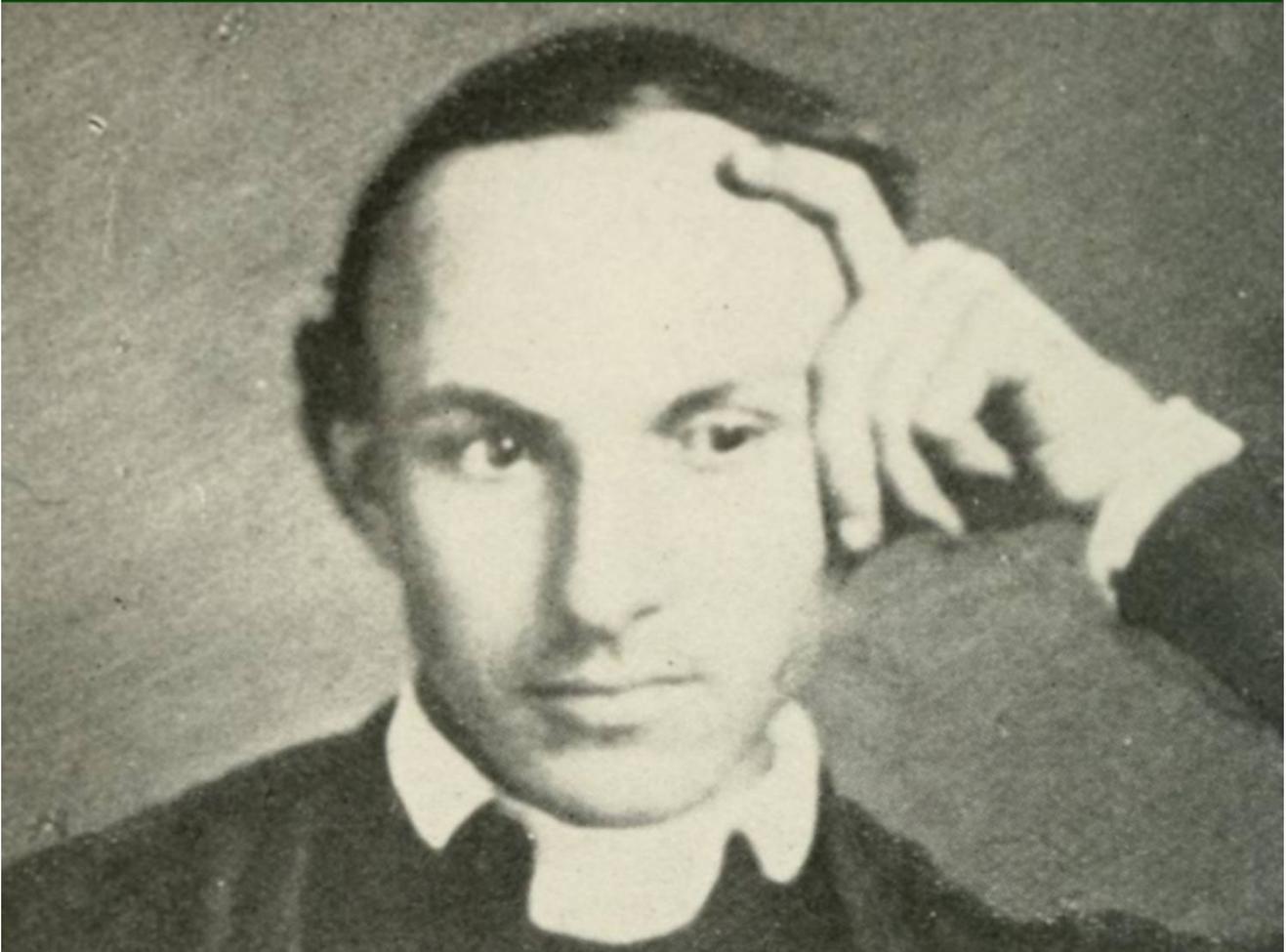


Matthias Loy

The Augsburg Confession

An Introduction and Exposition



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The Augsburg Confession

An Introduction To Its Study And An Exposition Of Its Contents

By Professor Matthias Loy, D.D.

Columbus, Ohio
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Dedication

To
Rev. Prof. F. W. Stellhorn, D.D.,
Whose personal friendship, added to our unity of the spirit,
has been one of my highest earthly joys in the past
twenty-five years, and whose studies and labors in
the cause of the truth which the Augsburg Con-
fession sets forth, have all these years been
coincident with mine and been an un-
failing help and comfort to me in
the service of our Lord, this
book is gratefully
dedicated.

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Please have patience with us when you come across typos. Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

Preface.

MANY years ago the writer was requested by the Joint Synod of Ohio to prepare an exposition of the Augsburg Confession for the instruction of our people. He was in hearty accord with the purpose of the request, and not withstanding his fears that he would not be able to meet the expectations of his brethren, he would have undertaken the work, if he could, without neglecting or slighting the duties of his calling, have found the time for it. Since his disablement five years ago, by a bodily affliction that left little hope of recovery, he was dispensed from these duties, and as his strength has been gradually returning, his thoughts have recurred to the old request and his accord with its purpose. His advancing age has rendered it impracticable to resume the work of his professorship, and so he is left at leisure to perform any service which may seem possible to him under the infirmities which burden him. "The Story of My Life", which my friends persuaded me to write and publish, as in their estimation the best service that I could render the Church before I die, only postponed the present work, upon which the writer has been engaged since that Story was finished. Its publication is the consummation of a service which the writer has for years desired to render the Church which he loves and to whose blessed work he has been privileged to devote a long life.

But he does not give his book to the public without some misgivings. These do not pertain to the principles and doctrines which are set forth and maintained. About these he has no doubts. But he has reason to doubt whether the best is done for the cause which he pleads in this volume. and whether its publication may not be a hindrance to the publication and circulation later of a volume from another pen that shall not fall so short of doing justice to the great subject. He is not even sure that he has done the best of which he is capable, and that he is pursuing the wisest course in sending his production to the press at once, instead of subjecting it to a thorough revision, which would probably result in the labor of rewriting some portions in the hope of rendering them more effective. The book would no doubt gain

in clearness and comprehensiveness by such a course, although it might lose in the freshness and directness which usually attend the first utterance of sincere convictions and purposes that live in the soul. But at his age it is not likely that his strength will be much longer at his disposal, and circumstances admonish him to do quickly what he thinks he should do yet before God calls him to his eternal rest. He will not conceal his conviction that what he has to say in this book may be of some service to the Church, and so he has resolved to publish it, notwithstanding its infirmities, hoping that even some of its blemishes as a literary production, which might tend to detract from his reputation as an author, such as the occasional repetition of the same thought in different connections, might contribute to the accomplishment of his purpose by impressing central truths on readers' minds.

The object had in view in the preparation of the book was not to make a contribution to theological science, but rather to serve the people by helping them to understand the faith and character of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. That this has something to do with Christian theology is self-evident. But I have made no effort to pursue investigations which could cast new light on theological problems, whether of history or doctrine. The whole purpose of the book is practical. It steadily pursues the aim of helping our Lutheran people to a better appreciation of their Church and its precious heritage, and to a firmer stand and a more zealous labor to maintain them and make others partake of the blessings of the Reformation.

It was on this account that so much space was allotted to the exposition of the doctrine of the Church and that the subject is discussed in different relations and connections, though this may strike some readers as a blemish in the work. The writer's experience has taught him that one of the chief difficulties in the way of a proper development of a Lutheran consciousness among Lutheran Christians is the prevailing confusion in reference to the nature of the Church and the purpose of the Reformation, with its resultant Church of the Augsburg Confession. The current opinions on these momentous matters, when carefully analyzed and traced back to their basal assumptions, mean that the Reformation was a sectarian movement, and the Lutheran Church was an unwarranted and therefore sinful institution. Christians who search the Scriptures, as the disciples of Christ are commanded to do, need not be told that if that implication of modern theory and practice in regard to the Christian Church were true, the Lutheran Church would forfeit all divine right to exist, and the right thing for earnest Lutherans to do

would be to disband as a separate organization. The watchword would then be back to Rome or forward to anarchy. The writer has suffered not a little for his persistency, with voice and pen, in advocating the cause of revealed truth for which the battles of the Reformation were fought and which proclaimed its victory. And now, when he can no longer lift up his voice in the classroom of our Seminary, or in the pulpit of our churches, he finds it a pleasure, in his old age, once more to use his pen in the effort to give some encouragement to his brethren of the Lutheran Church and to contribute something, though it be but a mite, to the great cause of the truth in Jesus which makes us free from sin and death and the devil. He knows the reproaches that are cast upon Christian believers who insist on the pure Gospel as our Lord gave it, and on the Augsburg Confession as the true expression of the contents of that Gospel, and on the Church of the Augsburg Confession as the witness of that Gospel in its purity, and therefore the true visible Church of Christ on earth. If Christians in other visible churches, who with us form the one invisible church of all believers, which is the communion of saints, knew what the Reformation meant in its strenuous conflict with the corrupt visible Church of Rome, they surely would not persist in paining us by unjust and often wanton charges of uncharitableness and bigotry, and even malice, in our contention for a pure Gospel and a Church of the pure Gospel.

The writer hopes that this book may, under the blessing of the Lord whom it earnestly seeks to serve, be of some little help towards understanding the claims of the Lutheran Church and its relation to other churches. This hope is not based on the assumption that his plea will get an extensive and impartial hearing among Christians of other denominations, and that as a consequence the blind persecution of the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession, whenever and wherever it is faithful to its life and its profession, will cease, and the spirit of faith that worketh by love will take its place. Experience has shown that that would be a vain expectation. Our hope rests on a humbler thought. If we cannot directly reach the thoughtful people of other churches, we may fairly expect to reach the ears and minds of our own Lutheran brethren, and stir up their pure hearts to the remembrance of what God in His infinite mercy has done for them in the glorious Reformation and the establishment of the Church of the Augsburg Confession, and thus induce them to exercise the grace which God has given them to bear their testimony to the truth in Jesus for the benefit of their fellow

Christians in their own and other churches, and of all people who are willing to hear in its purity the Gospel which alone bringeth salvation.

The book, though it will no doubt appear to many a reader provocative of dispute, and full of challenge to controversy, is written in the interest of peace. But I will not conceal, but rather assert with due emphasis, that it is peace in believing the Gospel towards which my aim is directed, though many may think the assertion too unreasonable to be sincere. Those who will consent to read it with some attention and reflection will, it is hoped, if they are believably interested in the cause of Christ, be led to see that the contention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is neither stupid nor fanatical, even if they are not fully convinced that it is the legitimate outcome of the Christian faith and the only truly evangelical foundation for the solid building of Christian churches as the visible manifestation of the one Holy Church of Christ on earth, which is the communion of saints.

What the writer has labored to make clear and impress on Christian minds is that the Gospel of Christ is the only hope of humanity lost in sin, that the Holy Scriptures are the only source whence that Gospel can with certainty be derived, that faith is the only means by which the assurance of the salvation of Christ can be received into the soul, that, when the Holy Spirit has wrought such assurance by kindling faith, the first duty and impulse is to confess that faith for the glory of our Lord and the benefit of all who will hear it, and that the truth thus revealed and believed and confessed unto salvation is the only truly Christian banner under which to gather the members of the Lord's Body, the congregation of believers, into local churches, and thus present the Church in visible purity as it exists in its invisible essence, so far as this is possible in earthly conditions under the corrupting and depraving influence of sin. Rome waved that banner in the days of the Reformation, and our fathers honored it; but they saw how it was tarnished and how the blots and blemishes and tags on it rendered it almost indistinguishable from the flag of the enemy, and therefore in true loyalty sought to wipe out the blotches which disfigured it and to remove the appendages which rendered its meaning uncertain. Were they untrue to their Christian banner in doing this, or did they thus become unfaithful to the one Holy Christian Church when those who had disfigured that banner decried and denounced their efforts and refused to recognize the Reformation? As true believers they were compelled to run up the flag of the Augsburg Confession as their insistence upon the pure Gospel and the banner of the

Church of the Reformation, as against the corrupt Church of Rome. Under that the Lutheran Church gathers its congregations in allegiance to the pure Gospel and fights its battles for the truth in Jesus, thus working together with all true Christians for the upbuilding of the One Holy Christian Church, but absolutely refusing to abandon one jot or tittle of the truth to which our Lord testified and on which His kingdom is founded.

It seems to the author not impossible that Christians of every name might be led to understand the Lutheran Church in her labor for the salvation of men, and that his endeavor in this direction, though the prospect is not encouraging, will not of necessity be in vain. But our appeal is primarily to our own people. Other churches will not be likely to appreciate the purpose and work of our Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession as long as we ourselves do not properly appreciate it.

Our Lutheran Christians are but too often frightened when Romanists and sectarians of every hue bring railing accusations against them and condemn them as members of an effete sect, who have been left behind in the progress of the world's enlightenment; and we have known some who were ready to hide their heads in shame and some who were ready to join any popular sect for relief from the painful situation. Must the members of the glorious Church of the Reformation, to which under God all that is bright and hopeful in this world of sin is due, be ashamed of Jesus because other visible organizations of Christians have obtained more popularity and power and honor in the community? Let Lutherans learn to appreciate the heavenly treasures committed to their charge, be sincere and earnest witnesses for the truth which their Confession sets forth, and God will bless their work and make them a blessing to the people. They will thus be a power for the preservation and extension of the kingdom of Our Lord by the pure Gospel, and while they can give no sanction in word or work to Rome or any other Christian organization that inculcates errors against the Gospel, they will labor effectually for the saving of souls and rejoice when sinners are led to the Savior, by the promulgation of His truth, without a thought that it is powerful only when they proclaim it. For their heart's desire is not ultimately to magnify the visible Lutheran Church by increasing its membership and its influence as a visible organization, but to glorify God by adding to the Church daily such as shall be saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If this is done in other visible churches, even in Romish churches, we are glad.

If God in His abounding grace still reaches souls with the portion of saving truth which is still preserved among erring denominations, why should not our hearts rejoice at the gracious work to the accomplishment of which the Lutheran Church is devoted? Other churches have still, notwithstanding the rejection of the pure Gospel which the Lutheran Church sets forth in her Augsburg Confession, portions of Gospel truth by which souls may be brought to faith in the only Savior. Christians would not recognize them as churches if this were otherwise. But their errors are hindrances to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, and therefore Lutherans contend for the Gospel in its purity and decline all responsibility for the impurities of doctrine in other churches, which hamper the cause of the Gospel. We plead for more faith and a larger charity that is willing to labor and to suffer for the precious truth that is able to save our souls and glorify our Savior.

To this end may our dear Lord bless our book.

M. LOY.

Columbus, Easter, 1907.

Part I. Introduction To The Augsburg Confession.

1. Historical Survey.

LONG before Luther was born the corruption existing in the Roman Church was known and felt, and efforts had been made to effect a Reformation. But all had failed. Perhaps all the reasons for this may with fairness be stated in the one general proposition that God's own time had not yet come. The Romish oppressions were bitterly experienced; the abuses were manifest; but the root of the evil and the remedy for it were not yet plain. Even in the dark ages of medieval history there were among the Christian people some reminiscences of the Gospel which prophets fore-announced and apostles preached, and devout endeavors were made to render it more effectual in the life of the Church.

There were reformers before the Reformation. The Waldenses and Wicliffites and Bohemian Brethren had raised their cry to heaven and lifted up their voices among the people. Apparently they effected little; in reality they effected much. Romanism, with its vast power, that had been accumulating for ages, found little difficulty in leading men like Savonarola and Huss to the stake. But such men had not lived and protested in vain. In bodily presence they were silenced, but what was right and true in their testimony worked as a leaven. They had not fully penetrated into the profound mystery of the pure Gospel, and seemingly they failed. But evangelical truth never fails, whatever appearances may indicate. "The mills of God grind slowly," and Christians err when slowness in accomplishing divine ends is reputed to be failure. God's time had not yet come, and the precursors of the Reformation, signal as their failure seems, hastened its coming.

Martin Luther was neither by birth nor social standing pointed out as the coming man, through whom that should be accomplished which other men had tried to effect, but whose efforts only brought them to the fires of martyrdom. By natural endowment and education he was eminent among the few who could appreciate his gifts of mind and heart, but the thought of being something great and doing something great did not enter his humble soul. History makes manifest that God chose him for a mighty work and conducted him, in its progress, from step to step, without revealing to him the divine purpose and outcome of it all. As far as he was concerned, he was made a willing instrument in the hands of God to do a great work, whilst he did not even know what the Lord, whose meek servant he was, designed to accomplish through his instrumentality. By nature and by grace, by study and experience, he became a man of ever increasing mental and moral power, and was a providentially qualified and graciously equipped reformer before he had any thought of the great Reformation and of its glorious outcome in the great Augsburg Confession.

In consequence of the ninety-five theses which Luther posted up at Wittenberg, on October 31, 1517, a great religious agitation arose. The act was simply that of an unpretentious monk who had become aware of glaring evils existing in the Church, and desired to remove them. They had obstructed his own official work as pastor and professor, and he thought himself in complete harmony with those in authority when he published his propositions and invited to their discussion. He had no thought of making trouble in the Church, and least of all did he desire to attack the pope and the bishops, whose jurisdiction he fully recognized. That by the grace of God, and under His guiding providence, he was to become the great reformer, who should lead the people of God out of the house of bondage and bring about the restoration of the Christian Church to its original purity and blessedness under the Gospel, never entered his mind. He was humbly loyal to the existing ecclesiastical powers, and desired only the correction of some palpable evils which he thought inconsistent with the purpose and ordinances of the Church. Apparently his act had, in his eyes, nothing of the greatness which history has shown it to embody.

But in the plan of God, in whose hands the Wittenberg monk was a willing instrument, the matter had a different aspect. The act of seemingly small significance was the beginning of a mighty movement which we call the great Reformation, and which was not of Luther's devising nor of his exe-

cution. It was a work which originated in God's counsel of wisdom and mercy, and was executed by God's power and grace.

Luther's theses had special reference to the traffic in indulgences, at which many hearts were incensed, and to his teaching they were therefore prepared to give an interested hearing. The conditions were such as to secure for them wide attention, and soon the whole land of Germany was aflame from the little spark. The question of indulgences involved principles which were recognized as momentous. That the Church possessed a treasury of merits which is available for others than those who acquired them, and that on the basis of these merits she might remit penalties imposed on offenders, was not denied. The whole corrupt system, of which the indulgences granted for a pecuniary consideration were a part, was not yet manifest to Luther's mind when his theses were published, and only as the subject engaged the thoughts of Christians with ever increasing earnestness did the truth become clearer and the corruption of the papal Church more manifest.

The need of a reformation was incontrovertible. Even Romanists admit this. Not only was spiritual life, where it still existed, at a low stage for lack of the means to give it power and promote its growth, but moral corruption prevailed throughout the whole community. Even the clergy were steeped in depravity. Nay, it was in the highest circles of the Romish hierarchy that Satan reigned supreme, so that the saying became common that, if there was a hell, Rome was built upon it. Such crimes as history reports of popes and cardinals would have disgraced heathenism even in its most lustful days. But the moral depravity, which at times sank into the unnatural and beastly, was not the worst feature of the times preceding the Reformation, although it is difficult to conceive a lower depth into which humanity may fall. The terrible condition seemed irremediable, because the only possible remedy was itself adulterated and rendered powerless, or even poisoned and rendered powerful for evil. When corruption appears in the community there is hope for better times as long as the Church applies the regenerating and sanctifying grace which she possesses in the means committed to her trust; for God can still help where all human help has failed. But when the Church herself is involved in the degradation and woe, whence shall deliverance come? No argument is more absurd, ensnaring as it is to the unwary, than that which Romanists have advanced and still urge even in our enlightened days against the Lutheran Reformation, namely, that our fathers should

have pursued the way of order in opposing the abominations of their time and thus have avoided the calamitous revolution in which their course is alleged to have resulted. They desire then, first, to make the false impression that the reformers lunged thoughtlessly into the work of saving souls from the tortures under which they were writhing, without any reasonable regard for the divinely constituted authorities by which God, who alone rules in the universe, designs to remedy arising evils and furnish the necessary help; and, secondly, to make the no less false suggestion that, if the proper course had been taken, the end in view could have been attained without the uprising and upheaval which the history of the Reformation presents.

But it is an utterly false assumption that Luther and his co — workers disregarded existing authorities and made no effort to enlist them in the cause of the Christian people, who were suffering under the devil's oppression. Luther was so little disposed to enter upon the world's historical stage as a reformer that, with the simplicity of a child, he began his work in the assurance that he was doing the Roman Church a service when he published his theses. He confidently expected the pope's approval, and hoped that by his intervention the indulgence business, which was giving so much offense and doing so much injury, would be stopped.

