

# IF PEOPLE ONLY KNEW WHAT THEY SOUND LIKE!

By Pr. William P. Terjesen

Recently someone wrote to Ann Landers and with the following comment: *“I was raised to respect all religions, but the Catholics I’ve know since childhood always gave the impression that they believe theirs is the only true faith... You quoted Rev. (sic.) Robert J. Geisinger, who said, ‘non Catholics should not... receive communion, although the church allows exceptions to be made.’ More Catholic snobbishness. I’m a Lutheran. All Catholics are welcom to take communion in our church. Please tell those who are rejected to come to us.”*

I think it would be instructive to take a closer look at this person’s comments in order to understand modern secular foolishnes coming from the mouth of a professed Lutheran.

## **“I was raised to respect all religions.”**

What does this mean? The writer obviously doesn’t respect Catholics’ right to practice their own religion. Catholics who follow Catholic teaching are labelled ‘holier than thou’ and ‘snobbish’. Why? Because they won’t abandon what they consider truth in order to fit in, be nice, and validate non-Catholics. True respect for other peoples’ religions includes honoring their rights to practice their faiths, and when disagreeing with them, doing so on doctrinal rather than personal bases. Mainline Protestant churches, for the most part, no longer believe what their confessions of faith once stood for. They have adopted a weak, vague American civil religion in which nobody’s wrong because everybody’s right. Such theological anemics can bend over backwards to praise almost any pagan oddity. There is just one thing they can’t tolerate: conservative churches and Christians who try to remain true to their confessions. The writer is slamming Catholics, but the same attitude is often aimed at Missouri Synod Lutherans. Liberals respect all religions by believing in none, and they resent those who do.

## **“They believe theirs is the only true faith.”**

Well? All church bodies who exist as separate fellowships are supposed to believe that they uniquely believe, teach, and confess the whole truth of God. Otherwise it would be a sin for them to remain separate and out of fellowship with other church bodies. Even in ecumenical discussions, when done right, each church representative comes believing that their church is the true church. If we believed that we were wrong about anything it would be our business to repent and forsake error immediately. Now to confess that our church is the true church is not to say that other churches are not Christian. We do not deny that non-Lutheran churches are Christian. We do not say that only Missouri Synod Christians go to heaven. What we do say is that where those churches and Christians differ doctrinally with us they are in error, and are therefore heterodox. Though we grant that they may be Christians, we cannot enter into fellowship with them without sanctioning their error. A church that believes that it is no more correct than any other church sins when it remains separated from those other churches. The real Christian Church confesses that it believes, teaches, and confesses the truth of God.

## **“Non-Catholics should not... receive communion [in Catholic churches].”**

Great! Roman Catholics practice closed communion just like Baptists and Confessional Lutherans. I’m glad about it. Why? Because part of what it means to respect others’ religions is to respect the differences and divisions that separate us. Open communion, practiced by liberals, is like living together without benefit of marriage. It may look loving but it lacks committment. There are strong similarities between Lutherans and Catholics, but the things that divide us are

stronger and prevent us from communing together. Closed communion acknowledges and respects those differences. No genuine Catholic would want to commune in a Lutheran or other protestant church; and no genuine Lutheran would want to commune in a non-Lutheran church. Those who attend our churches and get offended by being denied communion are like house-guests who get offended when we don't give them the utter run of the house.

**“I'm a Lutheran. All Catholics are welcome to take communion in our church.”**

I'd love to be able to say, “This person is certainly not a Missouri Synod Lutheran!” But, considering the current state of things, it wouldn't surprise me if he or she were. There are plenty in our circles who talk like unitarian universalists. But think for a moment how odd the above statement sounds. When did the Lutheran Church say, “Oops! We were only kidding! Can we come home to Rome now?” When did the Catholic Church say, “You're right. We were wrong and we're sorry?” My friends, the things that divided us then still divide us now. The difference is that most people don't care anymore. And that is not a sign of spiritual vitality. There are still some Churches and some Christians who care about truth, and those who don't resent us for it. Hence all the hub-bub about closed communion. Meanwhile, sincere Lutherans and Catholics rejoice in points of unity and sorrow over differences. They discuss these things together, sometimes heatedly, acknowledging and respecting the differences and praying for the day when genuine doctrinal agreement is achieved.