

"This is now becoming more and more evident in LCA circles. And because this false, unscriptural principle has made its home in the Merger, any real doctrinal discipline is in the last instance quite impossible, since divergent interpretations in matters of doctrine are not divisive of church fellowship.

"Moreover, any LCA people who under such conditions are still hoping for improvement are very naive, and are living in a 'fool's paradise'. As the late Professor Koch used to say with respect to such cases: 'Whoever believes such things, deserves a penny!'

"And we have no doubts whatsoever that Satan by the successful inclusion of Article 1, 4(e) in the Theses of Agreement has scored a major and decisive victory!"

III.

Finally, our third thesis reads:

III. HOLY SCRIPTURE CONDEMNS THE FALSE ARGUMENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN ADVANCED IN FAVOUR OF THE EVIL MODERN THEORY OF OPEN QUESTIONS AS COMPLETELY INVALID, SINFUL AND WHICH ORIGINATE IN OUR BLIND, CARNAL, CONCEITED, SELF-WILLED AND PRESUMPTUOUS FLESH.

A. FIRST FALSE ARGUMENT

“The fact that the Church Militant cannot achieve a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one proves that in the Church any error against the Word of God can have equal standing with the truth or demand tolerance.”

SCRIPTURAL REPLY:

It is true that the Church has never reached a higher degree of unity in doctrine than the fundamental one. Luther writes:

“If the saints were not subject to error in faith and truth, why does St. Peter teach that they must grow in faith and in the knowledge of Christ? 1 Peter 2:2. St. Paul also taught that we should grow in Christ so that we would not, like little children, be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, Eph. 4:12,14. But as faith decreases in us, error and unbelief will increase.” (SL XIX: 1131).

Despite this fact, Holy Scripture condemns the toleration of the least error, even if it be in non-fundamental doctrines. The moment any error arises including even a non-fundamental error, it must immediately with patient instruction from Scripture be refuted and condemned. If however, such a person stubbornly persists in his error and despite all instruction chooses to continue in his antisciptural teaching, then fraternal relations with him must be terminated. Dr. Walther writes:

“The same thing applies to a whole church-body which errs in a non-fundamental doctrine” (CTM, April, 1939, p.262).

B. SECOND FALSE ARGUMENT

“Because Christian doctrines are formed gradually then doctrines which have not as yet gone through this process of formation are ‘Open Questions’.”

SCRIPTURAL REPLY:

It is not true that our doctrines came into existence gradually so that there are doctrines which are not yet formed and others in the process of formation. This erroneous view Walther calls

“a daughter of Rationalism appearing in Christian dress, a sister of Romanism hiding behind a Protestant mask, and a fruitful mother of large families of heresies.” (CTM, July, 1939, p.507).

The Word of God clearly teaches that the true Christian Church (Invisible Church) at all times is ONE and ONE ONLY, John 10:16. Even the Church of the Old Testament is ONE with that of the New Testament, Acts 15:11; 26:22; 13:32-33. Christ Himself and His Apostles asked their hearers to examine their doctrine according to the judge of the Old Testament Scriptures, John 5:39, 45-47; Acts 17:11. In Eph. 2:20 the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets on which the Church is built, is nothing else than the total number of the articles of faith taught by the

Apostles and Prophets. In Gal. 4:26 the Church is called the mother of all believers, because it possesses, preserves and uses that doctrine through which people are brought to the one true faith and are kept in it, and because in this manner the Church constantly perpetuates itself. The "FAITH" of the Church is not something which has to be discovered, but it is the FAITH which was once delivered unto the saints and for which the Church would have to contend, Jude 3. True disciples of Christ continue permanently in Christ's Word and therefore know and are certain of the Truth, John 8:31-32. It is only the hypocrites who are "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth", 2 Tim. 3:7. The Truth has been entrusted to the Church as her most precious treasure, as the good thing which has been committed unto her to keep it by the Holy Ghost, 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 1 Tim. 6:20. It is the Church's duty to teach the Truth and when it is attacked to present the pure doctrine so that the fraudulent doctrine may be unmasked and the Church protected from destruction. Luther writes:

"We invent nothing new but stay with, and adhere to, the old Word of God as the Church possessed it; for this reason we with it constitute the true old Church, as one body, which teaches and believes one divine Word." (SL XVII, 1659).

C. THIRD FALSE ARGUMENT

"Those teachings which have not been doctrinally fixed in the Lutheran Confessions must be placed among the 'Open Questions'."

SCRIPTURAL REPLY:

The doctrines that are contained in the Lutheran Confessions were not put there so that they might gradually become a law imposed upon the Church telling her what she must believe and practise in the days to come; but they state what the Word of God teaches, what doctrine the genuine Lutherans had been teaching and intended to teach. They are only a summary of the chief doctrines which the orthodox Lutheran Church was compelled to defend in the critical Reformation period. (Triglotta, p.58, 95, 847).

According to the above sinful theory the Book of Concord becomes that person's Bible. Then such people are no more than a miserable sect, possessing only a brief portion of Biblical doctrines. This sinful argument militates against the fact that our Church in the Lutheran Confessions accepts not only those doctrines mentioned therein, but the entire Bible and all the doctrines contained therein. Whenever any controversy arose in the orthodox Lutheran Church regarding doctrine, the first question that was always raised was: "WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?" All that the orthodox Lutheran Church believes is not found in her Confessions but only in the Bible. She has indeed written Confessions and defined doctrines, solely because false churches and teachers forced her to make clear-cut statements on certain doctrines. With Luther we confess:

"Luther himself intended to be Lutheran only in so far as he purely taught the Holy Scriptures." (Walch, XXI, 234).