So honestly did he act upon this principle that his conduct is even made the basis of a charge of inconsistency against him, inasmuch as he denounced a system which was conducted by papal authority while he professed loyalty to the pope. He himself gives expression to his mind when he says, later:

“I had got singly and inadvertently into this dispute; and, as I could not draw back, I not only gave way to the pope in many important articles, but willingly and very honestly revered him. For who was I, a miserable, despised monk, then more resembling a corpse than a living man, that I should oppose myself to the majesty of the pope? Those self-confident spirits, who afterward attacked the pope with great pride and presumption know but little of the sufferings and afflictions which my heart experienced during the first and second year, and of the not pretended or imaginary but real humility in which I then lived.”

The very thing which adherents of the papal church censure Luther for avoiding, he at first did to an extent that made him amenable to the charge of half-heartedness in his devotion to the Gospel truth and of cowardly and servile subjection to the lordly ecclesiastics who usurped all power. It was only because God ruled over all and the Reformation was His work, that it

did not come to naught by weak submission to the usurpers who claimed to be the Church and to have all power in their hands. The thought is preposterous that a dispute which involved the very foundation on which the proud papacy rested, and therefore its very right to exist, should be referred to that papacy for adjudication, instead of referring it to the great Head of the Church Himself, who has spoken and still speaks to His disciples by His Word, graciously committed to us in the Holy Scriptures.

The humble monk, whom the Lord had chosen for the mighty work, was not long in the field where the battle raged with ever increasing force, until it became plain to him that submission to the pope would be a surrender of the Gospel and a calamity to the world which that Gospel alone could save. Luther was strongly tempted and suffered much, but the Lord gave him light and strength, and he surrendered nothing.

The publication of the theses stirred the whole religious world. It was time for the Lord to work, for they had made void His law. Everywhere people were led to think of the evils besetting hem, and many hearts were opened to receive the Gospel truth and were led to hope for the dawning of the day. Gradually the truth became clear in the minds of thousands, that popery with its traditions and decretals and ordinances, to say nothing of its regal pomp and ceremony and proud oppression of the Christian people, is not the Church of Christ's institution the Church of the living God, which is the ground and pillar of the truth. As the controversy became warmer and light increased on the controverted topics, large numbers embraced the Gospel and an evangelical party was formed by the Spirit of God, who works through the Gospel. That which distinguished them from others who professed Christianity was their firm conviction that the Word of God alone teaches and decides what is to be believed and what the conscience is bound to observe and do, and that the great central truth revealed in this Word is salvation from sin and death, not by works of righteousness which we have done or may do, least of all when these are done in compliance with merely human ordinances, but by the sacrifice of the Son of God, who became man in order to take the sinner's place in the fulfillment of all righteousness by obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, all the benefits of which sacrifice the Holy Spirit applies to individual souls by faith, that being justified by faith they might have peace in believing through our Lord Jesus Christ. It was the old doctrine of the Gospel, but entirely new to the dignitaries of the Roman Church, who had grown fat on the human contrivances

substituted for the simple truth in Jesus and who, with all their powers, resisted the Gospel and denounced it as a rebellious innovation. Rome sought in vain with all the mighty forces at its command to suppress the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ, and the evangelical body grew daily in numbers and wisdom, and the grace of God was upon it.

At first the pope, Leo X., feeling his power and accustomed to have all other powers submit to his will, made rather light of the commotion in Germany, and therefore, in 1518, merely addressed a note to the Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise, saying:

“We command you to see to it that Martin Luther be brought into the power and jurisdiction of the Holy See.”

But the elector declined the office, and, as all the means employed to silence the monk proved abortive, the pope in 1520 issued a bull declaring Luther a heretic and excommunicating him if he did not recant within sixty days, at the same time ordering all governments in Germany personally to arrest Luther and deliver him to the pope as a prisoner. Instead of recanting, however, the humble professor, who had continued his study of the Holy Scriptures and saw with increasing clearness the abominations of popery, burned the papal bull in the presence of a large concourse of people and thus publicly renounced all allegiance to the pope and the Romish Church. The Papists were enraged, but Luther was not delivered into the hands of the tyrant at Rome, and the Gospel continued to spread and the evangelical party to grow.

Then, in 1521, came the famous Diet at Worms, before which the Emperor Charles V. summoned Luther to appear. Notwithstanding the warnings and entreaties of his friends, he obeyed the summons, and on the 17th of April presented himself before the Diet. It was required of him that he should recant his writings and submit to the pope and the councils. On the following day he gave his decision, closing with the ever memorable words:

"Since your most Serene Majesty and your High Mightinesses require from me a clear, simple and precise answer, I will give you one that shall have neither horns nor teeth: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or the councils, because it is clear as the day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless, therefore, I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or the clearest reasoning, unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted, and unless they thus release my conscience, bound by the Word of God, I cannot and will not retract; for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against one's conscience. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise; God help me! Amen.

"Thus spoke a monk before the emperor and the mighty ones of the nation," says a historian of the Reformation; "and this feeble and despised man, alone, by relying on the grace of the Most High, appeared greater and mightier than all of them. His words contain a power against which all these mighty rulers can do nothing. This is the weakness of God, which is stronger than man. The empire and the Church on the one hand, this obscure man on the other, had met. God had brought together these kings and the prelates publicly, to confound their wisdom. The battle is lost, and the consequences of this defeat of the great ones of the earth will be felt among every nation and in every age to the end of time." For it was the triumph of the great Head of the Church over a proud and pretentious hierarchy that had usurped His authority and used it for the oppression of His people.

But the conflict did not end with the victory of the Gospel at Worms, and the time had not yet come for the promulgation of an Evangelical Confession which should unite and identify the Evangelical Lutheran Church in distinction from the corrupt Church of Rome. The Romanists in their rage were intent upon destroying Luther and his followers. The emperor, on the day following Luther's appearance at the Diet, ordered a message to be read in which he declared: "I am about to dismiss the Augustinian Luther, forbidding him to cause the least disorder among the people; I shall then proceed against him and his adherents as contumacious heretics by excommunication, by interdict, and by every means calculated to destroy them." Luther had no fears, for he knew himself under the protection of the Almighty. But his friends feared for his life and secretly brought him to the Wartburg, where he could abide in safety. There he busied himself in translating the New Testament into German, and thus performed one of his greatest works for the promotion of the Evangelical cause, which no power of pope and princes was capable of stemming. The threatened extermination by violence was not realized. Some of the papistic states endeavored to execute the emperor's decrees, and persecutions of Lutherans took place, some

even unto death. But circumstances, under the good providence of God, were unfavorable to a general massacre of Lutherans even in the states whose rulers were devoted Papists, and some of the most influential rulers, like the Elector of Saxony, were no longer Papists, but believers in the Gospel which Luther and the Lutherans preached. The ferocious edict of Worms was therefore practically a failure, and Christ's kingdom of truth gained daily victories among the people, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts of Rome to crush it.

The religious troubles became a feature in the political movements of the time. Popery, with its inherent distrust of the divine power of the Word to govern the Church and its reliance upon physical force to compass its ends, naturally resorted to political schemes and intrigues to maintain its ascendancy and enforce its demands, and rulers who had learned that the pope is not their political lord were forced to protect their lands against violence. The commotion increased from year to year and in 1529, at the Diet of Speyer, the papal party succeeded in passing a decree that the edict of Worms, which at a former Diet at Speyer, held three years before, had been suspended until the assembly of a general council to be convoked within a year, should now be enforced until the proposed council could be held. The decree forbade all persons to join the Lutherans, and all preachers were commanded to teach in accordance with the doctrines and regulations of the Church of Rome. That the princes and estates that had accepted the Gospel declined to accept such a tyrannical edict needs scarcely be mentioned, and when it was insisted that they must submit to the majority, they solemnly protested. "Thus the believers in the Gospel obtained the name of Protestants, an honored name which belonged originally to the Lutherans alone, but which has often been abused by those who have no other claim to it than that, like the Lutherans, they oppose popery. In their protest the evangelical princes and estates give their reasons for refusing to accept the decree and say, among other things:

“The new edict declares that the ministers shall preach the Gospel according to the writings of the Holy Christian Church. We think that for this regulation to have any value we should first agree on what is meant by the true and holy Church. Seeing that there is great diversity of opinion in this respect, that there is no public doctrine but such as is unfavorable to the Word of God; that the Lord forbids the teaching of any other doctrine but that of His Word; that each text of the Holy Scriptures ought to be explained by other and clearer texts; that this holy Book is in all things necessary for the Christian, easy of understanding, and calculated to scatter the darkness; therefore we are resolved, by the grace of God, to maintain the pure and exclusive preaching of His Word alone, as it is contained in the biblical books of the Old and New Testament, without adding anything hereto. This Word is the only truth; it is the one rule of all doctrine and of all life, and can never fail or deceive us. He who builds on this foundation shall stand against all the powers of hell, whilst all the human vanities that are set up against it shall fall before the face of God. For these reasons, most dear lords, uncles, cousins and friends, we earnestly entreat you to weigh carefully our grievances and our motives. If you do not yield to our request, we protest by these presents, before God, our only Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Savior, who will one day be our judge, as well as before all men and all creatures, that we, for ourselves and for our people, neither consent nor adhere in any manner whatsoever to the proposed decree, in anything that is contrary to God, to His Holy Word, to our right conscience, to the salvation of our souls, and to the last decree of Spires.”

It was noble *Protest*, worthy of the Christian men whose heart had been won by the heavenly truth of the Gospel, which they so simply and so firmly confessed in the following year at Augsburg.

All things were now tending in the direction of that great confession, which marked the official entrance into the world's history of the distinctive Protestant Church called Evangelical Lutheran. It was not another than the Christian Church, which the papal hierarchy claimed to be, that was thus brought into view. The evangelical believers called attention in their famous Protest to the misleading employment of the word Church in the decrees of the Diet. They were heartily willing to teach in accordance with the doctrines of the Church of Christ, if by this were meant the doctrines which Christ, the Head of the Church, sets forth in His Word for its guidance, but not if it were meant to bind on their consciences the commandments of the papal arty, who pretended to be the Church and arrogated to themselves the Lord's authority.

They would conform to all the requirements of the Church of Christ, but not to all the human impositions of the Church of Rome. It had become clear to the people who studied the Scriptures that the Church is the Communion of Saints, as all Christendom confessed in its Creed, and that those who abide in His Word are the people of God. To these the promise is given that they shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free. These

constitute the Church of the living God, the ground and pillar of the truth. Everything was tending now, under the providence and grace of the great King in Zion, to gather those together who had become one in faith around one confession, in which that faith should be declared to the world with new clearness and fulness and energy, and which should be the symbol of the true visible Church gathered around the pure Word and Sacrament as distinguished from the Roman Church, which had corrupted its way under papal domination, and from all other ecclesiastical organizations that departed more or less from the law and the testimony laid down in Holy Scripture.

The emperor received the Protestants ungraciously, and treated them as prisoners when their delegation submitted to him their decision. That the papal party was in power and had the prestige which attaches to superior numbers was manifest. This gave them in the eyes of the world a great advantage. They not only prided themselves on it, but in their carnal-mindedness even supposed that this gave them the absolute right to rule and impose on the minority the duty to obey. Neither the emperor nor the pope was sufficiently enlightened by the evangelical truth to appreciate the rights of human conscience and individual faith, and very probably the emperor, who in general was disposed to act reasonably and do right, sincerely thought it but reasonable and right that the Protestants, seeing that they were in the minority, should submit their judgment to that of their opponents, who were greatly in the majority. When the truth of supernatural revelation and the divine power which it exerts upon the soul is not appreciated, it is not difficult to understand how even men of just disposition, on the human basis of civil righteousness, can come to the conclusion that a modest man will not set up his opinions against a multitude, and that the fact of his persistently doing so renders him dangerous to the community and justifies repressive measures even to the extent of violence. Men who know no higher authority than that of man's judgment cannot otherwise than regard the voice of the majority as decisive in points of disagreement. The emperor probably did the best that he knew when he insisted that the Protestants must obey the decree of the Diet, because that was the decision of the greatest number. But that was not the best that the Lutherans knew, as they had learned in matters of faith and conscience to appeal from all human judgments, whether of kings or beggars, popes or peasants, learned or unlearned men, to God, who has given us a revelation for our enlightenment where all human reason

fails, and caused that revelation to be written for our learning in the Holy Scriptures. They appealed to a heavenly court, where men have no voice and therefore human majorities as well as minorities count for nothing. In the assurance of their faith that they stood upon the ground of eternal truth, with God on their side, they protested and resolved to stand by their protest, whatever consequences might come. They were with God and God was with them, and they had the faith to be confident that all was well. When we think of this heroic faith of our fathers, we have reason to blush at the remembrance of our fear in controversies that are past and at the contemplation of our vacillations and concessions and sinful subterfuges of the present, all of which reveal our littleness of faith and our shameful degeneration as children of the Reformation. Lord, wilt Thou not revive us again?

The emperor's reply to the Protestant decision led to negotiations looking to a defensive alliance on the part of the Lutherans; but the call issued by the emperor for a Diet, to be held at Augsburg in April of 1530, for a while allayed the rising tempest. The conciliatory tone of this call had a soothing effect. It was mild beyond all expectation. The emperor had evidently received information that bade him pause in his proposed persecution. The summons to the convocation at Augsburg stated as one of its objects, in regard to the existing religious differences, to hear and consider, in love and kindly concern, the opinions of all parties, to seek an agreement in the Christian truth, to obviate all misunderstandings, and to put away all wrongs.

When in March of that year the Elector of Saxony received the emperor's call for the Diet, he at once, by the advice of his faithful chancellor, Dr. Brueck, commissioned his theologians at Wittenberg. Luther, Jonas, Bugenhagen and Melancthon, to prepare a statement of the chief points of the evangelical doctrine, that it might be well understood what the Protestants must maintain at the convention and how far they could, with a good conscience, enter upon any agreement with their adversaries. This statement was to be delivered to the elector at Torgau with the least possible delay. As Luther had already at the end of the previous year carefully noted down the most important points in a paper known as the Schwabach Articles, these were taken as a basis for the work, thoroughly considered and revised, and additions made in regard to existing abuses. The result was then presented to the elector at Torgau, on which account he document as called the Torgau Articles. These the theologians proposed to present as their confession at

the approaching Diet, desiring to screen the good elector from danger to himself and his country; but he replied to their suggestion: "God forbid that I should be excluded: I will with you confess my Lord Jesus Christ." The preparations having been duly made, the elector with his retinue started on his journey and on May 2 reached Augsburg, being the first of all the princes to enter the city, where one of the most momentous assemblages in the world's history was to be held, and where in the following month the Lutherans read the carefully and prayerfully prepared declaration of their faith, which is known in all the world as the Augsburg Confession.

Thanks be to God that He inspired noble men to do the noble deed, and blessed be His name that to this day He has preserved the Church of the Augsburg Confession that is made glad by the Gospel which cheered their hearts and made them ready to sacrifice all that is dear on earth to preserve the dearer hope of salvation in heaven. And this glorious Church of the Augsburg Confession, while it prizes above all price the grace and the truth which is its precious heritage, and while it gives all glory to the Lord who blessed them and blesses us with the same grace unto salvation by the glorious Gospel which they confessed and we confess, does not forget the mighty men who suffered hardness to secure not only for themselves, but for their children and their children's children the blessings of the Gospel, which announces pardon and peace to sinners, who have and can have no other hope. We will not forget the grace of God which gave to the world the great men of the Reformation. whose noble deeds of faith and heroism gave us the Augsburg Confession.

God, who saves us by His grace, works also by His providence in the same love and to the same end. Our appreciation of His goodness embraces the instrumentalities of His government of the world as well as His means of grace committed to the Church. It is but a one-sided view of the divine government to confine our observation only to the Church with its administration of the means of grace. Unquestionably here is no hope of salvation outside of these, the divinely appointed means for its attainment. But the Lord rules over all, and if in the historical development it seems that natural reason is the potent factor, the goodness and mercy of the Creator and Governor of all must never be overlooked, as He makes all things work together for good to them that love Him and makes even the wrath of man to praise Him. It is ignorance of this divine government of the whole universe by which the Lord of heaven and earth makes all things tributary to the accom-

plishment of His purposes, that makes so many a history of men and nations and of the world such an unintelligible jumble of facts without a meaning and therefore devoid of all human interest. The Reformation was a wonderful work of God, and Luther and Melancthon and other prominent men in the great movement were His instruments. It was not a fatalistic plan carried out in disregard of the creative design to let the human will have the decision in respect to matters subject to its jurisdiction, but a plan of salvation by grace, to the execution of which the whole government of the world should be directed, without the least conflict with the primal design of man and his creative endowment and dominion.

God chose His servants for the great work of the Reformation, and by His grace they nobly performed the task assigned them. We will not forget their labor of love, as we will not forget the grace and mercy of God, by which they were enabled to proclaim anew the Gospel which gave them peace and brings peace to us. Glory to God in the highest, who through the Reformation proclaimed gain the peace on earth by the Gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, and with the renewed power of faith gave us in such simplicity and beauty the Augsburg Confession! Will we not hear it?

That which made the Diet of Augsburg so memorable in the annals of time is chiefly the presentation of the great Confession of the Evangelical Lutherans. There were other topics engaging the attention of Church and State in that splendid assembly of high dignitaries, but there was none of such momentous import as the work of Luther and the mighty movement which was in progress because of his persistence in preaching the Gospel, in spite of the opposition of emperor and pope, kings and cardinals. Even the great political questions of the time faded into relative insignificance before the vast concerns of the Christian faith and man's eternal salvation.

After the second Diet at Spires in 1529, which annulled the comparative freedom from persecution accorded to the Lutherans three years before and which gave rise to their famous Protest, the Protestant princes made their appeal to a free General Council. The emperor was evidently willing to grant this, but the pope, who was afraid of free councils and from whose power Charles V was unable to extricate himself, would not consent. He therefore convoked the Diet at Augsburg, promising to attend it in person and to give an attentive hearing to the Protestants, who were asked to prepare a statement of their faith and their grievances.

When the Diet assembled, which was to be on April 8, 1530, but was afterwards postponed until May 1, although the emperor's appearance was delayed for several weeks even beyond that date, the Lutherans were ready. During the time which lapsed between their entry into Augsburg and the coming of the emperor they were not idle. The Lutheran princes had their preachers busily engaged in preaching the Gospel throughout the city, and the people heard them gladly. Great multitudes thronged the churches to hear the good tidings; one church after another was opened to the Protestant preachers; even in the cathedral Lutheran services were held. The city was profoundly stirred, and the Papists, who could not fail to observe the mighty power which the Gospel exerted among the people, became more and more alarmed and embittered. Information of the commotion in Augsburg was conveyed to the emperor, whose delay was evidently becoming more trying to the Papists than to the Protestants. Three of the bitterest enemies of the Reformation, Elector Joachim of Brandenburg, and Dukes George of Saxony, and William of Bavaria, went to meet the emperor at Innsbruck to consult about the situation. They were sent on mischief and not at all scrupulous about the truth, so that Melancthon, on May 18, wrote to Luther that they had probably gone to the emperor to consult about the necks of the Lutherans. Their efforts were directed towards prejudicing the emperor against the noble Elector of Saxony on account of the Evangelical preaching, which they represented as almost causing riots in Augsburg. This they presumed to have been his object, as he was suspected of harboring evil designs. They even offered to furnish military forces to oppose the elector.

These representations were not without influence on the emperor, who was, seemingly against his own judgment, largely swayed by the influence of the pope and his following. Accordingly he complained to the elector that he had not been faithful in carrying out the edict of Worms, which required that Luther should be captured and that his followers should be crushed. It must be remembered that this edict had been virtually repealed by the Diet of Spire in 1526, and could not now be appealed to in proof of any dereliction by the elector. But this was not all. He demanded that the elector should put a stop to the preaching of the Gospel at Augsburg. That was expecting too much of a sincere Christian man.

The elector wrote to the emperor in reply, that he must for conscience' sake most humbly decline to forbid the promulgation of the Gospel, as nothing was preached but the plain truths of God and Holy Scripture, and

that it would be dreadful to forbid the Word of God and His truth. Moreover, this would be a stumbling-block to many and would look as if his Imperial Majesty designed to prohibit the doctrine of the Gospel without giving the matter a hearing, notwithstanding that his call convoking the Diet had given assurance that the whole subject should be duly considered in a Christian spirit, and he certainly would not desire that his word as published to all the world should be disregarded. His Majesty was also entreated not to give so much heed to the enemies of the Evangelical faith, who were doing their utmost to prejudice his mind against the truth.

In another respect the long delay of the emperor, who did not arrive in Augsburg until the 15th of June, inured to the advantage of the Protestants, severely as his dilatory course, which kept them waiting so long for the opening of the Diet, tried their patience. It gave them more time to put the finishing touches on their Confession, at which Melancthon worked assiduously every day.

As the time between the emperor's summons of the Diet and the date fixed for its meeting was very short, the work of preparing the document was done in haste, and the severe literary taste of Melancthon was not fully satisfied with the form which it had assumed. As regards the contents there were no lingering doubts in the minds of the Protestants, and the important document could have been presented without hesitation in the same form in which it had been delivered to the elector at Torgau in March of that year.

The Schwabach Articles, principally the work of Luther, and the Articles on Abuses, drawn up by Luther, Melancthon, Jonas and Bugenhagen, as they were embodied in the confession delivered to the elector, adequately expressed the faith and hope of the Lutherans, and there was no wavering among them. They were ready to present their testimony when they entered Augsburg in the early part of May.

As to its substance the whole work emanated from Luther, who was best qualified to give expression to the faith and life that pulsated in evangelical souls during those Reformation times. In respect to the contents he could justly claim that the Augsburg Confession was his work. And yet it was not his faith alone that was to be confessed before that august assembly, but the faith of all those who received the pure Gospel which the Holy Scriptures teach and which he preached. It was the faith of the whole Protestant host that was to be confessed and maintained, and it was befitting that this

should be clothed in the best possible form. Therefore, while the emperor delayed his coming they continued to direct their principal attention to the due preparation of their confession. Princes and theologians, who were to appear before the Diet as Evangelical Christians confessing their Scriptural faith in allegiance to Christ, in protest against papal usurpations and errors, were alike anxious to make their work worthy of the great occasion. The materials which were ready at hand were therefore committed to the skillful hands of Melancthon, who virtually acted as secretary, for further elaboration in form and style, that the confession might not only clearly express their common faith, but satisfy all the demands of a refined taste in its expression. Day after day Melancthon, the acknowledged master in matters of style, labored while the emperor delayed, to make the Augsburg Confession, in consultation with the other confessors, more and more that masterpiece among Evangelical Confessions which all the world acknowledges it to be. Alas, that all the world has not the faith which it so beautifully confesses!

On the 15th of June the emperor finally arrived at Augsburg. His coming was with all imperial pomp and pageantry, and he was received in the city with all the reverence due to his exalted position. When the reception ceremonies and addresses were over the papal legate extended his hands to pronounce the papal blessing. The emperor and the whole gorgeous assembly bowed their knees to receive it as the holy Roman father's benediction. But seven princes, those who were about to deliver the glorious Augsburg Confession in testimony of their evangelical faith, did not bend the knee. Were they soured and sullen, stubborn and contentious? God knows how their hearts yearned for the peace of the Gospel and the benediction of heaven upon all men. But therefore they desired the blessing of the Lord Jesus, not of the pope, and would not place themselves in a false position by any seeming concession to popery and its pretensions. They resolved to bear their testimony from the start against Romish error and for the truth of the Gospel which they came to confess. They were ready to suffer, but not to deny their faith — not even by an act which to less tender consciences might seem excusable.

But this did not end the trial to which their faith was subjected on that occasion of the imposing display of imperial splendor. After the pomp was past and the lords were retiring, the emperor requested the Protestant princes to remain. He then ordered that the preaching of the Gospel should

finally be discontinued, and announced that on the following day their participation in the Corpus Christi procession was expected. This was rightly regarded by them as the result of Romish influences upon the emperor. For years such processions had not been held at Augsburg. Besides this, it was customary at the assemblies of the princes to let each one decide for himself in what religious celebrations he would take part, if indeed he chose to take part in any. The emperor had therefore no ground to expect such participation by the Protestants and seemingly to test their loyalty by such an announcement. It was manifestly inspired by papal craft.

The Protestants demonstrated against the unusual and unwarranted requirement, but the emperor angrily replied that he would insist upon it. What then, in the presence of such pomp and power, should the poor Protestants do? They could flee for strength and refuge to the Lord their God. He was their ever present help, for it was in His name that they had set up their banner, with no reliance upon an arm of flesh. The aged Margrave, George of Brandenburg, accordingly stepped before the emperor and with the firmness peculiar to faith replied:

“Rather than deny God and His holy Gospel, and accept a false and erroneous opinion, I would here, on this spot, kneel before your Majesty and have my head struck off.”

The earnestness of the Margrave, manifestly expressive of the spirit of all the Protestants, did not fail to make a salutary impression on the emperor. No doubt to the chagrin of the Papists, whose will he had been executing even beyond his own conception of right and reason, the emperor answered in a kindly voice, “Dear Prince, not head chopped off.” But the orders were not revoked.

The Protestants were given time until the following morning to decide what they would do. In the evening they consulted and on the next day, in the name of them all, the Margrave of Brandenburg set forth at some length the reasons why they could not take part in the proposed ceremony. He declared that their participation in what the emperor designed to be a religious celebration would, on their part, be a partial assent to a proceeding, as of divine right, which the Scriptures do not recognize, and would thus be understood as a denial of their principle that only the Word of God must rule in matters of faith and conscience. Therefore, they could not comply with the emperor’s requirement, desirous as they were to be obedient to the “powers

that be," so long as this could be done without a violation of their conscience, which is bound to obey God rather than men.

The emperor failed to accomplish his purpose, but still firmly expressed the hope that the Protestants would find it possible to participate in the ceremony.

They did not.

The result was, as an historian of the times expresses it, that "our princes returned to their lodgings and left the emperor with other electors and princes to hold their procession." In regard to preaching it was at last agreed that for the time both parties should refrain from publicly proclaiming their tenets in the churches.

Meantime the filing and polishing of the Confession which as Melancthon's special charge, but the delivery of which as the declaration of their faith, was the great concern of all the evangelical princes and theologians, went on, that nothing might be left undone to give it clearness and elegance. For various reasons it was not deemed wise that Luther's precious life should be jeopardized by his personal presence at Augsburg, though his counsel in the great work of preparation for the approaching testimony before the Diet was felt by all to be of paramount importance. He accompanied the evangelical confessors as far as Coburg, that he might be as near the Diet as possible without leaving Saxon territory, and was in constant communication with his brethren at Augsburg. Although he could not attend he conferences which they held in those anxious days of suspense and trial, when clouds hung heavily over them, his thoughts were hourly with them, and his prayers to God were unceasing for their success. Melancthon kept him duly informed of the work done on the Confession. When this was sent to him in the revised form on May 11, he wrote: "It pleases me right well, and there is nothing I would change or could improve. Nor would it be expedient for me to do so; for I cannot tread so gently and so quietly. May Christ our Lord grant that it may bear much fruit, as we all hope and pray that it will."

There was not a Christian at Augsburg who was more intensely interested in the work going forward there or who participated more solicitously in its progress than Luther in his watchtower at Coburg. "With sighs and prayers," he writes to Melancthon, "I am in truth faithfully at your side. The cause concerns me also, indeed more than any of you. It has not been begun lightly or wickedly or for the sake of honors or worldly goods. In this

the Holy Ghost is my witness, and the cause itself has shown it until now. If we fall, Christ falls with us — He, the Ruler of the World! And though He should fall, I would rather fall with Christ than stand with the emperor.”

His faith and prayers, as well as his voice and pen, were thoroughly enlisted in the evangelical cause which as engrossing the thoughts and moving the hearts of thousands of noble Christian men, and which was now reaching its great crisis at Augsburg.

The Diet was opened on Monday, June 20. A solemn mass as celebrated in the cathedral, which the Lutherans attended, but without taking part in the services. The papal nuncio then made a savage attack on the Germans for their evangelical faith, representing them as worse than the Turks, who were causing the emperor some trouble and whose case was also to be considered by the Diet. Thus at the very outset the spirit of the Romish party was indicated, and left the Protestants but little room to hope for fair treatment. The outlook was dark around them, but the hills of God were bright, and they had learned to look up. In a case like theirs all help of man is vain. They knew this right well, and therefore looked up to the hills whence their help cometh. Having faith, they were not dismayed.

The next step in the Diet was not so menacing, though it was by no means reassuring. In the address made on behalf of the emperor there was at least a little more moderation than in that made by the nuncio in behalf of the pope. He had the clemency to declare that the religious question which caused him solicitude, and which would occupy the attention of the Diet, should be dealt with in the spirit of charity and kindness. But unjust accusations were at the same time made against the Protestants. Troubles which had arisen were ascribed to their neglect of duties imposed by the Diet of Worms. In both addresses the Lutherans were represented as the offenders, though the temper of the emperor was less fierce than that of the pope. Neither afforded the evangelical Christians any reasonable hope for justice, much less of charity.

In the evening the Elector of Saxony called his Lutheran colleagues together and admonished them to be steadfast in their faith and its profession. They were in peril, and in their time of trial they all needed encouragement for the conflict that was before them. The Lord God Almighty was with them, and they had nothing to fear. But the faith of Christians often becomes weak in the day of temptation, and they need encouragement even when, from the standpoint of trust in God, there is not the slightest reason to

be dismayed. On the following morning the elector desired to be left alone. He entered his closet, prayed long and fervently, and went over the Confession again with critical care and earnest solicitude as in the presence of God, before whose judgment bar he desired to be ready at any hour to give account of his stewardship. He thus endeavored to be prepared for giving unqualified utterance before the Diet of the faith of his own heart as well as that of his brethren in faith and in tribulation. The Lutherans left nothing undone to fortify themselves, through the power of the Holy Spirit speaking to them in the Holy Scriptures, with the full assurance of faith, so that whatever might betide they might be certain that God is with them and would bless them. All the historical documents of the time, in letters of high purpose and narratives of corresponding deeds, make manifest the child like confidence in God's promises which actuated those brave confessors in those days that tried men's souls.

It was agreed that the subject of religion, which was agitating all hearts, and which was confessedly of the most momentous import, should have the first place in the deliberations of the Diet. The emperor designated Friday, June 24, for the purpose, and ordered that the Lutherans should be ready on that day to present their cause. They were ready at any moment. With them it was not a small matter for which the needful preparation could be made at some convenient season of leisure. They had for years been earnestly considering the questions involved; they had drawn up their statement before the Diet met; and all the days of their waiting at Augsburg had been spent in revising and perfecting the important document. On Thursday the evangelical estates were convened at the house of the Elector of Saxony, the Confession was again carefully read and considered, and all of them signed it. There was nothing lacking in the preparation or their great historic work when the morning of Friday dawned. They were quite ready, but the emperor was not. He had other interests, which occupied him more than that which was the great life question in the souls of the Protestants, who were seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. All the indications were that the Papists had no desire to hear the Confession or to have it publicly read. They rather dreaded it. Slanderous reports had been circulated about the doctrine as well as the life of the Lutherans, and it was not to the interest of their adversaries to let the light of truth shine among the people. Not only would the foul misrepresentations of the Romanists be exposed if the Lutherans received a hearing, but the abominations of popery, which

these misrepresentations were designed to serve, were also likely to share in the exposure. The policy of the Papists, therefore, was, if possible, to prevent an open declaration of their faith and purpose by the Protestants, as this might break down many a refuge of falsehood on which the papal party built their hopes of victory. Other business was represented as needing immediate attention and the pressing subject of religious dissensions was pushed aside. Thrice did Dr. Brueck, who was ready to read the Confession, entreat the Diet to give it a hearing. The second time, after a matter that was declared to be urgent had been settled, the emperor alleged that the day was now too far spent for the public reading, and suggested that the purpose of the document could be attained by handing it over to him, promising at the same time to give it all due consideration. No doubt the Lutherans felt that, if this were done, their righteous desire for a public hearing of their Confession would be frustrated. In their behalf Dr. Brueck pleaded that they had been grossly maligned in regard to their doctrine and practice, and that justice and fairness required that they should be allowed to give an account of their faith before all people; wherefore they humbly entreated his majesty for God's sake to grant them a public hearing. Finally the emperor yielded to the arguments and entreaties of the Protestants, and consented that their Confession should be publicly read on the following day.

With little sense of fairness the emperor had taken the precaution that this reading should not take place in the great hall of the council, where the public sessions of the Diet were held. In the estimation of the papal party that would not be expedient, as it would enable a multitude to hear it. It was therefore ordered to be read in the chapel of the episcopal palace. Accordingly in the afternoon of June 25 the princes and deputies assembled there to hear the Confession. Dr. Brueck held in his hand the Latin, Dr. Bayer the German copy, the latter being the one appointed to be read. Again the emperor manifested his disposition to prevent, as much as in him lay, the effect of the public reading. He demanded that the Latin copy, which would not have been so generally understood, should be read. But the Elector of Saxony urged that they were on German ground and therefore hoped that his majesty would permit the use of the German tongue. The emperor deemed it prudent to yield, and Dr. Bayer read the Confession in a loud and measured tone, so that all could distinctly hear every word of the grand testimony to the truth in Jesus. Thousands of people, who had heard of the imperial arrangement, gathered in the court outside of the chapel, and through

the open windows the ringing tones of Dr. Bayer's voice were heard as clearly by the multitude as if they had been within the walls of the small chapel, which would accommodate only about two hundred persons. In spite of the emperor's shrewd scheme to prevent the public proclamation of the Gospel of grace in Christ for man's salvation, God in His good providence prepared a way to have it heard by a vast concourse of eager listeners, many of whom praised the Lord for the glad tidings they were permitted to hear in those troublous times.

"That was a day," writes Spalatin, "on which one of the greatest works that ever occurred on earth was done — a day on which a Confession sounded on Holy Scripture and written in such quiet mildness in Latin and German was read, the like of which had not been seen for a thousand years, nay, not since the world stands."

"I am exceedingly glad," says Luther, "to have lived to this hour, in which Christ by His so great confessors, in so great an assembly, has been preached in so glorious a Confession, and the Word has been fulfilled, 'I will speak of Thy testimonies before kings,' and this also has been fulfilled, 'and shall not be ashamed;' 'for him who confesseth me before men' — these are the words of Him who cannot lie — 'I also will confess before my Father who is in heaven.'"

The trumpet ones of Gospel truth and liberty that sounded forth on that 25th of June in 1530 are ringing in the ears of the world until this day, when millions are still rejoicing in the precious treasure of the glorious Augsburg Confession. Shall not we, favored sons of such noble sires, hold high the banner on which it is inscribed?

The emperor was not delighted, as were the Evangelical Christians, at the precise and precious proclamation of the truth unto salvation by faith in Christ presented in the Confession, though there was much in it that evidently found lodgment in his heart. He made known, indeed, that he received it graciously. "But," he added, "as this is a matter of great moment and requires mature consideration," he would give it further thought and communicate his decision later. Having taken charge of the Confession and ordering that it should not be printed without his consent, he closed the glorious day's proceedings.

As the Confession set forth the pure Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe, it could not fail to impress many earnest hearts which were not reckoned among the Lutherans. Some of

these were pricked in their consciences, and some were convinced that the Protestants had been basely slandered; while the thorough-going Papists, who were intent only on gaining a victory over the bold monk of Wittenberg and wreaking vengeance upon him for his alleged insolent attack on his superiors, were chagrined beyond measure. It produced a tumult among them. The bitter enemies of the Gospel could not answer the questions proposed by minds more seriously inclined, and they would not acknowledge their defeat. Not only some of those high in authority were led to doubt their papistic foundations in the light of the clear testimony of the Gospel, but even the emperor himself could not wholly conceal its disquieting effect upon his conscience; and it is still a question if he did not at last, when death came, flee by faith for refuge to that Savior whose merits were proclaimed by the Lutherans at Augsburg as the sinner's only hope of salvation.

After hearing the Confession the papistic party held a council to determine what should now be done. A declaration of their faith and aims, that inquiring minds might have an opportunity to compare them with the clear and candid statements of the Evangelical Confession, would now have been in order and eminently proper. It might even seem that this would be the only reasonable course from their own point of view, as they would thus compete with the Protestants for public favor by setting the two contentions side by side and inviting all to examine and judge for themselves. Such a course would have been in accord also with the avowed purpose of the emperor in convoking the Diet, the call for which recognized the existence of unhappy dissensions on questions of religion. These should be settled, and to this end each party in the controversies was expected to present its case. But a course which seems so reasonable and so manifestly demanded by the circumstances, did not commend itself to the judgment of the more radical and reckless followers of the pope, whose policy even the emperor was not at liberty to ignore. They sought out inventions to evade what they thought a dangerous path, even if they did not fully realize the futility of arraying darkness against the light. It was a crafty device of their theologians to deny that the Protestants were on an equal footing with the adherents of the pope, and that these were under the same obligation to state and defend their position as the former. They argued that they were the party in power and in possession, while the Lutherans were in rebellion against the constituted authorities and had the duty to submit and obey their superiors, instead of

claiming equality with them. In those times of ignorance such arguments had force, even upon honest minds. The light which the Reformation brought and which now shone in splendor upon Augsburg through the great Confession, had not yet penetrated the hearts of the people, and the fallacy of the Romish contention had not yet become generally apparent — alas, it is not even yet apparent to thousands of people who call themselves Protestants, but have never fully purged out the leaven of popery, which still vitiates their thinking and disturbs their peace!

The papistic theologians thought it plain enough that the pope and his cardinals and bishops and priests were the Church, and that the Church had supreme authority on earth. They did not know better, and they refused to learn better, assiduously as the Lutherans endeavored to impress on them the heavenly truth declared in the Bible. Asserting this claim, they thought themselves invulnerable, notwithstanding that the fundamental principles of the Reformation had been proclaimed as the very truth of God revealed from heaven, and had been victoriously maintained from the Scriptures against all objections and assaults from the Papists. They would not learn. They adhered to their custom and their slavery, and supposed that an appeal to the miserable order of things as it existed was sufficient argument to make all popish ordinances respectable and acceptable. But were they willing to formulate their claims, as these had come to be understood in their superstitious and tyrannical practices, and to assert them in opposition to the teaching of Holy Scripture and the sighing of sincere souls for release from bondage, as these had been set forth and voiced by the Augsburg Confession? That was a ground which they saw to be too perilous to venture on. They preferred to make no explicit declaration of their faith as against the Lutheran confession of Gospel truth, with its appeal to Holy Scripture as the decisive Word of God. This was prudent not only because no opinions of men could have any weight of evidence in opposition to the decision of God, which must stand in all eternity, but also in view of conditions with which human reason must reckon. The papistic confession of human traditions and notions and policies and contrivances presented a labyrinth that was inextricable even for the craftiest Romans. What could they present as the settled doctrine and decision of the Romish hierarchy, which they claimed to be the Church of Christ? In every way they occupied unsafe ground, and every step was perilous. They could not without the greatest danger venture upon a declaration of principles and policies which might

result in dissensions and disputes among themselves, and especially not when any declaration would necessarily be set against the simple Gospel confessed by the Lutherans. The council was perplexed, and opinions were divided. Some advocated violence as the only effective means of overcoming the so-called stubborn heretics. It was argued that peace could be secured only by the utter extermination of the Lutherans, and it was accordingly urged that only fire and sword could remedy the existing evil. Others were decided in their conviction that in the present crisis such extreme measures would not be good policy. No doubt some of those who opposed the scheme of blood and murder were impelled to withhold their assent to such sanguinary expedient by other thoughts than those of prudent policy. The emperor and some of the princes were disinclined at once to resort to the sword as the best means to maintain their cause. Only in one point there was apparent unanimity among the Papists: they must not yield the prestige which they had in the possession of power. They had the advantage and meant to maintain it. Therefore the Lutherans must not be treated as their equals in the contest. It must not be conceded that the Protestants were entitled to have their cause adjudicated before an impartial tribunal which should accord to both parties the same rights. According to their conception there were not two religious parties whose controversy was brought before the Judge of heaven and earth and must be decided by His Word, but a heretical party on trial before the Church, which must pronounce judgment, notwithstanding the act that this alleged church was the other party to the controversy, and its usurpation and abuses were fundamental points in the dispute. They were shrewd enough to perceive that if they admitted their cause to be on trial as well as that of the Protestants, and that both must be judged by a higher court than that which they claimed to be the Church, which meant that they must themselves be judge and jury, their case was well-nigh hopeless. If the whole matter was to be referred to the tribunal of the Great King in Zion, before whom Papist and Protestant alike must give account, the Word of that King must be decisive, and that is just what the opponents of the Gospel dreaded. To them it was essential that the authority usurped by the pope should be maintained, and that thus the leaders of their party should be the supreme judge between them and the Protestants, whose condemnation was therefore a foregone conclusion. Against this Romish begging of the whole question at issue and tyrannical exercise of power, which the Papists had unrighteously arrogated to themselves, the Evangelical

Christians could not do otherwise than persistently protest, and unswervingly make their appeals to the Word of the Lord, which is written for the learning of all men in Holy Scripture.

As the sanguinary party could not carry their point, looking to the termination of the religious dissensions by the extermination of the Lutherans, the deliberations of the Romanists exulted in the appointment of a committee of theologians to examine and refute the Confession of the Protestants. This cannot but be regarded under the circumstances as an additional evidence of the salutary effect produced by the evangelical testimony at Augsburg. It was something of a concession that the papistic party was willing to give the Protestant Confession such distinguished consideration. It was hazardous to meet the Lutherans on their own ground, and many felt it to be a condescension. The truth confessed was exerting its heavenly power on the souls of men; and if the resolution adopted by the council of the Romanists does not prove that many of them were affected by it and impelled to give it careful examination, it undeniably does prove that it was working to such an extent that a refutation was regarded imperative. Among the men selected for this work were the ablest leaders of their party, including those who were known to be the bitterest enemies of the Reformation, such as Eck, Faber, Wimpina and Cochlaeus.