D. FOURTH FALSE ARGUMENT

"Those teachings must be looked upon as 'Open Questions' in which acknowledged orthodox teachers have erred in the past."

SCRIPTURAL REPLY:

Luther, together with the orthodox Lutheran Church, never appealed to any person as the final authority in spiritual matters, but always appealed to SCRIPTURE as the SOLE JUDGE and AUTHORITY in all matters of doctrine and life. Faithful confessors of the truth in the past are only quoted as testimonies to the fact that they agreed with the same Scriptural truths in past ages. They have never been quoted by the orthodox Lutheran Church as authorities which

have abolished the supremacy of the Bible. At the time of the Reformation the genuine Lutherans met the above evil theory with the reply:

“The fathers were lights and not gods, teachers and not judges, servants and not masters.” (CTM, October, 1939, p.754).

They never regarded any teacher of the past as being equal to Scripture. An orthodox teacher may have erred in ignorance or weakness. But he loses the character of orthodoxy if after instruction he stubbornly persists in that error. But this is in no way a reason why an error is to be tolerated in the Church. It presents a serious warning to us as Walther points out:

“Although the old faithful teachers of our Church still are our teachers and examples in many respects, yet in the errors they made they are a WARNING to us according to the well-known proverb: ‘MAY THE FALL OF THE GREAT DETER THE SMALLER SPIRITS’.” (ibid. p.755).

To follow the above evil theory would lead to a complete destruction of all purity and unity in doctrine. Frequently it occurred that when an influential, respected orthodox teacher of the past erred in some point, there was no-one who noticed this error, or if he did, did not possess the courage to rebuke the teacher. Much is at stake if this evil theory rules. Let us at all times cling to the Scriptural truth that God commands His Word to be purely proclaimed and applied and that every error be opposed and eventually removed.

E. FIFTH FALSE ARGUMENT

“Those doctrines in the Bible that are not taught in a clear, plain and unambiguous way, must be looked upon as ‘Open Questions’.”

SCRIPTURAL REPLY:

Holy Scripture teaches that the Bible is so CLEAR that it sets forth everything God wants us to know concerning our salvation in words so plain and simple that they can be understood by all persons of average intelligence, Psalm 119:105, 130; 19:7-8; 2 Peter 1:19; 2 Tim. 3:15. All the doctrines necessary for our salvation are clearly revealed in the Bible, for a Christian must know them to be saved. This is taught in all those passages where the Lord urges us to search the Scriptures for our salvation, John 5:39; Luke 16:29; Acts 17:11; 2 Thess. 2:15; Isaiah 34:16; 1 John 2:13-14. Some passages only appear to be obscure because the expositor does not know certain information (languages, history, archaeology, geography, other doctrines of Scripture, grammar, etc.) that would immediately make it plain. We, of course, will never be able to comprehend the mysteries of faith (e.g. Trinity); yet they are set forth in words so simple that even a child can believe them. The Bible only remains a closed book to all (a) who understand neither human speech nor Scriptural speech; (b) who are so filled with prejudice that they refuse to give the Bible honest and serious study; (c) who foolishly try to comprehend the divine mysteries with their blind reason; and (d) who are filled with hatred toward the Bible. Whatever is not clearly revealed in Scripture is not truth at all.

Walther writes:

“To maintain that certain doctrines of faith are revealed in the Bible, but not in clear understandable words is nothing else than a denial of God’s wisdom and goodness and blasphemy against God or a denial of the divine origin of Holy Writ.” (CTM, Nov, 1939, p.332).

CONCLUSION

This evil modern theory that among the clear doctrines of God’s Word there are “Open Questions” where a person can please himself what he teaches, is one of the most dangerous

unionistic principles of our time. It leads to indifference in doctrine, uncertainty as to the Truth, compromising the Truth, complete corruption of the Truth, substitution of man's reason for the sole judge and rule of God's Word, scepticism and doubt, and salvation by works.

Now let us listen to a final word from Dr C.F.W. Walther:

"We close with this prayer on our lips: May the Lord guard and defend the Church, the dearly bought communion of saints.... against the inane theory which at the present time (1868, BLW) is a cancerous sore in the theology and Church of our former fatherland and which, if it gained ground here, would gnaw at the root of the freshly budding tree of our American (May we add Australian, especially ELCR, BLW) Church and cause it to wither away again! A general acceptance of this principle would indeed establish peace in the Church (may we add, the peace of the graveyard, BLW), but a syncretistic (unionistic, BLW) peace, of which the sainted Dannhauer said: *Foris ei]rh<vh inters e]<ri<vvmj* (externally peace, internally discord).” (CTM, Nov. 1939, p.834).

May we, in true Godly awe, tremble at the Word of God, that is, may we sincerely dread to deviate in the slightest from the pure doctrine. For if we do, we are in danger of losing our soul's salvation. Upon the Word of God, which not only convicts us of our sin, but also assures us of our salvation through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, may we at all times take our stand. Above all, out of love to Christ and in loyal gratitude for His Word, may we diligently avoid this evil "Open Questions" Theory in all its forms in doctrine and practice. Only then will we have true Biblical unity and only then will blood bought souls be cared for properly.