These men of Romish might, who were eager for the fray, at once went zealously to work; and in a little more than two weeks they were ready to submit to the princes of their party a bulky composition which was called a "Confutation" of the Augsburg Confession. But the document was in no respect a brilliant success; in fact it was a dismal failure. The emperor received it on the 12th of July; but on the 15th it was returned with the criticism that it was entirely too diffuse, superficial and violent, and with instructions to make it more modest and more thorough. For men as vain as Eck this was a hard medicine to take, but there was nothing to be done, considering the high source, but to take it and suffer the humiliation. Apparently the commission, in their hot and hasty zeal, had overlooked the main business for which they were appointed. Instead of subjecting the Confession to a rigid examination they had expended their energies upon a violent reiteration of the calumnies in vogue among the populace against Luther and the Lutherans. Spalatin reports that the "Confutation" consisted of 280 manuscript pages, but that when the emperor was done with the sifting to which he subjected it, only 12 pages remained. It was mortifying. Luther re-

marked concerning it that “poor carpenters make many chips and spoil much choice wood, as ungodly scribes daub much good paper.” No wonder that Eck, who was the mastermind of the commission, was almost driven to desperation and could give vent to nothing better than the remark, that the emperor was himself to blame for their intolerable trouble with the Lutherans; for if he had heeded the counsels of the pope and his faithful advisers, he would, when he entered Germany, have attacked them with fire and sword, and the cause would have been won by putting them all to death.

Notwithstanding the discouraging reception of their first effort, the Romish theologians went to work again in the hope of producing something more satisfactory to the authorities, who no doubt seemed to them rather hard to please. On the 3rd of August they presented their “Confutation” again. This time it was in a form which the emperor, after numerous revisions, thought fit to be read before the Diet. This was done in the same place where, more than month before, the glorious Confession of the Lutherans had been read. But it lacked everything that made the Augsburg Confession of the Protestants glorious. The light of the Gospel did not play around it, and the power and comfort of the great Evangelical Confession was not in it. Like the first effort, it was a failure in all matters essential to the great controversy, although from a merely human point of view it was in some respects less objectionable than the first. On August 6th Melancthon wrote to Luther: “Faber never wrote a book so silly and so awkward that this Confutation is not more silly and awkward still.” It was difficult for the Lutherans to repress merriment at the feeble efforts of their adversaries to support their contentions by Holy Scripture, at which they were novices. The matter was too serious to indulge in ridicule, but the Protestants could not otherwise than feel elated by the papistic failure to support their cause on any grounds that could appeal to the Christian conscience; and Spalatin writes that all upright and reasonable men were consoled and encouraged when they heard how childishly and inaptly the Confutation was written.

For the papal party the situation was proportionately disheartening. Those who were more reasonably and righteously disposed could not but admit that they had been defeated in the grave contest.

It was now as perplexing to decide what further to do as it was after the Lutheran Confession had been publicly read, and the power of its heavenly truth was felt throughout the Diet. The Confutation had not convinced sincere enquirers that the Protestants were in error, and the weak product of the

strongest papal theologians, with all their strenuous effort, naturally intensified the doubt whether the cause of Rome could be maintained by any legitimate appeal to human consciences. At a meeting held after the reading of the Confutation the Bishop of Augsburg admonished his colleagues to exercise caution that nothing be done against the Scriptures or in violation of justice and equity, as it was manifest that the confessors of Luther's doctrine had not assailed or desired to impugn a single article of the Christian faith; and when another bishop vehemently remonstrated against such concessions and charged that the views expressed were in conflict with those maintained but a few days before, the Bishop of Augsburg replied:

“I do not deny that in my life I have done manythings which were evil and culpable, but the present time and occasion impel me to renounce all malice, to abandon the evil lusts of the flesh, and to begin a different life. And that I may conceal nothing, perhaps the life of Your Grace has not been more pious and godly than mine; but your purpose compared with mine is so much worse and more terrible as you endeavor with the greater obstinacy to exercise your vices, to cloak the idolatrous abuses, and to defend and maintain ungodly doctrines.”

The participants were bitter and the meeting became stormy. But nothing was done, or could be done by a party divided among themselves, to secure peace between them and the evangelical confessors. Notwithstanding their internal dissensions and their inability to give a Christian reason for their adherence to the papal cause, they persisted in their opposition to the Protestants. The emperor declared that he accepted the position of the Confutation, alleged that the Confession of the Lutherans had been refuted, and expressed the hope that they would return to the old religion. Under the circumstances this could only mean that the Protestants were required to renounce their evangelical faith which, though it was the faith of God's people in all generations, they should vilify as an innovation in the kingdom of Christ, and return to the papal house of bondage with all its abominations and miseries under the pope.

The reasonable request of the Lutherans, that a copy of the Confutation should be furnished them, only added to the confusion of the Papists. All could see its propriety, but not all could see the expediency of granting it. They were perplexed about it. From their point of view it would not be prudent to submit the weak document to the scrutiny of the strong men of the Augsburg Confession; but neither would it seem prudent to submit themselves to the reproach of dreading to have their work examined. They chose

what appeared to them the less of the two evils confronting them, and refused to grant the request. The papal legate, Campegius, who had shown himself to be a wily diplomatist, had previously expressed the opinion that it would not be wise to enter upon a discussion of the Lutheran doctrine, because its advocates would have little difficulty in rendering it plausible to the common people. He recommended that no copy of the Confutation should be given out, lest this should give rise to new contentions. Their conduct made it apparent that they felt their weakness. The Jesuit Massenius confesses that their refusal to give the Protestants a copy of the answer to the Confession justly made the impression that they did not have great confidence in their cause; and with some appearance of candor he remarks that the Lutherans had more expert controversialists than the Romanists, and also had the further advantage that they based their contentions on the one foundation of Scripture, while the Romanists wandered about on the wide field of various interpretations, of the writings of the Fathers, and of the decrees of Councils.

At last, amid the manifold embarrassments of the situation, the emperor concluded that it would be best to give the confessors a copy of the Confutation, provided that they would promise under oath not to publish it or offer a reply to it. Such conditions they, of course, could not accept. No doubt the Papists felt perfectly safe in making such an offer, as the Lutherans could not honorably accept it, and the document would be useless to them if they did accept it. They stood fast in the faith of the Augsburg Confession, and firmly refused to adopt the opinions of the Confutation, or in any way to be bound by it, whatever the Diet might decree.

Apparently the whole matter was thus settled. All efforts to effect an agreement had failed. The Lutherans had presented their Confession, and their consciences being bound by the Word of God and their eternal salvation being at stake, they had done what they could. Much as they prized peace, there as nothing that they could yield, whatever might betide. The Romanists had drawn up a paper which they called the Confutation, and the Lutherans were required to accept it. They could not. Though the Papists were in power and therefore assumed the authority to compel the acceptance of their decision, it could not be accepted. The evangelical believers were ready to be condemned as heretics or rebels, or whatever the party in power might doom them to be called, but they were under no conditions ready to prove disloyal to their Heavenly King and to renounce their faith in

His Word. Therefore the rupture was inevitable. As our fathers at Augsburg spoke because they believed in the Lord and His precious Gospel, there was no choice for them but to stand by the truth which they professed and become known in the world as the Church of the Augsburg Confession.

Although they could not obtain a copy of the so-called Confutation, they resolved to make a reply to its allegations and claims. Many had heard it read, and some had taken notes. Melancthon, although he was not present at the reading, was induced by inclination as well as by solicitations and by the circumstances generally, to prepare the reply. This was called the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, which is a masterly exposition and defense of the Lutheran faith, and which was rightly assigned an-important place in the Book of Concord containing the public Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In the preparation of the work he used the notes taken by Camerarius.

“On September 22, the first draft of the Apology was offered to the emperor by Dr. Brueck, immediately after the reading of the first decision of the Diet. It was received by the Count Palatine Frederick, in the name of the emperor, but returned when his brother Ferdinand whispered something in his ear.”

There was no further notice taken of it by the Diet, in whose second decree the Confutation was promulgated as its official decision. Melancthon subsequently obtained a copy of the document, and continued to work on the Apology until it was brought to its present state of completeness as a recognized masterpiece of confessional clearness and vigor.

As a matter of fact the presentation of the Lutheran Confession at Augsburg and of its alleged Confutation ended the church relations between the Lutherans and the Papists. They were inwardly divided and outwardly separated. The papal dream of supreme authority could not bind them together and make them a unit. There was a gulf between them which no human pretensions or contrivances could bridge over. The emperor was angry at the persistent refusal of the Lutherans to submit their faith and subject their consciences to the dictation of the pope or the decision of the Diet. According to the prevailing views of the time, that meant culpable obstinacy. But the light of the Gospel had come again and shone in the hearts of the Protestants. In the high matters of conscience and eternal salvation they had learned from the Holy Scriptures to hear and obey only when God speaks. Neither pope nor emperor could be admitted to have any authority against

the Lord of all. The Augsburg Confession was forced to take its stand, whatever the consequences might be, for Christ and His revealed truth, against the Romish sect that would not submit to the Word of the Lord, but boasted of its power to compel all others to submit to its usurped authority.

The radical and rabid party among the Papists thought that now assuredly the emperor would resort to physical force, which they regarded the only efficient means of subduing the supposed stubbornness of the Lutherans. Some of the Protestants also expected such a result, and the Landgrave Philip of Hesse was no doubt actuated by such thoughts when, on the 6th of August, he secretly departed from Augsburg. But counsels of moderation still prevailed in the Diet, and renewed efforts were made to unite the divided hosts. A committee, composed of members of both parties, was appointed to devise a way of peace. But it failed of its end, as it could not otherwise than fail as long as the popish party refused to let the Lord reign and accept His Word as decisive. The fanatical Elector of Brandenburg, as the chief spokesman of the papal party, sought to subdue the Lutherans by threats, which he thought would be potent for their subjugation, because unquestionably the pope and the emperor had the power to execute them — if the Lord of all did not reduce their potency to perfect impotence! But the Protestants cared nothing for papal threats. Should the worst come they declared themselves ready to sacrifice not only all their earthly possessions, but even their lives in order to preserve a good conscience before God and save their souls from everlasting death.

Nothing was accomplished, but hope was not abandoned. A second committee, composed of fewer members, was appointed to make another effort toward conciliation. It consisted of fourteen persons — two princes, two jurists, and three theologians on each side. Eck, Wimpina and Cochlaeus represented the Romanists: Melancthon, Schnepf and Brenz represented the Lutherans. These discussed the questions in controversy from the 16th to the 21st of August. For a while their endeavors seemed more promising of results. But while there was a temporary prospect of peace it was at the expense of the Gospel. Another time of probation had come for the evangelical cause.

Luther was not present at Augsburg, and now he was greatly needed. Melancthon was expected to take the lead in the maintenance of evangelical truth, and though he had done noble work he was not equal to the task before him now, where a Luther was needed. He was a man of peace and

unduly timid withal. It is difficult to speak of the work of this commission without censuring his weakness at a time when the occasion demanded unflinching strength. He hesitated and vacillated when he should have stood forth as the bold confessor of eternal truth. The fact is undeniable that his lack of qualification for leadership when faith was put signally upon trial, as it was on this occasion, threatened disaster to the whole cause of the Reformation. He did not show the firmness, especially against men so unscrupulous and so resourceful in subterfuge as Eck, which was befitting the humble disciple of Christ who absolutely bowed to the Lord's Word, whatever might come of it. By Romish craft an agreement in terms was effected on some important points, while the words were so chosen as to admit of a Romish sense. Peace seemed secured, but without a distinct declaration of evangelical truth. Even in the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith Melanchthon consented to a compromise, which did not indeed expressly deny the Lutheran confession, but which rendered this liable to a false construction in the interest of Romanism.

Luther, who always looked at things in the clear light of the Gospel, replied to a letter of Melanchthon's in which the matter was reported to him: "You write how Eck was forced to confess that we are saved alone by grace; would to God that you had forced him to quit lying."

Melanchthon was pressed on all sides by the shrewd Romish theologians, and, sincere Christian though he was, he was unable in his weakness to withstand all the solicitations and artifices of the cunning adversary. He was thus allured into concessions which were not even in accord with the faith of his own soul, and he himself as well as his Lutheran brethren suffered for it. But God still ruled, and He had no concessions or compromises to make. The wily plans which menaced the evangelical cause must finally come to naught.

When the Papists pertinaciously insisted that the Protestants, if they were determined that the Holy Supper should continue to be administered in both kinds, must not teach the people that this is done by divine command, and that the withholding of the cup from the laity as practiced in the Romish Church is a violation of God's ordinance, Melanchthon's conscience overcame his timorous love of peace, and neither he nor his colleagues could be induced to make such a concession. Our Lord's plain "Drink ye all of it" could not be put aside to gratify the pope. The Lutherans declared that the Church must administer the sacraments according to the

divine institution, and that the people must be taught what the Scriptures teach. By the grace of God the danger that was threatening the Church of the Augsburg Confession was thus averted. The negotiations ere brought to a close, and the commission reported that no agreement could be effected.

A third effort, the committee being still further reduced in number and only Melanchthon and Eck being engaged as theologians in the negotiations, was also without result. Melanchthon, invigorated by the letters of Luther, became stronger and steadier in the maintenance of Gospel truth, and was no longer disposed to make dangerous concessions. The Lutheran princes now announced their determination to enter upon no further negotiations concerning their Confession, as their faith rested upon the Word of God and they therefore could yield nothing. They accordingly renewed their appeal to a general council, and the Augsburg Confession remained intact as the declaration of the evangelical faith.

Virtually the business of the Diet was thus finished, so far as the Lutherans were concerned. Being justified by faith, they had peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and they would stand by their banner. They had taken their position with many prayers and amid many conflicts, and knew whereof they affirmed. What true love could do in fidelity to the Scriptures to prevent a final rupture between them and the Papists they had done. Now the difference was seen to be irreconcilable, and they took their divinely appointed place in the world as the Evangelical Church, with the banner of the Augsburg Confession floating over them to mark their separation from Rome as a distinct Christian organization, but at the same time to show forth their loyalty to the Head of the Church and His blessed Word recorded in Holy Scripture as the Church of the pure Word and Sacrament, and thus the true visible Church of Christ on earth.

But the Diet still continued its sessions. On September 7, after hearing the determination of the Protestants, the emperor informed them that he had heard with displeasure and grief that in the chief articles of faith they were still disagreed with the other estates; that he had not supposed that they, who were comparatively so few, would presume to make such innovations in opposition to the holy customs of the Christian Church and maintain a doctrine which is inconsistent with that of the pope, of his majesty, of King Ferdinand, and of all the princes and estates of the realm; and that it could not be permitted that the matter should be thus left undecided and free course be given to the innovations; they must be resisted and abolished.

With a seeming sense of justice he at the same time promised to see that the pope granted the general Council to which appeal was made, but with manifest injustice he appended conditions which rendered the promise nugatory.

Everything indicated that the emperor was guided by the wishes of the papistic party, and was not inclined to show the Lutherans any favor. He continued to harp on the fact that these were a minority and should therefore in modesty and meekness submit to the judgment of the greater number, especially as these were in power and could enforce their decisions. In pursuance of the same sophistry he urged that it would be dreadful to pronounce his ancestors and other good princes in error by admitting the contention of the Protestants. His logic was as lame as that of the Romanists usually is. But potent as it was to mislead the thoughtless partisans, it was impotent with those whose faith rested on the Word of God. They were sure that what the Lord revealed from heaven is true, and they were not disturbed by human fears and threats of disorder and disaster if this truth be accepted. They were intent on the salvation of their souls and of those who would hear their confession, and were content to leave all consequences to God, who gave the Gospel for the enlightenment and comfort of men, not for their criticism and its subjection to the test of expediency as human reason is able to see it. Happily for us and for all the world they were men of faith, who held fast to the Scriptures, whether others would hear or forbear, and were therefore sure that their Confession would stand amid any and every storm, as the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.

On the 23rd of September the Elector of Saxony left the Diet in the conviction that nothing more was to be done there for the cause of the Gospel. It still remained in session for several months longer, and on the 19th of November the final decree was published. The emperor remained firm in his opposition to the Lutherans. They were condemned, and fearful menaces were pronounced against them. But they, by the grace of God, were firm in their faith, and were not daunted by the threats of emperor and pope. They trusted in the Lord, and He made them strong, so that they did not fear what man could do unto them. They were unjustly dealt with; the powers of earth were against them: but God was with them, and they carried the glorious banner of the Augsburg Confession to victory.

That the Lutherans could not and would not comply with the requirements made upon them by the Papists in their proud consciousness of power, is plainly implied in their faith and in the Confession which God

gave them grace to make before all people. They were not disheartened by the cruel threats made against them, notwithstanding that the party making them had the power requisite for their execution. Trusting in the Word of God as given to the world in Holy Scripture, they knew that God is mightier than popes and emperors; and they knew also that He would maintain His cause and lead it to ultimate victory even if, in His inscrutable providence, the instruments He had chosen to advocate it should be required to sacrifice all their dearest earthly possessions and even their lives, in the faithful execution of the trust committed to them. Believing that the Savior, whose cause they were pleading and maintaining, has all power in heaven and on earth, and that He would according to His promise be with His disciples every day and make every thing work together for good to them that love Him, they were sure that whatever betide, their cause could not be lost. They might suffer: appearances might be against them: they could not know what thorny paths they must traverse and to what severe trials their faith might be subjected while God works out His plan in history: but they did know that the gates of hell should not prevail against the Church of Christ. The faith that was in them is voiced by Luther when he writes:

“Even though we are greatly solicitous and anxious, yet we accomplish nothing by our vain cares, but only afflict and torture ourselves and render all things worse. God wants us to acknowledge Him in Christ as our God and Father, to call upon Him in all danger, and to believe with certainty that He cares for us, as Peter writes in the testimony quoted from Psalm 55:22: ‘Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.’ 1 Pet. 5:7. Also Christ Himself says: ‘Be not therefore anxious.’ Matt. 6. Nor can Satan and his instruments injure us more than to kill the body. They cannot even touch the soul; as Christ Himself says, comforting His disciples: ‘Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.’ Matt. 10:28. Christ, our Lord and Savior, has once died for our sins, as it is written in Rom. 4 and 6, and in Heb. 5 and 9. Therefore He will die no more for truth and righteousness, but lives and reigns as the Almighty Lord of all creatures. If this is true, as the Scriptures constantly testify, why should we fear?”

Faith such as God gave Luther made men strong; only the lack of it, or the inconstancy of it, made men weak and fearful.

The Lutherans were not much disturbed by the papistic boast, which was reiterated in the imperial decree, that their Confession had been refuted by the so-called Confutation. They knew that according to the Word of God, recorded by inspiration of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, it was not so, whatever is Imperial Majesty and his papistic prompters might think and boast about it; and on that Word, not on any human authority, whether of

emperor or pope, their faith was founded. Neither were they driven to despair by the wild declamations of the fanatical Elector of Brandenburg, who sought to subdue them with terrible threats that, if they did not accept the published decree of the Diet, “the emperor would deal with them as they deserved.” In quietness and in confidence was their strength. They knew the bitterness and the power of their enemies, but they knew also the mercy and the omnipotence of their Lord and Savior. While they did not underrate the inimical forces and their power for evil, they were able by the grace which God had given them and continued to give them, also to appreciate the soul-saving and world-conquering power of heavenly truth revealed concerning Christ in the Holy Scriptures. Knowing by faith the infinitely superior might and authority of God and His Word, and supported by His promise, which is always sure, notwithstanding all that in the course of nature and experience may seem to make against its fulfillment, they were not dismayed. How could they be, as long as they adhered to the Word which sustained the faith by which they lived? As good Christians they declared themselves willing, in all humility and obedience, to submit themselves to the emperor’s will, so far as this, with fidelity to God and with a good conscience, could be done; but they were just as emphatic in the declaration that, when God speaks, they must obey Him rather than men, whatever may result. Therefore they did not hesitate to say, as distinctly as they were able to say it, that it was impossible for them to accept and obey the imperial decree, as this would contravene their Confession and violate their conscience, which is bound by the Word of God. They did this with a profound consciousness of the import of their deed, and were content to await and to bear the consequences of their refusal.

The ban of the empire was now to fall upon the Protestants with the intent to crush them. It was a terrible crisis. But God still reigned and by His grace the Lutherans still believed the Gospel. They were not even silenced, much less exterminated. They lived and labored on, carrying their grand Confession as their banner before them; and they grew and multiplied, and the grace of God was upon them. It came to pass as it was written of the adversaries of the Lord in other times: “Take counsel together and it shall come to naught; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us.” Isa. 8:10.

The accusations made against our Lutheran fathers, that they were comparatively a little company, constituting, in their opposition to the great Ro-

man Church, a heretical sect supported only by an over-weening self-conceit, and that they were engaged in a fatuous rebellion against the reigning powers that could crush them at any moment, did not seem to them as formidable as to their accusers, whose minds were steeped in the errors which prevailed in that age of apostasy from the Gospel of Christ. It was a conflict of human traditions, time-honored and deeply-rooted indeed, but still human, against divine truth revealed from heaven. The Papists felt their superiority in power and authority, as from their point of view, with all the human instrumentalities for asserting their prowess and enforcing their will in their possession, they had reason to feel it. But the Protestants had a source of strength and comfort of which their adversaries had little appreciation, and they were undismayed by the railing accusations hurled against them.

They were a minority. They admitted that. Nor did they endeavor to conceal the fact that they were promulgating the evangelical truth in opposition to the corruptions and usurpations of popery. On the contrary, they were glad of the opportunity to deliver their glorious Confession at Augsburg, and they stood by it openly and manfully. Every Lutheran was ready with St. Paul to say: "This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets." Acts 24:14. If the men whom the Spirit of God led to victory in the advocacy of the Gospel in the days of the Reformation had been the weaklings brought forth by the religious impulses of mere nature, as we see such aspiring to leadership in many a religious crisis, they would have quitted the field. They were a minority: compared with the glittering host that followed the pope and the emperor they were a little flock. But they were the "little flock" that inherited the promise, and they knew the Scriptures and therefore knew whereof they affirmed. Menaces were as little to them as blandishments, when God had spoken. They would hear God's Word, they would do God's will, they would suffer what God permitted the enemy to inflict: but they would not abandon the evangelical truth, which gave them peace and joy and prospective blessedness in eternity, and thus give up every thing that makes life worth living. We cannot too much admire the light and the life which became manifest in the heroism of the noble men of the Augsburg Confession, nor too much praise the abounding grace which gave them such clear intelligence and heroic faith in those trying times. Should we, who inherit the blessings of the Reformation,

not seek also to attain something of their Christian firmness and fortitude in confessing the faith? Or is it less precious to us?

Even in our times, when the light of the Gospel has been shining upon us for centuries, there are many among the professed adherents of evangelical Protestantism who are nonplussed by the sophistries of Romanists, and who see no way out of the trouble but that of ultimate surrender to the dominant majority. But this not only shows how incompetent such men would have been to lead in the Reformation and secure the victory of everlasting truth in the Augsburg Confession, but also how incompetent they are now for captaincy in the battles still to be fought in the cause of Gospel truth which the Reformation again brought to light. We cannot but regard it as an ominous sign of the times, that the arguments drawn from superior numbers and corresponding power and prestige, which had no effect upon our fathers in their work of faith and labor of love, are now so often treated not only as respectable, but even as unanswerable. Sophistical as the whole argumentation is, the supposed right of domination by majorities over smaller numbers refusing submission, and of the historically dominant church, however that domination may have been attained, is tacitly recognized in our time of confessional weakness, and the whole contention of our Lutheran Reformation and our Lutheran Church is thus compromised. But our fathers were better versed in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and therefore we still have an Evangelical Lutheran Church to defend and to propagate. They were not only more learned in the revelation graciously given us in the Holy Scriptures than were their Romish adversaries, but also more than the great mass of modern theologians, who, with their immense erudition and wonderful acuteness of criticism, often fail to see the Church of God because of the flies on it, by which their attention is diverted.

To simple believers of the truth revealed in Scripture and set forth as the faith of Christians in the Augsburg Confession, it is painful to note how the great theological learning of our day hesitates and vacillates and prevaricates under the pressure of Romish sophisms, which our fathers answered and set aside by a childlike reference to a word of the Lord in the Holy Bible. What did they care for all the learning of earth, when a question was decided by Him who made and governs and is the final Judge of all the earth! Emperors and popes could not, with all their pomp and pretense and parade, set aside this judgment, which will stand when all their pageantry has passed away and everlasting righteousness reigns.

As regards the first of the two points which Romanists made against the Protestants, common sense will at once admit that, if human opinions are to determine the course to be pursued, the judgment of the largest number, assuming that conditions are equal, must be decisive. It is more likely that the opinion of ten thousand is correct than that of ten individuals in any case evoking sincere thought. A little flock has little chance against a great multitude when votes are counted. Nor is it to be denied that it savors somewhat of self-conceit when, the question being one that properly belongs to the domain of natural reason, the few persistently set their judgment against the many. But even on this basis there are so many considerations to be taken into account in order to form a sound and righteous judgment, that a decision on the bare assumption that the largest number must be right, is unreasonable and not seldom immoral. There are conditions in which the judgment of two men is worth more than that of two thousand. But our confessors at Augsburg were not under the necessity of investigating the relative value of men's opinions and weighing the probabilities of their correctness by the standard of numbers. Even on that ground there was much in their favor, though they were confessedly in the minority. But they rested their cause on no such shifting and insecure foundation. Theirs was not a cause to be decided by any human judgment, whether it were of the few or the many. It was the cause of God for which they contended, and God alone must decide whether they or their adversaries were right. And they knew whereof they affirmed, and could not be frightened from their position by the popish majority. For God had graciously given to men a revelation from heaven, and that was written in Holy Scripture, that all might read it and know the mind of God on the subjects in dispute. The truth thus written for our learning our fathers by the gracious power of the Holy Spirit believed, and this they confessed. Their appeal was to the Word of the Lord, who alone has authority in heaven and earth. An appeal from this to human majorities or to any human court could only seem to them absurd. Who were popes and emperors and all their gorgeous host of followers, that they should have a voice when the Lord of them all and the final Judge of them all had spoken?

The case presented to the Lutherans in that contest of life and death was not at all one of possibilities and probabilities gathering around the opinions of men professedly in quest of truth and right, and endeavoring in some rational way to find some human standard by which divergent claims might

be tested and the controverted points decided. With them it was simply a question of faith. The Word of God decided all, and they believed the Gospel and were heartily satisfied with the decision. In the privacy of their closets they gratefully exulted in the peace and joy which it gave them as poor sinners saved by grace, and in their proclamations they gloried in it as the merciful message of pardon and salvation to all people. The Papists might make a great ado about existing conditions and power and assumed authority growing out of it all. They could refer with pride to the prestige of Romish opinion accumulated for centuries and crystallized in institutions that had become venerable with age. No doubt it seemed to them that all this must lend them authority.

But to Lutherans, who had learned the Word of God, it was no argument, that myriads had gone wrong and that these myriads were adduced in proof that the wrong was right. Led by the truth revealed in the Gospel, they could not and would not give ear to the blandishments and sophistries of carnal wisdom, which in the sight of God is only foolishness. The opinion of a thousand against one man would probably lead that one individual, if he were a modest man, to doubt the correctness of his judgment when it must be maintained on equal grounds against so many who are as well endowed by the Creator of all. But it is an entirely different matter when the judge of all the earth has spoken and requires all men to stand in awe of His Word. Then millions may rise in opposition to His decree and stiffen their necks against Him, and He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at their proud and impotent presumption. And if the pope with all his pomp and the emperor with all his power should join in such a rebellion against the Lord God Omnipotent, of what effect could that be in deciding the question at issue? The Lutherans were not to be driven from their rock and their fortress by appeal to human reason in a question which did not lie within its jurisdiction. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, undisturbed by the appeal of their adversaries to human authorities and majorities.

The second count in the papistic charge against the Lutherans is equally specious and equally groundless. Even in our own time of boasted enlightenment the accusation that they disregarded the existing order of things, and the government which supported and endeavored to enforce it, has to many a formidable appearance. But the men of the Reformation believed the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ, and this gave them light where others,

who refuse to hear and heed the gracious revelation, grope in darkness. No doubt it seems plausible to the natural mind, when it is argued that the papal church, with its complete organization and control of all ecclesiastical forces and resources, had all the power and authority which pertains to the Christian Church, and that therefore those who refused submission to its decisions and decrees were, for that very reason, rebels against the existing government and outside the pale of Christendom. In the eyes of natural reason it no doubt looks as if, in these premises, the Lutherans were a sect in rebellion against the properly constituted authorities and are therefore worthy of condemnation. So the Papists judged and therefore thought they had good reason to condemn the Protestants. And to this day the error which existed in the minds of the Papists and the resulting confusion of thought and consequent wrongdoing, still continues to haunt the minds not only of Romanists, but also of many nominal Protestants, who ought to know better. In the light of the Gospel which was shed abroad by the Reformation, they had opportunity to learn the distinction between Church and State, and the nature of the power committed to each, and of the obedience which may be legitimately demanded by each. Our fathers were men of faith, and in their controversy with Rome they judged by other standards than those of sense and reason. They had learned from Holy Scripture to understand the article of the old Christian Creed concerning the Church of Christ as the Communion of Saints, and therefore to distinguish between the body of believers throughout the world and the ecclesiastical organization of any given time or place. The number of those who studied the Bible and believed its gracious revelation of truth for man's salvation kept constantly increasing, and the more they studied and prayed, the clearer it became to them that the papal pretension to lordship over all Christendom is the supercilious arrogance of Antichrist in the endeavor to dethrone Christ and make His kingdom, which is not of this world, the temporal kingdom of the pope. Therefore when the demand was made upon them that they must obey the mandates of those proud papal powers or be damned, they were not terrified, but quietly appealed from the decree of a haughty usurper to the rightful King, the true Head of the Church in all time and for all eternity. He had spoken His Word, and that would stand when heaven and earth shall pass away; and it was time that He should arise, for they had made void His law.

What was afterwards expressed in the Smalcald Articles was already the faith which fortified the hearts of the Augsburg confessors against all the

virulence of the Papists and their efforts to intimidate and silence them. “We do not acknowledge them to be the Church,” the Lutherans declare, “and they are not. We will not listen to those things which, under the name of Church, they either enjoin or forbid. For today, thank God, a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely the saints, the believers, and the lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children repeat, ‘I believe in one Holy Christian Church.’ This holiness does not consist in an alb, a tonsure, a long gown, and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond the Holy Scriptures, but consists in the Word of God and the true faith.”

Having by the grace of the Holy Spirit accepted the Gospel of Christ and confessed His glorious name before the world, they knew in whom they believed and had the testimony that they by faith were the children of God and members of the household of saints; and being obedient unto the faith, they had the consciousness also of being free from all the ordinances of men in their liberation from the law and its curse, and especially from all obligation to submit their necks to the yoke of bondage which haughty usurpers of the Lord’s authority endeavored to impose upon them. Instead of yielding to usurping tyrants who rebelled against their Lord, they bravely declared their loyalty to His Word by presenting the Augsburg Confession.

Men who are able to think and who are willing to exercise the gift have little difficulty in perceiving the sophistries to which Romanists resorted, and Lutherans had little difficulty in exposing them, though their adversaries closed their eyes and hardened their hearts against the light. Let men who are willing to recognize the sovereignty of truth fairly and honestly look the point of controversy in the face. The Papists had the majority: that was not in dispute. They had the power and prestige that could, so far as all human eyes could see, enforce their will: neither was that in dispute. What then was the question to be decided? Manifestly it was this: whether the Church is a kingdom of this world under the government of the pope, to which all Christians must by divine ordinance be subject as the ordinance of God, or whether the Church is a kingdom which is not of this world, over which Christ is King and which He governs by His Spirit speaking in the Word of Holy Scripture. The Papists maintained the former, the Lutherans the latter. These had the distinct advantage, moreover, of the discreet refusal of the Romanists to deny the authority of the Holy Scriptures, whatever may have been their internal attitude towards them. Ostensibly they ac-

cepted the Bible, only claiming other divine authorities, by the employment of which they thought themselves able to maintain their position in spite of its plain requirements. Luther and his friends appealed to the Bible only as the voice of the true King in Zion. They showed that the papal claim was in glaring usurpation of that King's prerogative and supremacy. They proved that many ordinances and usages of popery were in direct contradiction and contravention of the express decrees of the King as recorded in the Bible. And now when this usurped authority was used to condemn the Protestants for their loyalty to the Lord, and for their earnest protest against the tyrannical misgovernment of the usurper, who was laboring to dethrone the rightful King, the Lutherans are expected to bow to the Antichristian usurpation and, in the face of the light which the Gospel had given them and in violation of their own conscience, cravenly confess that, "the powers that be" deciding against them, they must submit.

To this day the Papists continue to scare ignorant people into slavish obedience to their human ordinances by the pretense that they are the Church and that disobedience to their behest subjects to everlasting death and damnation. Those who will not hear the Gospel truth, which alone can supply the glorious liberty of the children of God through faith in the Redeemer, have no means of escape from such tyranny.

Let us not unsympathetically say that now, since the Reformation brought again to the world the light of the Gospel, they have no excuse and deserve their dismal fate, but rather keep holding high the banner of the Augsburg Confession as we carry it on through the ages, thanking God that some see it and hear and learn, and taking courage in the grace of God, though some others despise it and call us fanatics and bigots, and what not? It is an astounding thing, seeing how a lost world is struggling for deliverance from weights of woe that are crushing it, that so many will not hear when we offer them the only possible relief and help. "Brethren, pray for us that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you; and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith." 2 Thess. 3:1-2.

Our fathers were firm in their allegiance to the Gospel, and nothing that the Papists were capable of doing could shake their faith in Christ and the truth which is revealed in Scripture, of which He is the center and sun. They presented their Augsburg Confession in no tentative effort to effect a compromise, or make vain offers of negotiations for peace on the basis of natu-

ral reason. They had grown beyond any hopes of reconciliation upon a basis which they knew to be unsound in any event. By the grace of God acting upon them in Holy Scripture, they had come to see that the great question between them was whether God should reign, or His miserable creatures, slumped in sin, should usurp His dominion: whether the eternal Son of God, incarnate or our deliverance from death and damnation, and fulfilling all righteousness in our stead that we might escape the penalty of our sin, should now be recognized as our Savior and reign over those saved by His grace, or human adventurers, ambitious of power and glory, should be permitted to cheat the poor souls out of the pardon and peace which the Savior had purchased for them at an unspeakable price.

They knew in whom they believed and were aware of the great salvation at stake, and they did not hesitate. They were ready to die at any moment and thus to enter into the joys of their Lord, but just on that account they were ready to yield nothing of the Gospel which rendered them ready to live or die as the Lord pleased. With popery they were done. They recognized in it an institution and potency adverse to the Gospel of Christ, which they knew and prized as the power of God unto salvation. The Papists had a powerful organization to support them; they had the civil authority with its armies under their control; they had the prestige which centuries of possession lend to successful usurpers; they had the reins of all governmental power in their own hands. This was all adapted to render their anathemas dreadful. But they had not the Word of God to sustain them; they were not the Church, and the Lord of the Church, to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth, was not with them; God was against them. That bade the Lutherans be of good courage, notwithstanding all the formidable human powers arrayed against them. They believed, and that made them strong in the Lord. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever." Ps. 125:1-2.

In our days, when the tide has unhappily turned again in favor of human endeavor and of reliance on human power of brain and brawn, and confidence in the unseen, secured and rendered certain by divine promise, which is the characteristic of faith, seems so unscientific and so ill adapted to the requirements of an age of advanced culture, it is difficult to realize how our fathers could rest easy in prospect of the coming storm of death and desola-

tion. Must they not, after all, yield to the inevitable? They could die, but they could not yield; for they were intent first of all on the glory of God and the salvation of their souls in the confident expectation of beholding that glory when time and its troubles should cease.

If we are a feeble folk, who cannot properly appreciate their faith, there were men of God before them whose faith they could appreciate, and its expression was written for their learning and for ours: "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" Ps. 27:1. They believed the Word and knew that they were the little flock that inherited the promises.

After the close of the Diet Melanchthon succeeded in obtaining a copy of the alleged Roman Confutation of the glorious evangelical Confession made at Augsburg by the Lutherans. He had been long working on a reply to the Romish allegations of that document, but had only the notes taken by those who heard it read as material to work on. Although these notes taken by men who were entirely trustworthy presented fairly the main points of the Romish contention against the Protestants, the conscientiousness of Melanchthon, as well as of all the noble men who led in the great Reformation, demanded that the opponents should be heard in their own words. Most cordially was this done.

As the Lutherans contended for nothing but the truth of the Gospel, and had no other interests to subserve but those of the glory of the Redeemer and the salvation of the souls for whom He shed His precious blood, they were prepared to receive with gladness any manifestations of the power of that truth in the souls of their Roman adversaries and any recognition of that glory as the prime object of Christian endeavor. They would have rejoiced to find that the document was better than was reported, convinced as they were that the reports were honestly made. But it was not better, and Melanchthon had no important change to make in the reply which he had undertaken. He worked on assiduously at it, now doubly assured that no injustice was done the Romanists in his carefully prepared Apology of the Augsburg Confession. This was joyfully accepted by the Lutherans as masterly defense of the evangelical truth confessed at Augsburg, and as such has ever since formed part of the confessions usually called the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, all of which confess the same evangelical faith taught in Luther's Catechism and witnessed in the Augsburg Confession. This faith the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as the Church

of the Reformation, continues to confess unto this day. And it is this faith that legitimates her as the true visible Church of Christ on earth in her pure evangelical confession.

2. The Confessing Church

THE HISTORY of the rise and progress of the great work of faith which resulted in the Augsburg Confession would not be rightly apprehended if it led any mind to the conclusion, that the Lutherans denied any need for an external, visible organization of the Church. Their contention against papal usurpations and pretensions was based on no such untenable ground. They did strenuously contend for the article of the old Christian Creed that there is one Church of Christ, the Communion of Saints, as they contended for every article of the ancient faith of Christendom. They did most earnestly protest against the Romish arrogance in its assumption of power which the King in Zion had not granted, and against the crying sin and bitter persecution to which that arrogance had led for centuries. And they did with unwavering persistence deny that the Roman organization under the papal hierarchy is the Church whose existence on earth they recognized as an article of the Christian faith. They believed in one holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, but they did not believe in popery and its suppression of Christian truth and its oppression of the saints who confessed that truth. Their appeal was to the Bible, which is the charter and constitution of the Church. It was an appeal from the usurper of kingly prerogatives and powers to the King Himself, whose judgment is righteous altogether. Far as it from their thoughts to reject the right and duty of Christian believers to unite in visible congregations for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom, or to deny that these organizations are the Church of Christ in their various localities. The wonder is that amid the errors into which the Roman Church, which was then dominant in the whole world, with the exception of the Greeks, had fallen through Satan's wiles, the Lutherans could find their way through the tangle which the situation presented and which even now perplexes and confuses so many minds. It is a miracle of God's grace that they could see so clearly and walk so securely in such a labyrinth of error and darkness. But they had the light of God's Word, which to believing hearts shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

No human deductions of reason and no figments of the human fancy were allowed to divert the minds of our fathers, intent on things that lie in a higher domain than that of this world, from the plain and precious instruction which they found in Holy Scripture. There were two points contained in that instruction which gave them the needed light respecting the Church and which were potent factors in determining their conduct as humble believers guided only by the counsels of their Lord. One as that the Church is the company of believers in Christ as their Savior who loved them and gave Himself for them, the other was that the papal organization, which so manifestly disregarded the voice of that Savior, could not be the Church which, depreciating if not utterly denying His merits for man's justification, could be presented before God without spot or wrinkle.

It was of the utmost importance for our fathers that they should recognize the Church of Christ as the communion of saints, or the congregation of believers. This necessarily implied that it consists only of persons who by faith embrace the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and that all unbelievers are excluded from membership, even though they should be accepted by the human organization of the Church and recognized by those who are charged with the administration of its affairs. This assured them that, in following the voice of the Good Shepherd of the flock, and abiding by His Word as given in Holy Scripture, they could not go astray. They could not thus be departing from the Church of Christ whose voice they obeyed. For this is composed of those who believe His Word and abide by His will. They were sure that they were the good Shepherd's flock while they heard His voice and followed Him.

On the other hand, they were thus rendered quite certain that the Roman hierarchy could not be the Church of which the Scriptures speak as the body of Christ, and of which all Christendom, according to the Scriptures, speaks as the communion of saints. For this organization usurped the authority which belongs to Christ alone and taught otherwise than His Word teaches. The Lutherans reverently hearkened to the warning which that Word gives: "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matt. 15:9. Nay, they could not, in view of the papal persistence in sin and oppression, close their eyes to the description of the Antichrist given by the apostle and its manifest applicability to the Roman Pope:

“Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped: so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God... whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.” 2 Thess. 2:3, 4, 9, 10.

Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and bound in conscience by His Word, it was impossible that our fathers could submit themselves to the Antichristian usurper called pope and to the abominations of popery in doctrine and practice. They protested and stood manfully by their protest, committing themselves and their cause to Him on whose Word of truth and grace they confidently relied. They heartily believed in the holy Christian Church, but nothing, whether arguments or menaces or enticements, could induce them, against the clear Word of Holy Scripture, to believe that the papal apostasy is that Church.

This did not, as some suppose, resolve the Christian Church into a vague idea, or a mere abstraction, which has no real existence in this material world in which we live. To the Lutherans the Church was and is a precious reality, and a reality that is not so far away from their abode on earth. It is true that they regard it is an object of faith. So all Christendom regarded it from the beginning. Why else could Christians from apostolic times down to the present give it a place in their creed and confess that they believe in the holy Christian Church? Only those who have not learned the glorious lessons of the Reformation could interpret this to mean that we believe in a great hierarchy that He has His people on earth who know and believe the love which He hath toward them. They did not pretend that they could see who among the multitudes of men were such believers. They did not even presume to single them out in the multitude of those who professed to believe. Possibly there were some among these who said, Lord, Lord, while their hearts were far from Him. Considering the conditions prevailing since sin has entered into the world, it was probable that there were many such. As far as they could judge by all the tests which the human mind within its natural abilities could apply, they might all be hypocrites. Human reason has no means of refuting such a suspicion, which the uncharitableness of the flesh dominating human reason has more than once expressed in fallen man's fight against Christianity, and which the devil exploits to its utmost capacity. The Lutherans believed that God has a people on earth who hear

His Word and believe His promises and rejoice in the God of their salvation. Who they are, beyond the consciousness of their own faith in each individual heart, they could not know, as no one could see into the heart of another. But they knew by faith in the Word of God that by the grace which He offered in Word and Sacrament He gathered a peculiar people, a company of believers, a communion of saints, a holy Christian Church, which recognized Him as King and constituted His kingdom of grace.

Our fathers were quite sure that there is a holy Christian Church on earth, and that the Romish usurpation with its popery and its traditions, its abuses and its oppression of believers in the Gospel of grace and salvation in Christ, is not that Church. Those who walk by sight, and not by faith, would conclude that the way was thus cleared for maintaining either that the Church of Christ, having an existence cognizable only by faith, needs no external organization as a visible Church in distinction from the invisible communion of saints, which is the Church in its essence and reality: or that the Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, is that one holy Christian Church of our Creed. Neither the one nor the other of the two alternatives is true, because either the one nor the other, seemingly plain as the dilemma may be to reason, which is not the Christian's authority in spiritual things, accords with the Word of God, which is the believer's infallible and therefore his only guide.

It is not true that the invisible Church of Christ, the assembly of believers known only to Him who "knoweth them that are His," has no need to manifest itself in our world of matter and sense, and does not have any local habitation in which its presence could be discerned. So much is undeniable, that sense and reason can never discern its presence, for it is and always remains an object of faith, and therefore only believers can discern it. But it enters into the material world in its reality, and if sense cannot discern it, as it certainly can not, the signs which are subject to our senses furnish all the evidence needed to assure faith of its presence. The truth revealed in Scripture is such as at once to show believers the necessity of its manifestation in the world and their duty in this behalf. For according to the Lord's command, the Word must be preached in the world, and the holy Sacraments must be administered, and to the believers the commission is given to do this. The duty is expressly enjoined upon them to confess the Lord Jesus before men for the glory of His name and for the invitation to others to come and share the blessing; and what is commanded, the Spirit in their hearts

prompts them to do and makes it their delight to do. But they not only tell what a dear and mighty Savior they have found, and thus by their confession become manifest in the world and extend the call to their neighbors, for whom the great salvation is prepared as well as for themselves. That would not be sufficient to accomplish their Lord's purpose. To retain the blessing which they enjoy and to bring others into its possession requires something more than an occasional confession of the truth as opportunity may offer to the individual. The divine command is to preach the Gospel to every creature, or, in other words, to go into all the world and make disciples among all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded them. This makes it necessary that they should join together and make proper arrangements for the regular and orderly discharge of the commission given them to administer the means of grace in their Savior's name. His disciples are all to stand together and work together as a united band of faithful subjects of the great King, who is present with them always. Therefore St. Paul writes to the church at Corinth:

“I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” 1 Cor. 1:10.

As this is the intent of the Holy Spirit, who works the will of the Lord in the hearts of believers, it is recorded of the Christians in the days of the apostles, that those who gladly received the Word were baptized. “and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers.” Acts 2:42. They were united in the apostolic doctrine which they confessed with one accord, and they preached the Word and administered baptism and the breaking of bread in the Holy Supper as the sacraments of the Lord's institution, with promise of salvation, and engaged in prayers, as the worship of God in the beauty of holiness required. And that this order included the work necessary for a faithful fulfillment of their great commission on which their own spiritual life as well as the extension of Christ's kingdom depended, is evident not only from the fact that the Word was preached, that those who gladly received it were baptized, that numbers were daily added to the Church, that the Lord's Supper was

administered, and that prayers were offered, but also from the admonition given in view of the victories won by the Gospel:

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 15:58.

Believers confess the Lord Jesus, know each other by their confession, join together as a body of Christians who are of one mind and one heart, form a congregation of believers, make all necessary arrangements for the discharge of their high commission as the subjects of the great King, who has entrusted to them the administration of the means of grace for the preservation and extension and edification of His kingdom, and call a pastor, who is to act in their behalf as the stewards of the Lord’s mysteries. primarily entrusted to them. In short, they organize as a Christian Church, confessing the Headship of the great King in Zion, subjecting themselves by His grace to the absolute authority of His Word, rejoicing in the great salvation which He has wrought, worshiping Him in spirit and in truth, and intent on doing the work needed on their part and in their sphere for the evangelization of the world, though their work must begin in their own congregation and locality, in order effectually to extend outward to the people and nations beyond them. In view of the clear teaching of the Bible. which the Holy Spirit had led them to understand and taught them to love, and on which they based their whole contention against Rome, our fathers never indulged the fanatical thought, if it ever entered their minds, that the Church, which is the communion of saints and thus essentially an object of faith, not of sense, needed no visible organization. It of necessity appears in the world, and in such appearance is discernible by its profession and its work as a power on earth, and is so recognized by all the world, though only faith, which believes the divine promises attached to the Word and Sacraments and their faithful administration, can assuredly know that in this visible multitude of professing Christians doing the Lord’s work, there is really and truly a congregation of believers whom the Lord knows to be His. He alone knows who they are, but all believers know by the divine promises that they are wherever the Word is preached and the Sacraments are administered, with which these promises are connected. Wherever the means of grace are among a company confessing the truth revealed from heaven for our salva-

tion, there a congregation of believers is called into existence, and it is not needful for us to know which are the believers, and which are only pretenders, in order to know that there is a church or congregation of believers, where these divinely appointed means are administered, and thus the conditions of the divine promise are fulfilled.

Reason would next suggest that, if the existence of the invisible Church in this visible world is not denied, but it is denied that the Roman Church is the communion of saints presented as an object of faith in our Creed, the necessary consequence would be that the Lutherans would replace the rejected papal church by their own. But in their minds this did not follow, neither did they care much about logical deductions in the light of reason, when they had the clear light of revelation to guide them. They knew that the Scriptures recognize local churches and speak of cases in which the members should tell the church, and assure us that, where two or three are gathered together in the Lord's name, there He will be present with them. The one Church of Christ, the body of believers throughout the world, cannot of course be collected in one place, nor were they all ever organized into one visible community, with a visible head and an earthly government like the State. That is impracticable and needless. The Lord's government is the King of Zion, whose statutes are the Scriptures, amply supplies every need. They well knew that the Lord requires His people to assemble for worship and the administration of the means of grace, and that what He demands is that they should keep His Word, confess Him as the Savior of the world, teach the people to observe all things that He has commanded, continue steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and avoid those who persist in teaching otherwise than His Word teaches, thus causing divisions and offenses among Christians. They found the Romanists obstinate in their adherence to errors and abuses contrary to the Word of God, and were therefore in conscience bound as well to avoid them, as to adhere to the truth of the Gospel with the knowledge of which God had graciously blessed them. They recognized the duty of confessing that truth and making all necessary provisions or maintaining it by the preaching of the Gospel in its purity and administering the Sacraments according to the divine institution. They therefore organized congregations of the pure Word and Sacrament, in which the Lord alone should rule by His will revealed in Holy Scripture, and in which His glory should be the aim of all the membership. The complex of these churches was the Church of the Reformation, consoli-

dated as the Church of the Augsburg Confession, commonly called the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Neither the reformers in the days of the Augsburg Diet, nor their children in later days, presumed that the Evangelical Church, thus called into being in opposition to the corrupt Church of Rome, is the one holy Christian Church of the ancient Creed, as the Papists assumed their hierarchical organization to be, and that this Church of the Augsburg Confession must now in all righteousness and reason claim the place hitherto occupied by the papal organization. This could not be. Our fathers would have undermined their whole contention and their entire work by entering such a claim and putting forth such a plea. In the first place, they utterly repudiated the human figment on which the papistic assumption was based, and they could not, without admitting that their position was equally false, arrogate to themselves the authority to establish a visible Church that could of right domineer over Christian people and other Christian churches. The Romish theory that our Savior established one visible Church, like a civil government, and that all churches throughout the world, in order to be recognized as being in the unity of the Church, must stand in communion with that Church and be subject to its regulations, is totally and fundamentally false. It is in conflict with all the teaching of Scripture in regard to the Church as the body of believers, and equally in conflict with the faith of all Christendom as witnessed by its universal Creeds. There is no such a divinely constituted visible Church, embracing all Christians, and exclusively having the promises and powers of the whole body of believers and communion of saints. The Romish claim and consequent assumption of authority is merely a manifestation of its arrogance and impudence, as it is utterly without Scriptural warrant. The Lutherans wholly rejected the presumptuous claim, with its attendant scheme to override the faith and crush out the liberty of God's free people. It could not enter their enlightened minds and emancipated hearts to substitute the Lutheran for the Papal Church, and thus give a new basis and perhaps a new impetus to the abominations of ecclesiastical arrogance under the guise of authority committed to the holy Christian Church. Lutherans were never guilty of an inconsistency so glaringly at variance with their own principles and so plainly subversive of their whole reformatory contention.

In the second place, their cardinal doctrine of justification by faith in Christ, who fulfilled all righteousness in our stead by His obedience unto

death, even the death of the cross, and their corresponding doctrine of the Church as the communion of saints, that is, as the congregation of those who believe in his mighty Savior and the atonement which He has made for our sins, forbade any such proud notions as that these poor sinners, saved by grace alone, should now presume to lord it over their fellow-believers. For these were by faith emancipated from all human authority in matters of man's salvation, and were referred in this regard alone to the Holy Scriptures, in which God speaks and before which all Christians reverently bow. Lutherans recognize but one Master, Christ, by faith in whom they are all brethren, all equally subject to the one Lord. They unite according to the Lord's will as such brethren in local churches, and those who accept the Augsburg Confession are recognized as the Evangelical Lutheran Church. As this is a unity of faith made known by unity in the same confession, the external union of these Churches of the Augsburg Confession is not necessary for their legitimation, desirable as it may be for the successful prosecution of their work in larger fields. All that is essential for the existence of the Christian Church in a community is the union of believers who, having the same faith, organize for its preservation and propagation by the stated administration of the means of grace. That which distinguished the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation was the insistence on the purity of the Word and Sacrament, that no foreign element might obstruct the work of God performed through these means, and therefore the insistence on the Augsburg Confession as a guarantee of unity in the faith and as a safeguard against the encroachment of error. The Churches of the Augsburg Confession, each in its own locality having all the rights and powers of the Church, are the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which, in the days of the Reformation, took its position in the world as the Church of the pure Word and Sacrament, in opposition to the Church of Rome, which had corrupted its way before the Lord by departing from His Word and thus become the corrupt Church of the Pope.

So far were the Lutherans from any thought of recognizing the Romish error, that the Holy Christian Church is a visible corporation under a visible head, and of now entering upon a contest with the Romish powers for the prize of supremacy under such a perversion of all the teachings of Scripture concerning the kingdom of Christ, that they recognized the Roman Christians, notwithstanding the grave and grievous errors into which they had been led, to be still a Christian Church. Let it be well noted that the papistic

claim to be the one Christian Church of the Apostles' Creed, was at the same time earnestly denied and denounced as a damnable heresy. There was no confusion in their thought, as Romanists presumed, and many so-called Protestants now presume. The cause of the Reformation was to them a matter of such tremendous import that they could afford to rest no salient point on emotional impulse or slovenly thinking. The Gospel had purified their hearts by faith and enlightened their eyes, so that they did not grope in darkness. Humbly hearing and heeding the Lord's words, they knew the truth, and the truth had made them free. They denied that the papal institution and the whole visible organization, with all its great pretensions, is the one holy Church which our Lord established as His kingdom, which is not of this world, and which is the communion of saints. They denied this, not because they assumed that now, since the light of the Gospel had shined and many had seen the light and confessed the Savior, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as the body that had put away the abominations of popery and adhered to the pure Word and Sacrament, must claim that place, with all its authority, if not, at least in present conditions, with all its power and pomp. They denied it because the kingdom of God cometh not with observation, but is within you; because that which constitutes the essence of the Church, that is, the element which constitutes the congregation of believers and a communion of saints, is no outward sign or visible mark, but the faith in the heart which God alone can see; because, in short, the one holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, is an object of faith, of whose existence and presence we are assured only by believing the divine promises connected with the administration of the means of grace, not a visible institution at all that could be known by the eye of sense. The teaching of Scripture is such that neither the papal nor the Lutheran organization can visibly realize in this world of sin the ideal of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, as God sees it, not as an abstraction, but as a reality in this nether world of ours, but which we, because of the limitations which preclude our looking into others' hearts, cannot see. But whilst it was denied that the Church is in its essence a visible organization, with all visible signs appealing to the senses and thus certifying its authority and its power to every man that has eyes to see, it was fully admitted that the Romanists are still a Christian Church, though their aberrations from the truth of the Scriptures and their persistence in them had rendered them a heretical sect.

The contradiction seems glaring, but it seems so only to those who decline to walk by faith in the light of the Gospel. There is no contradiction at all. All who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Virgin Mary to save our sinful world, and acknowledge Him to be the Lord, as He speaks to us by His Word, are His kingdom, in which He reigns over a people whom His truth makes free and His grace saves from sin and death. These believers throughout the whole world constitute His holy Church, the Communion of Saints. They are all united to Him by faith and are thus all united with each other as one body, the Body of Christ. As such it is an organization by the Holy Spirit which needs no visible organization to complete it. The Lord knoweth them that are His, and they know Him. That which makes them members of this Church is not their adherence to a local congregation, whether it call itself Roman or Greek, Lutheran or Reformed, but the faith which the Holy Spirit works in the heart and which unites them to the Savior, whom they thankfully and cheerfully serve. That would seem to be enough for all the purposes of the communion of saints, the Church on earth patiently and rejoicingly pursuing its pilgrimage until it joins the Church in heaven, the believers who have gone before and have entered into the eternal joys of their Lord.

But these believers become such by the Holy Spirit's gracious work through Word and Sacrament, and are sustained and nourished as believers through these means of grace. That is the Lord's plan and ordinance, in the formation of which God did not take counsel with the wisdom of His creature. Therefore, human reason, which is wise in its own conceit, is disposed to criticize and find fault with the plan. Many cannot see why the Holy Spirit may not do His sanctifying and saving work in the hearts of men without the intervention of such material means as syllables and sounds, and water and bread and wine. Why must He employ these earthly things which, in their nature as creatures, have no spiritual power in them, to effect His heavenly operations in the soul, which is unquestionably a spiritual entity? And so they reason about the matter until they come to the conclusion that the Bible is all wrong, although some of them still have enough reverence for the Scriptures to refrain from such infidel vociferations, assuming that the Bible words do not mean what they plainly say, but must be figuratively interpreted to accord with the demands of human reason. Thus it comes that such men as Zwingli and his followers deny any need for the Word and Sacraments as means of grace and, without the least warrant save

that of their own wisdom and will, maintain that the Holy Spirit does His work immediately, among heathens as well as in Christian lands, where and when He pleases. That is the difficulty with so many of the sects, who are disciples of Zwingli and Calvin.

On the other hand, there are many who are not in harmony with the divine plan because their notions lead them to the opposite extreme. Ultimately the ground is in both cases the same. The extremes meet in the rationalistic assumption that the Holy Spirit cannot use a material element for the conveyance of spiritual power.

But while enthusiasts and fanatics reject the divine plan by substituting alleged operations of the Spirit, without any mediation at all between the Holy Spirit and the human soul, thus subjecting the whole work of grace to the vagaries of human reason and sentiment and will, the extremists on the other side rationalistically conclude that, as God uses earthly means to effect heavenly ends, these earthly means must themselves become supernatural powers, and thus the inevitable cause of the spiritual effects produced. The sounds, or the words representing them in the Gospel, and the elements in the Holy Sacraments, thus themselves are regarded as magically charged with spiritual forces which causally accomplish spiritual effects, independently of the order established by divine wisdom, according to which the work of grace is done by the Holy Spirit through these means when the soul believes. The Romish Church is the outcome and the typical representative of this materializing tendency. Not only its doctrine of transubstantiation and of the operation of the sacraments by the mere work performed, as the application of a cause for the production of its corresponding effect, is the result of this Romish principle. It is illustrated fully in the papal assumption of all power in the Church of Christ, on the ground that this Church is a visible corporation, and that all its powers and prerogatives have been conferred on the Church of Rome. We have thus a Church to deal with that is disposed to reduce the whole spiritual power of God and the whole spiritual kingdom of Christ to a mere kingdom of this world, though endowed with powers which elevate it above all other kingdoms of this world and make it superior to them all.

The reformers knew all these things, gave them earnest thought, and by the grace of God continued in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship. They adhered to the Gospel, refusing to be betrayed into ways of error by the one extreme or by the other. The Lord commanded that they should proclaim

the Gospel to all people, as the good tidings of great joy were designed for all, that they should baptize in the name of the Triune God, and that they should teach all who would hear to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded them. They knew that to carry out their Lord's will they must provide for the regular administration of the means of grace, the Word and Sacraments, through which He would be ever present to do His work and save to the uttermost them which believe. They accordingly knew right well that, if they were to be found faithful as members of the one holy Christian Church, they must abide by the Word of the Lord and engage in His work. They therefore organized congregations on the basis of Gospel truth, as this is declared in the Augsburg Confession, and provided for the regular preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments, that the Lord might continue and extend His work of grace and salvation among them. They did this as believing Christians, and thus manifested the holy Christian Church in their localities.

Theirs were churches of the pure Gospel and Sacraments, as these were contended for in the Reformation, and were thus differentiated from the impure churches which had corrupted the Gospel and departed from it in their administration of the means of grace and their worship and work. They recognized other churches: for they knew from the Scriptures that wherever the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered, here would, according to the divine promise, be believers, and a church or congregation of believers would arise, though we cannot see who in the assembly are believers and who are not. The existence of the Church always remains an article of faith, even when the name is applied in a figurative or wider sense to a visible body of persons confessing Christ and using His means of grace. In the strict and proper sense, only those form the Church who believe the Gospel of God's grace in Christ unto salvation: the others are in the organized visible body, but they have not that which is essential to constitute them members of the communion of saints, and are therefore not of the Church, though they are in its external organization.

The men who organized their churches under the pure Gospel as set forth in the Augsburg Confession and were united by that faith and confession in mutual recognition as the Evangelical Lutheran Church, were well aware, when they spoke of pure churches, that their members are not without sin. Not even could this be said of the true believers who properly constituted the Church in the visible organization. They knew, with that depth

of conviction which is characteristic of true faith, that Christ alone is their righteousness, and they could not endure the thought of making any claim that could detract from His merits and glory. It was not in their penitent and believing hearts, whose sincere apprehension of their Savior's righteousness at once humbled and exalted them, to think themselves holier than other men. Comparisons of that kind they did not even invite with popish leaders, many of whom were known to lead scandalous lives. They insisted on what men, indifferent to what is revealed as the will and power of God, but all the more strenuous in pushing into the foreground the wisdom and will of man, combined to treat as of trivial import, as men of the same spirit do now. The Papists sneered at the pure doctrine of the Gospel, against which they felt themselves unable to maintain their usurpations and human ordinances; and many, some of them even calling themselves Lutherans, in our day, take up the hue and cry against displaying the reformatory flag of a pure Gospel and turn up their noses at pure doctrine as an antiquated rag of the olden time, when science and civilization had not yet enlightened the earth. But God had not forsaken His people, else there would have been no Reformation, and He has not forsaken them even now, else there would be no Evangelical Lutheran Church that still maintains the principles and the faith of the Reformation. Our fathers strenuously insisted on the pure Word and Sacrament, that the Lord might be acknowledged as King in His kingdom, and that His saving means might be employed for the sure accomplishment of His work. Holy lives are our Lord's will, and He gave Himself for us, that henceforth we might not live unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again. He purchased and delivered us that we might live under Him in His kingdom, according to His Word, in righteousness and holiness all our days. But it is not this holiness that saves our lost souls, and it is not these holy lives that set us right again and bring us back to the Savior when the flesh overcomes us and we stray from His ways. We cannot save ourselves. He saves us. And He saves us through His Word and Sacrament, that faith may have something sure to which it may cling when tempests sweep down upon us and our own hearts fail us. The Word of the Lord alone is sure. "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Jer 17:5-7. "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." In this world that lieth in wickedness and that is benighted by sin even in the no-

blest of its creative powers, there is no other refuge and light but that which God has given in His Son and His inspired Word. With those who will not hear that, all is lost. All is lost, anyhow, and only that can rescue us, if it make us willing to flee for refuge to the hope set before us. It was not an intricate problem of philosophy that confronted the reformers, which might without much detriment be decided one way or the other, but a question of life or death, and they therefore treated it with an earnestness which those who look upon such matters as mere intellectual speculations cannot understand. Their longing was for salvation from sin and death, and they found in the Gospel of grace and pardon in Christ by faith what their hearts panted after as the hart panteth after the water brooks. That Gospel they in faith and charity desired to hand down to posterity and to extend amongst all men as the help and hope of all humanity in its sin and helplessness. The contention for sound doctrine may seem to some a trivial matter which tempts to ridicule, but with earnest minds, if by the grace of God they have been brought to believe, it will never fail to elicit sympathy for the intense earnestness of the efforts to secure the world's salvation by the Gospel, which is the power of God that alone can effect it. If the Word of God be itself corrupted, to that extent all remedy for human sin is cast away, and to that extent the very existence of the Christian Church is rendered questionable.

By this rule alone the Lutherans would judge the persons and organizations who professed to be believers, but declined to accept the Augsburg Confession. Who of them were children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, they could not know. But they could know what men professed to believe and could test its truth by comparing it with "the law and the testimony." If they spake not according to this Word, Lutherans heeded the Lord's instruction to beware of false prophets and to avoid them. They rightly regarded the whole subject of fraternal recognition and church fellowship not as one of judging men's hearts as to the sincerity of their Christian profession, which is the Lord's prerogative, but of hearing their confession and searching the Scriptures, whether these things are so, which is their duty as well as their privilege. If the heavenly truth given by inspiration of God is retained among us, we are safe; for then we have an infallible guide which is a sure directive in the way of grace and righteousness. and an equally sure corrective of errors and deviations from the right path. If that truth is renounced or

set aside, everything is lost, for the ship of the Church is left without rudder or compass at the mercy of every wave of human sin and satanic malice.

Luther and his friends well knew what they were doing when, with all the might of faith and love that God had given them, they insisted on a pure Gospel and determined that, by the grace of their Redeemer, the Church of the Reformation should unfalteringly maintain the pure Word and Sacrament; for only thus could they be sure that the Lord would abide with her and the gates of hell should not prevail against her. That purpose did not imply that those who adopted an impure confession must be denounced as people outside of the Church, in which alone is salvation. Such a thought did not lie within the range of their faith and love and hope. It is a thought which later times originated and which is much in vogue only since the multiplication of sects, and the liberalism which would reduce them all to a common level of rationalism or sentimentalism has devised it as a weapon of common sense against the faith of the Augsburg Confession, which still abides by the pure Gospel and refuses to amalgamate with the sects which urge the rights of private judgment even against the judgment of the Lord as laid down in the Bible.

Our fathers continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and therefore applied the same Scriptural tests to others that they applied to themselves. They were fully assured that there were believers in their congregations, not because these professed to believe the Gospel, or even because they professed to accept the pure Gospel as the Reformation restored it to the people and confessed it before men, but because the Word of God was preached and the Holy Sacraments were administered among them, and they believed the divine promise that these should accomplish what whereunto they were sent. So they believed when the Word was preached and the Sacraments were administered in congregations that did not accept the pure Gospel which the Reformation again brought to light. They could not doubt that the Church existed before Luther came.

Luther himself and his most devoted coworkers in the great cause of the Gospel truth were members of the Christian Church before the Reformation had established itself as the Church of the Augsburg Confession. The Romanists still had the Word and Sacraments, notwithstanding all the errors and abuses that had corrupted their work, and were still a Church, though almost crushed to death by the papacy and papistic ordinances, because according to the promises of the Lord there were still Christian believers

among them. The Roman organization was still recognized as a Church because of the Christians in it, who, although they were under the heel of the pope, had not bowed the knee of their hearts to the popish idols, but believed that Jesus is their Savior and trusted in His Word, so far as they knew it.

The same was their decision in regard to the Zwinglian dissent from the Augsburg Confession and the later Calvinistic explanations in their departure from the Lutheran faith. The Word and Sacraments were still used among these Reformed parties, and so far they still furnished the conditions under which the Christian faith could recognize the existence of Christian churches, and the Lutherans acted accordingly. They had no special interests, side from the truth in Jesus and the salvation of souls which that truth alone secures.

But they could not, as sincere and honest men of God, whose work alone they were intent on promoting, do otherwise than declare such organizations, in their departure from the pure Gospel and their consequent refusal to accept the Augsburg Confession, to be impure churches with which their love of the truth of the Gospel and their solicitude for the salvation of souls, as well as for the glory of God, forbade them to have fraternal fellowship. Who that knows anything of Christ and the faith which binds the consciences of Christians to His Word as the everlasting truth by which all men shall finally be judged, could blame them for refusing to recognize their organizations, seeing that they refused to accept the pure Gospel of the grace of God in Christ our Savior, as entitled to equal esteem and standing in the judgment of Christians with the Church of the pure Word and Sacrament?

The Church of the Augsburg Confession was and is the Church that adheres to the Gospel in its purity; the others are Churches so far as the Word and Sacrament, notwithstanding their departures from the truth of the Gospel, are still administered among them, and so far as their errors do not destroy the validity of such administration. But the deviations from the pure Gospel are concessions to Satan and are always dangerous. The Lutheran Church knows no higher duty than to avoid these errors and abide by the saving truth. She therefore distinguishes between pure and impure churches and warns against all who teach otherwise than God's Word teaches, even though they profess to be Christians, and even though in spite of their errors, many may be Christians in reality.

The difficult question as to how far there may be a departure from the doctrine of the Gospel without invalidating the Word and Sacrament, and thus removing all ground for the recognition of a Christian Church where false doctrine prevails, the Lutherans never ignored or sought to evade. They sought the truth alone with an eye single to the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and therefore never dealt in subterfuges. What that truth required they would do, whithersoever that truth led, they would go. Applying the criterion of Scripture, they recognized organizations professing to be Christian as churches so long as the Word and Sacrament as God's means of grace were in vogue among them, so that there the Lord could accomplish His work in the way of His ordinances. In other words, wherever the promises of God could be fulfilled in the administration of His appointed means of grace, they believed that a congregation of believers would come into being. The fact that some did not accept the pure Gospel as set forth in the Augsburg Confession did not stand in the way of such recognition; for the Bible had taught them that while believers are led by the Holy Spirit to stand in awe of the inspired Word through which He sheds His light and exerts His power, and to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, not every error and sin into which by reason of the flesh they may fall, destroys their faith and cuts them off from Christ, as error and sin certainly does when it is impenitently persisted in against the light which the Word of God has shed into their conscience. Hence the adherents of the Augsburg Confession spoke of a Roman and a Reformed as well as of a Lutheran Church, and did so not with timorous hesitancy, as if they were making a constrained concession with an uneasy conscience, but with the joyfulness of faith which is glad that, notwithstanding the deplorable errors which separated them from the Church of the pure Gospel and caused divisions contrary to the apostles' doctrine, they still retained enough of the heavenly truth to preserve the divine validity of the means of grace and thus to produce faith through their administration.

The Lutheran Church rarely has justice done her by the Romish and Reformed Churches in her humble fidelity to the Word and her large-hearted charity towards the erring. Appearances do not indicate that those who rail against us because of this fidelity, which they seem incapable of appreciating, have, in their treatment of us and of our contention, even a tithe of the charity which the Lutheran Church exercises in her dealings with denominations of other confessions. For while we recognize them as churches with

all the rights and powers which God has given to the communion of saints, and rejoice that there are believers among them notwithstanding their errors, they recompense evil for good and denounce us as exclusivists and promoters of division by condemning our insistence on pure doctrine and sound faith, which furnishes the only basis on which we can recognize them as churches at all.

The grace of God given to the Lutheran Church is in nothing more apparent to true believers than in the patience with which she has borne with the persecution of her opponents and in the persistence with which she has continued to treat these opposing organizations as Christian Churches, though the flesh so powerfully protested in its clamor for payment in their own coin and retaliation on their own principle, which God gave her grace to renounce as false and to shun as sin against the pure Gospel.

Of course the Church of the Reformation, after its fierce fight with the forces of Rome and its glorious victory over Romanism and all its abominations, could not, when its results had crystallized in the Augsburg Confession, declare the Church of the pope and the Church of the Gospel to be on an equal footing as Christian Churches, and to be sisters in the visible organization of the invisible communion of saints. They were churches, and their administration of the Word and Sacraments was valid, as they had been before Luther's advent on the scene. Else he himself would not have been a Christian believer. But they erred, and erred on points of no little moment for the salvation of souls. Notwithstanding this they retained what was essential to salvation. They still had the means of grace, and in the administration of these they still made it certain that the Lord, according to His promise, would work effectually among them, and that accordingly some would believe, and thus there would be a congregation of believers, who would not be deprived of their blessings because of the unbelief of others. The Romish Christians were still such, in spite of popish tyranny, which sought to crush out the pure Gospel. They were Christian Churches.

And so it was in regard to the Zwinglian opposition to the Church of the Augsburg Confession. The leaders were not men who humbly took their reason captive under the obedience of faith. They wanted to satisfy the natural mind in its independent cravings and walk by sight rather than by the faith which would have subjected them to the truth of the Augsburg Confession and made them one with the Lutheran confessors. They rejected some portions of the Gospel and set up a confession of their own, thus making a

rent in the visible Protestant community. The Lutherans could not prevent the division, because they could not consent to a departure from the Word of God by which their consciences were bound. And so another organization was formed on a Zwinglian basis, as another organization had been formed on a popish basis, and the Church of the Reformation was confronted by a Reformed division contrary to the Word of God, as it had been before confronted by a Romish division that refused to accept the Reformation.

The Lutherans suffered, but they did not waver. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and therefore recognized the Zwinglian opposition as a church, because by the mercy of God these opponents were saved from such a rejection of the truth of the Gospel as would deprive them of all efficacious operation of the grace of God unto salvation through the divinely appointed means. They still retained a valid administration of Word and Sacrament, and so God could still do His gracious work among them and create a congregation of believers.

The Lutherans believed God's promises as connected with His Word and Sacraments and therefore recognized the Reformed Church, as they had recognized the Roman Church, both standing in antagonism to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession with its pure Word and Sacrament.

To some minds this is equivalent to a surrender of the position which was taken by the reformers in regard to the vital importance of a pure Gospel. But it could seem so only to those who were not in harmony with the principles and the faith of the Lutheran Church and never understood her contention and her devotion to the Word of God, in whose power she had unflinching confidence. She could not surrender any portion of her faith, being bound by that sacred Word, without surrendering her very life. Indeed, her refusal to surrender even one jot or tittle of it to conciliate dissenting parties is the very head and front of her offending in the eyes of her opponents. She refused to yield one article of her faith even when adversaries threatened to cause divisions if she persisted in her refusal, and she refused to recognize the false doctrine, and the right to make divisions on that account, when the separation was effected.

Conscious of her calling to be faithful to the Gospel with which God had entrusted her and to hold fast that which she had, it never could enter into her deliberations that portions of the truth she might yield to avert threaten-

ing calamities or conciliate dangerous adversaries. The reformers trusted in the Lord to care for His Church and were quite sure that they could serve her interests best by adhering strictly to His Word and doing His will. So they regretted that so many Romanists refused to join them in witnessing their good Confession at Augsburg, and that Zwingli and his followers thought it right and good to draw up a different Protestant confession, but they could not help it.

Speaking the truth in love, they did what they could. They acknowledged the Roman and Reformed organizations to be churches and always conscientiously treated them as such, seeking as much as lay in them to have peace with all men. but never ceasing to reprove error and sin, and never presuming to alter the Lord's law for the sake of winning man's favor. Thus the Church of the Augsburg Confession came to stand as a visible organization side by side with other visible organizations which she recognized as also entitled to the name of churches.

The Church question thus became complicate.

Many have supposed that all the intricacies could be removed and the whole problem could be satisfactorily solved by the simple admission that all these organizations are equally in accordance with he divine will and that all taken together form the one holy Church of the Apostles' Creed. Learned treatises have been written to show how each of the great branches of this aggregation, the Roman and the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches, represents some great element of revealed truth and how this in its completeness becomes manifest when they are viewed in the aggregate, each lacking that which is complemented by the other. It is a beautiful speculation of the human mind, and the Lutheran Church has suffered much reproach for her alleged stubbornness in refusing to accept the delightful dream as real. But it is a dream, and she is awake and has her eyes open. Her sincere purpose to serve her Lord and promote His glory by laboring for the salvation of sinful souls in His clearly designated way forbids her acceptance of flights of fancy, instead of evangelical truth, where deliverance of perishing souls from death and the devil is concerned.

Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are as subject to the pleasures of the imagination as are other people and can chase butterflies over the mead and enjoy the chase as much as the rest of their race. But the rescue of quivering souls from the jaws of the dragon of hell is no such sport on flowery meads. They put things in their proper place, and the proper

place for matters pertaining to the salvation of souls is not in the otherwise delightful realms of the imagination. The Church of the Augsburg Confession set forth the pure Gospel of the grace of God in Christ. On that she based all her claims and on that she would stand on the day of final judgment. Beautiful visions might come and beautiful visions might go, but that Gospel of grace in Christ would endure forever, and the spirits of the just made perfect with the holy angels would sing its praises eternally in the heavens.

No, the Lutheran Church fought its battles with pain and suffering against Rome in defense of the Gospel, and she could not now, when the victory was won in the establishment of a pure Evangelical Church under the Augsburg Confession, stultify herself by pretending that her fight was needless and that the Romish organization still represented the good will of God, though she knew that the papacy had proved itself to be the Antichrist.

And although the Protestant parties, which formed the Reformed organization in opposition to the Church of the Reformation with its purely evangelical Augsburg Confession, had renounced popery and thus had joined in the protest against Romish tyranny, they refused to join the Church of the pure Word and Sacrament, but set up another visible organization to compete with the great Church of the Reformation.

How could now the Lutherans admit, against their own deepest convictions, that their warfare against the rationalistic tendencies of Zwinglianism and later of Calvinism were not the work of faith and labor of love, and that what the Reformed as well as what the Romanists contended for was the good pleasure of God as well as the Lutheran contention for the Word of God and the truth of God alone as authority and authorized in the Church of Christ? By such a course which would have lacked all warrant in Scripture and, under the conditions presented, even of sound reason the Lutheran Church would have undermined her whole work of the Reformation and condemned herself as enacting a miserable farce in her entire strenuous warfare for the truth in Jesus, and her victories as the out come of a ridiculous fight with windmills.

We, to whom life in the light of God's Word is earnest and death without the consolation of the Gospel would be unutterably dreadful, are pained to write such thoughts, of which we are certain that they never entered the hearts of our fathers or of their faithful children in the days of their loyalty to the work of God in the Reformation.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church now, as in the times of her severe trial, and of her heroic faith, still confesses her confidence in the promises of God and renounces all human fancies and speculations about a unity that is not of God, and insists on a unity of faith which God works by His Holy Word and which manifests itself in speaking the same thing in the confession of that truth.

That does not appear to solve the problem of different churches, notwithstanding the general admission that the Church is but one. The Lutheran Church never tried to solve the problem on the basis of those who originated it. This is essentially the Romish ground against which the Reformation was directed.

The Church is the assembly of all believers in Christ and cannot be otherwise than one. It is the Body of Christ that is one, and only one, notwithstanding all the dissensions and divisions which sin causes among believers as they manifest themselves in their organizations and works in the material world. Rents and ruptures, sects and schisms, make sad havoc in the Church as she appears, but do not take place in her essential nature as the communion of saints which retains its unity in Christ by the faith that binds them to Him and in Him to one another. "There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Eph. 4:46.

In this one body brought to the one Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit who works the one faith in the heart, so that through the one Lord they are led to the one Father, believers are made heirs of all the rich treasure of life and salvation as children of God and rejoice in the hope of glory. This is the brotherhood of believers under the Fatherhood of God which the Holy Spirit effects on the basis of the redemption effected by our Lord Jesus Christ — the mystery of the Holy Trinity working itself out on earth in the mystery of the Church.

Aside from this the Scriptures know no brotherhood of man save that of man's brotherhood in human nature, which sin has corrupted and made an object of wrath to the Creator. But in Christ a reconciliation has taken place and "as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." John 1:12. These believers are the Church, and God knoweth them that are His. He seeth the heart and knows His people, so that the one body is always discernible to His eye,

though we know it only by faith in the promises that His Word preached among men shall accomplish that whereunto He sent it.

These believers have a glorious work to do on earth. They are to be workers together with God in His unspeakably gracious purpose of sending the glad tidings of salvation to all people and making disciples among all nations. To this end He has committed to them the means of grace and made them stewards of His mysteries. They must accordingly confess Christ and appear in the world as His people, and they must provide for the work which He has given them to do. They must organize congregations and call ministers, both for their own preservation and edification in the faith, and for the extension of Christ's kingdom by missionary labor and enterprise. In each of these visible congregations with their visible administration of the means of grace, committed to them, the Church makes its appearance on earth, and each is the church in that place because in each there are — although our senses cannot discern who among the number are sincere followers of Christ, and who are induced to make the requisite profession and to join them on other grounds, than those of faith in Christ unto the saving of the soul, — true believers according to the divine promise.

The Church, which is the congregation of believers, exists there, as we know by faith, when the means of grace are administered, though we cannot know it by sight, as we cannot see who in the congregation is really a believer and who is not, while Christian charity assumes that all are sincere in their profession, so long as the contrary is not made manifest. All these churches should be and remain of one mind and speak the same thing according to the Lord's Word, to which all sincere Christians are presumed reverently and joyfully to submit all their thoughts and feelings and volitions. But sin interferes. and we never can have a clear reckoning when that sadly disturbing element is not taken into the account.

This evil comes into view in two respects. The true believers are not perfect in their sanctification, and the congregations which they form are not exempt from the deceit which is practiced by evil men and their consequent intrusion under false pretenses.

The believers may themselves be misled, even to the extent of ceasing to be believers, and the congregation may be so infected by mere pretenders to faith that vigilance may become drowsy, discipline be relaxed, and sin, which has the powerful support not only of the devil and the world, but also of the flesh which reaches even the heart of true Christians, may gain the

ascendency. Thus false doctrine, which is ever the root of errors in thought and life, gradually finds entrance into congregations, and the whole organization becomes corrupt, as was the case with Rome, and always must be the case when the great charter of the Christian Church is ignored or treated with indifference.

The Lutheran Church by the grace of God was determined to abide by the divine charter at every cost, and therefore refused fellowship with every organization that departed from the Word of the Lord and refused to fellowship under the pure Gospel set forth in the Augsburg Confession. One question always was whether such an organization of professed Christians administered the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, to which God annexed His gracious promises. If they did, they were recognized as a Christian Church; if they did not, no such recognition could be given. Thus it came that some professed organizations of Christians were denied to be churches, like the Socinians, Unitarians, and all parties that denied the divinity of Christ and the Holy Trinity, or declined to employ the divinely appointed means of grace, like the Quakers, because there could be no Christians without the faith which alone appropriates the great salvation which Christ has wrought for sinful man, or without the Word and Sacraments, by which alone such faith is wrought.

Others were recognized as Christian Churches notwithstanding the errors of their confession, because they still administered the means of grace by which God, according to His promise, led souls to Christ through faith in His name.

So the Evangelical Lutheran Church with its glorious Augsburg Confession has stood until this day teaching and confessing the saving truth revealed in Holy Scripture, whether men will hear or forbear, and joyful in the assurance that she is thus serving the Lord and securing the accomplishment of His saving will in the one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

Of course the fact that the Roman and Reformed Churches did not with them confess the pure doctrine presented in the Augsburg Confession laid the necessity upon the Lutherans to make a distinction in their estimate of the different churches. For this the Lutheran Church has been censured ever since the great Reformation and the strenuous days of Augsburg. It looks as if the common sense of which so much account is often made where the Word of God alone should be heard, had forsaken our adversaries when

they come to pass judgment on our position. The Romanists and the Reformed declined to stand with us in contending for the pure faith of the Gospel declared in our glorious Confession. Repudiating some of the articles of that faith, they prepared confessions of their own and built their congregations on another basis.

True to their principle, the Lutherans granted that these were churches, though they were organized in opposition to the Church of the Augsburg Confession, but continued to rebuke the false doctrines, for the support and propagation of which the division was made. And now, when the Lutherans refused to put these dissenting parties on the same level with their own Church of the pure Word and Sacrament, they are condemned for their alleged selfishness and bigotry.

Admitting what these adversaries claim, that those opposing the Lutheran confession were as sincere as those who declared it to be the very truth of God, how in all reason could these be rightfully presumed to be so insincere as to renounce their faith in favor of harmony with the adversaries who would rather cause divisions than denounce their dissenting opinions in favor of harmony with the Lutherans?

The Church of the Reformation was sober and vigilant in her adherence to the truth of the Gospel as the only hope of sinners in their quest of salvation, and knew well what she was doing both when she conceded that these opposing parties were churches, and when she denied that before God they stood on an equal footing with the Church of the Augsburg Confession.

It is hard for those who have confused notions about the kingdom of Christ and the one Holy Christian Church which is the communion of saints, and who are perplexed and not seldom nonplussed by the various manifestations of the Church, partly in the full truth of the Gospel, as in the Church of the Reformation; partly in the confession of the Gospel with the admixture of human reason, as if this were of equal authority with the Word of God, as in the Reformed Churches; and partly in the open confession of the ascendancy of human reason and the consequent denial of the Holy Trinity and the divinity of our blessed Savior, — to thread their way through the mazes with which they are thus confronted.

Let us admit that the subject has been made intricate and perplexing. But the Word of God and the faith which simply trusts that Word never made it so.

When reason meddles with matters that lie beyond its province and Christians listen to its argument, which is always sophistry when it intrudes where it has no calling and no business, complications and intricacies and problems arise which never troubled the men of faith in the days of the Reformation. They were not confused, because they were led by the Word of God alone, which is light and in which there is no darkness at all, and in the light of which no human sentiment and thought, with its darkening element of human sin, is given a hearing or a voice. To them the whole subject was clear.

The division which the Romanists and the Reformed made against the Reformation and its proper result in the Church of the Augsburg Confession was not in accordance with the Word of God. It was a departure from the truth of the Gospel. It was a sin. It was a sin of baleful import and consequence. Lutherans could not sanction it, else they would have yielded in those articles of faith which were the impediments in the way of harmony.

If they had been men of that mold they would long since have abandoned the whole work of the Reformation and saved themselves many an earthly sorrow and sacrifice, though it involved the sacrifice of their own souls and the souls of their children and their children's children.

They were not men of that sort, else we would not now be rejoicing in the blessings of an Evangelical Lutheran Church and striving to maintain her glory in thankless veneration. They maintained the truth at every hazard. Rejoicing in the rich provision which God in His infinite mercy had made for the salvation of all men in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus and in the work of the Holy Ghost through the means of grace for the application of that redemption to all who would believe, they were glad that those who would not accept the pure Gospel confessed at Augsburg did not renounce the Word of God entirely and become infidels and fight against Christ, but retained the faith of Christendom so far as to acknowledge the Scriptures as the Word of God and to continue the preaching of that Word as authoritative and the administration of Baptism and the Holy Supper as divine institutions, notwithstanding the errors into which they had fallen, and by which they had corrupted the pure doctrine of the Gospel and thus had introduced an element of danger that could tend to counteract the Gospel and in many souls would obstruct its divine efficacy. They could concede to their opponents no right to make a division contrary to the Gospel truth which they preached and confessed.

They spoke because they believed, and they could not recede from the truth of God which they believed on the ground of Holy Scripture and from the confession of that truth before men. As they saw the situation in the light of God's holy Word and of the faith by which their consciences were bound under the divine authority of that holy Word, the division was wholly unwarrantable, and the opposition churches were sects that originated in man's sin, not in God's will.

It is a hard saying and sounds rough in the ears of our adversaries. But it is the voice of faith and love proceeding from gentle hearts that as earnestly sought the salvation of men as the glory of God.

They spoke in the Augsburg Confession as they did because they believed, and they could not have been the sincere, honest Christian men that they were, if they had conceded that the doctrines in conflict with their confession which they believed to be the truth revealed from heaven, are as good as theirs, and that the churches established in opposition to those of the Augsburg Confession have the same divine warrant and claims upon human acceptance as the Church of the pure Gospel. Others might be Christians and still accept the Roman or the Zwinglian confession; they did not presume to judge men's hearts: but could they themselves be Christians and persist in the sin of saying yea and nay to the same article of faith? Would not their conduct make it manifest that their profession of faith, on which they insisted as Lutherans, is as unreliable as their profession of love if, to conciliate opposing churches, they failed to insist on that faith?

They could see, if their adversaries could not, that faith claiming to rest upon revealed truth and yet asserting the liberty to set that truth aside, when expediency seemed to demand it, is spurious, and that love which could regard the existence of sects and schisms as signal exigencies enforcing such demand is equally spurious. They were not ignorant of the power of shams in the affairs of the world, but they had no good word for them even in secular pageantries and social shows, and utterly abominated them when they tried to intrude their dishonest heads into the kingdom of God. The Lutherans were sincere Christian men who wanted to be saved from the curse of sin and the damnation of hell, and who therefore with an earnestness which only those who are fleeing from the wrath to come can fully appreciate, fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel. and having found peace in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ by the faith of the operation of

God through that Gospel. they would hold fast what they have, that no man take their crown.

Our theologians in after-Reformation times, when they treated of the Church and the Churches, spoke of the great Church of the Reformation, the Church of the Augsburg Confession, as the true visible Church of Christ on earth. This was designed to express the conviction of the Reformers that the Lutherans set forth the pure doctrine of the Gospel in their Confession, and that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is therefore the visible organization which has the Word and Sacrament in their purity and therefore in their complete power and efficacy, whilst other organizations — partly Romish, rejecting the whole reformatory movement; partly Protestant, accepting the main work of the Reformation, but rejecting the Lutheran faith in some of its articles and substituting human errors — retained the Word and Sacraments, but with more or less admixture of error. The same faith in the truth of God's Word and the certainty of His promises is thus set forth.

There are some professedly Christian organizations which proclaim the truth of salvation to such an extent that the Holy Spirit can, according to the wonderful and inscrutable plan of God, accomplish His saving work; there are others who so far dilute the revelation of God with human notions and contrivances, that their import is lost, and only these human thoughts and devices remain as factors in the organizations which are meant to be visible churches. There are, therefore, societies calling themselves Christians which are not Christian churches at all, because they have not the truth in Jesus which alone can by faith make Christians. There are others who retain the Word and Sacraments in their essential features, notwithstanding their errors in doctrine and confession, and whose organizations must, therefore, be recognized as Christian Churches, because the Word and Sacraments are still, notwithstanding their errors, effectual among them, so that believers can, according to the Divine promises, be assured that there are Christians and therefore a Christian Church among them. But they are not pure churches. That is what our theologians meant when they alleged that the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as against these impure churches, is the true visible Church of Christ on earth.

The phraseology was perhaps not the clearest.

It seemed to imply that the other churches, though recognized as such, are not Christian churches at all. In this respect it is not a happy expression. But there is little excuse for misunderstanding it in view of the explanations

which accompany it and which remove all ambiguity. What is meant is clear enough to unbiased minds, and to such as are disposed to put the worst construction on our words it would be difficult to find a term that would not be equally liable to misconstruction. The Lutheran Church designed to set forth the pure Gospel truth in her Augsburg Confession. She could not recognize that Gospel in its purity in the confessions of her opponents, who refused to accept some articles of her faith and substituted others which she knew to be false. As she viewed the situation in the light of God's Word with the eye of faith, she could recognize the existence of children of God in congregations still using the means of grace, though there were admixtures of error with the Gospel they preached and confessed, and therefore could acknowledge them to be churches, but was bound in conscience, by the very Word which enabled her to make such an acknowledgment, to make a distinction between the Church that had the Word and Sacrament in their purity and other churches that admitted the impurity of false doctrine into their confession and work, and to this extent dishonored God and endangered souls. Her fidelity to the truth and her peace of conscience required the distinction.

It was not a mere intellectual speculation or logical diversion, least of all was it the outburst of carnal bitterness against those who would not accept the Augsburg Confession, but chose to make divisions contrary to the Gospel which it declared. If there had been such forces dominating their hearts and their work, there not only would have been no recognition of Romish and of Reformed Churches, but there would have been no Reformation that sundered the Evangelical Lutheran Church from the Romish and from the Reformed Church. The rottenness of papal Rome would have continued, and we would all be under its bondage still.

But that is all unprofitable surmise.

The gates of hell could not prevail against the Church of the living God, the ground and pillar of the truth, and the Word of salvation by grace in Christ did not perish from the earth. The truth prevailed. The Reformation introduced new the light from heaven and the power of God unto salvation in the Gospel.

That Gospel prevailed.

Its supremacy was declared in the Reformation, shone forth in the Augsburg Confession, is enthroned in the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

There are other churches; for God is merciful and continues to rule in this sinful earth for the deliverance of poor souls from the curse and bondage of sin. He gives His means of grace, which bring to them the salvation which our Savior has wrought for our whole lost race, and offers the salvation to all, though so many reject it, and He knows that they will reject it. He ordains the administration of His gracious means of salvation, though He knows that many to whom they are brought will resist the Holy Ghost and refuse to be saved.

He is merciful and very patient and continues His gracious work of salvation through His appointed means, though many refuse to believe, and even some of those who are called to be laborers together with Him in the administration of these means are not faithful, and do not themselves embrace the great salvation which they offer in the Gospel to others. Multitudes, alas! may reject the good tidings of great joy to all who believe, and thus continue to sit in the regions of shadow and death; and some may refuse to hear the Gospel of infinite grace to man, and some pretend to accept it while they remain in the bonds of iniquity, and some with ulterior motives may even preach it, though they do not believe a word of it.

But the Word of God remains the same, and the Church of believers in Christ and His Word remains the same. The Church is the communion of saints who abide by His Word. The Evangelical Lutheran Church abides absolutely, without any modification arising from the suggestion of reason, or from any source whatever, that would detract from the supremacy of God's Word revealed in Holy Scripture by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It continues steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and therefore refuses to fellowship with churches that teach otherwise than God's Word teaches. They may be churches, but they are not loyal to the Head of the Church as He speaks to us in the Scriptures. Therefore, they are not true visible Churches as they ought to be, whilst the Evangelical Lutheran Church, with its pure Word and Sacrament, is the visible Church that is faithful to the Scriptures, and invites the application of this test to her, as she applies it to others.

It is not claimed that she is the one holy Christian Church outside of which there is no salvation. That is an object of faith, not of sight. No visible organization is that. None can be that.

Such notions belong to the fundamental errors of popery, which the Reformation has exposed and renounced, and with which Evangelical Churches

must not talk and act in harmony. The Evangelical Lutheran Church does not intimate that all believers are enclosed in her visible organization, and does not pretend that all who are thus included are true believers. There are other visible organizations that administer the means of grace and among whom, therefore, the Holy Spirit works faith according to the divine promise. Therefore we believe them to be Churches, notwithstanding the errors which render them schisms and sects, and on account of which we must avoid them. And as Satan, the bitter enemy of Christ and all salvation from sin and death, is always busy in sowing tares where the Lord sows wheat, and these, according to the Master's Word, will grow together until the harvest and winnowing time at the last day, Lutherans had no reason to think, and never did presume, that their organization of the Church of the Augsburg Confession would be exempt from the common lot and be a Church in which every soul that confesses her faith would be a sincere believer, and that the searching eye of God would find not a hypocrite among them. They indulged no such thought, even if Satan suggested it; for they had no promise of God to sustain it. In that respect the Evangelical Lutheran Church has no more claim than other Churches, to be the pure Church, and the use of that term to distinguish her visible organization from others that have not the Gospel in its purity, would have been still more liable to misconstruction than the claim to be the true visible Church.

After so much effort to make her position clear and to expose the misrepresentations of her adversaries, it should be finally understood that she believes in a holy Christian Church as the invisible communion of saints, composed of all believers throughout the world and known only to God, who searches the heart, and that in the Churches as they appear on earth the only test which can apply is the Word of God written in Holy Scripture for our learning and guidance.

The efforts of believers to execute the divine will in confessing the saving truth of the Gospel and administering the means of grace for the perpetuation and extension of His kingdom led to the organization of the Church of the Augsburg Confession, and the believers who entered upon this course, mainly because of the persistent refusal of the Roman hierarchy to accept the Gospel and submit to its requirements, still rejoiced that here were some believers, ignorant though they were of the fundamental import of our controversy with Rome, among those who remained Romanists, though they believed in Christ as their Savior. They could therefore concede

that because of these simple and oppressed believers, who should have joined the Lutheran believers in their glorious Augsburg Confession, but were not sufficiently enlightened, or in their devotion to time-honored customs were not sufficiently liberated by the Gospel to do this, the corrupt Roman body was still a Church — of course a corrupt Church, with which, in their loyalty to the Scriptures, they could not affiliate. But they rejoiced that in the corrupt Roman Church, with all the dangers to which its corruptions exposed them, children of God were born by its administration of the means of grace.

When people of other churches, sometimes ignorantly, but mostly thoughtlessly, and in some instances evidently maliciously, rail against the Lutheran Church for her firmness in maintaining her faith, which they call stubborn exclusiveness and manifest uncharitableness, they overlook the signal and self-denying concession which the Scriptures enabled her to make and which she therefore cordially made, that the Roman Church, though the head of its abominations was the very Antichrist, was still a Church, because the Word and Sacrament were still essentially in use among them. And so it was in regard to the sects that organized themselves among the Protestants in dissent from the Augsburg Confession. The Lutherans deplored their departure from the truth of the Gospel. But they did not on that account cease to rejoice in the portions of truth which were still retained and in the conviction that, so far as they still with divine validity administered the means of grace through which God does His saving work, notwithstanding their errors, they were still Churches of the living God, because there, too, He produced a congregation of believers, deeply as they lamented the false doctrine by which the efficacy of their work would be hindered.

The Church of the Augsburg Confession only desired to be the Church of the pure Gospel of Christ, in opposition to all human opinions and sentiments and traditions and ordinances that cannot save a soul, and that is her position still. It was no vain boast, but simply giving God the glory due His great name, when she ran up her flag as the Church of the pure Word and Sacrament, and therefore the true visible Church. The Church of the Augsburg Confession thus took her place among the visible churches on earth.

It is in perfect consistency with the corrupt Roman theory of the Church, when it is asked where our Church was before Luther appeared, and many are frightened by the specter thus conjured up before them. Why, manifestly

there was no Lutheran Church before Luther, and no Church of the Reformation before the Reformer appeared. This phantom delights Romanists and scares many alleged Protestants who are still held in the bonds of Romanism, though they have renounced some of its galling abominations. But, it is all a delusive vision and a needless scare. The Church always existed. By the mercy of God it continued to live in spite of all the efforts, conscious or unconscious, to kill it. If it had been killed before Luther came, there would have been no reformation. Instead of it the perdition of our race would have come. Without controversy, if the patience of our infinitely loving Lord with the infirmities of His people had been exhausted, and the Roman Antichrist had been permitted to reign supreme, there would have been no Luther and no Church of the Reformation and no Augsburg Confession.

But our thoughts are not God's thoughts. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to live and labor and die for its salvation: should He not still provide for the salvation of them that believe after the Antichrist had come and usurped His dominion? Verily, God is a gracious God, and does not abandon His love or forsake His people. When the devil and the pope had done their utmost, He still had a little flock of believers in the Lord Jesus who constituted His holy Christian Church. Of this flock were Luther and his followers when God gave them the Gospel and the grace to believe it, and they joined together to resist the pope and follow Christ, as Christian believers in all the earth had done before them. The Church continued to live, and appeared on earth as the Church of the Augsburg Confession.

The noble testimony borne to the Gospel at Augsburg in the great Confession of the Lutherans has continued to bear its precious fruit until this day. It was the symbol which characterized the Evangelical Lutheran Church through all the centuries since, and is the standard which she bears before her and which marks her identity now.

The peculiar relations into which she was providentially brought with civil rulers who accepted her Confession, and thus in matters of religion set themselves against other States that adhered to the Romish pretensions, complicate her history in the Reformation era and introduce not a few elements of confusion into her subsequent development and progress. Lutheran State Churches were not always loyal to the Gospel. In the nature of things they cannot be. The interests of the State, which rests on civil righteousness as reason apprehends it, and looks primarily to the welfare of

the people in their temporal relations, and the interests of the Church which rests in the supernatural of the Gospel and the revelation, righteousness of faith in the Redeemer, and looks to the eternal welfare of the soul when all these temporal relations have ceased, cannot be equitably combined under the same administration.

A State Church is essentially a contradiction, and must introduce confusion in thought and wrong-doing in practice. It is impossible to give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, when Caesar manages both. Caesar cannot be expected to appreciate the thoughts of God revealed in Holy Scripture for the soul's eternal salvation, nor can he be rightfully required even to recognize them; they do not lie in his province and the scope of his government.

God does not make laws for the regulation of civil communities and prescribe the policy to be pursued in the special conditions of organized civil governments, and the Church has no command to interfere with their political plans and policies or authority to dictate to their legislatures. Where the two form a combination, one or the other will suffer, and the loss usually falls upon the Church, because reason is wide as the world, and the Gospel is a force only among Christian believers.

The great Church of the Reformation has passed through many a trouble on this account, and has her troubles in the fatherland still. She has lived through trying times, notably the days of Rationalism with its withering atmosphere of death to all spiritual forces, and is passing through similar distresses in our own times, when Christian discipline in European churches is scarcely known, and where known at all is certainly impracticable. But notwithstanding all the hampering and harassing to which the Lutheran Church has been subjected, she still lived and still lives; and the Augsburg Confession continued and continues to be recognized as the great symbol of the Evangelical Church of the Reformation. Her membership was sometimes forgetful of her glorious heritage and her discipline frequently deplorably at fault; but her vitality is evinced by her continuance to live in circumstances so prophetic of death, and her coming forth from conflicts so fearful with a vigor so marvelous.

In our own land, whither some of her members came among the earlier settlers and where Lutherans were among the first to preach the Gospel, her history has been one of toil and trouble, — of wrongs suffered and of successes won under circumstances discouraging to all but those who trusted in

God. The firm faith which assured the Lutherans in the trying times of the Reformation of the truth set forth in the Augsburg Confession and of its immeasurable value to the souls of men, and which nerved them for every trial and every sacrifice to maintain their cause for the glory of Christ and the salvation of souls purchased by His blood, did not exist in all who came to these shores as Lutherans. It did not exist in all who bore the Lutheran name in the fatherland. In many, faith had become weak and love had grown cold. In some, the confidence in the precious Gospel of the grace of God had departed. They had a name to live, but were dead. We have no defense for the conditions which made it possible for people to reject the truth which the Lutheran Church confesses and yet to be recognized in its official organization as Lutherans. Hypocrites there will always be among the believing body of Christians; and these cannot help it. They cannot read the hearts of their professed brethren, and they would sin if they presumed to do it, and thus in uncharitableness judged them to be insincere. That is one of the most heinous of sins, and is invariably followed by consequences ruinous to the party that sanctions or even tolerates it; because it violates the fundamental law of God, destroys confidence among His people, and renders insecure from suspicion the reputation of every member of the Lord's body. It is an abomination which merits the condemnation of every Christian. But when members openly declare their dissent from the truth which the Word of God reveals for our learning, the case is different.

We repeat it, that we have no defense for the practice of a Church which permits individuals to promulgate false doctrines and lead ungodly lives without a word of disclaimer or a process of discipline, thus implicating itself in the ungodly proceeding. With all our love for the Lutheran Church and our admiration of her glorious Confession, we have no disposition to defend her when she errs in the execution of her great vocation. But error in the Church's application of her divine commission cannot invalidate the truth and righteousness which are committed to her keeping. She may sometimes be unfaithful, but her Lord is faithful still. She has the truth, and if in evil days she fails in its enforcement, she has no recourse but to repent and meekly bear the unhappy consequences of her lack of loyalty to her Lord.

The same law holds in regard to the Church as in regard to individuals. If I have sinned, I am sure that I am sorry for it as soon as I discover it, for my purpose is not to sin, but to do the Lord's will. But if another condemns me

to everlasting perdition because I have sinned, I have no disposition to hear him in that regard, because I know that my Redeemer liveth. Who has a right to condemn me when my Lord absolves me? And if I must be condemned at last, it could only be because the principle of obedience has been abandoned, and subjection to the divine government has been renounced.

The Lutheran Church has sometimes failed in the full discharge of her duty as the Church of the pure Word and Sacrament. But she has never renounced her allegiance to her Lord and His Word. She was the same Church of the Augsburg Confession in all the dreary days of Rationalism, as she was in the happier days of the Reformation. As her membership were human, she could fail in her duty. We have no hesitation in admitting that sometimes she did fail. But it was in her practice. It was not in her doctrine, which was and is the very truth of God, but in her occasional failure to live up to its requirements; and in her retention of the Augsburg Confession she retained the necessary corrective of aberrations which might otherwise have destroyed her life.

The earlier Lutheran congregations in the United States recognized their historical connection with the great Church of the Reformation, and whatever may have been their shortcomings, still preserved their claim to be churches of the Augsburg Confession. There were times when the charge that this Confession was a “dead letter” cannot be declared absolutely groundless. There were evil days when Lutheranism was not a mighty power in the nominally Lutheran Churches of the country. Rationalism and Pietism and Puritanism and Fanaticism existed among them and crippled them; but while they sometimes failed to manifest the spirit of the Lutheran Reformation and to cast out the leaven that was threatening their life, they did not renounce their Lutheran heritage or deny the allegiance due to the great Lutheran Confession. It was a case similar to that so often presented in the individual life of Christians, — that of a believing soul failing to live up to its profession, but not on that account abandoning its faith and ceasing to be a child of God, the very power of which leads to repentance and thus averts the calamity. The analogy is not perfect, but it does not fail in the essential point to be illustrated.

Some did indeed become Zwinglians or Methodists, and some even became Romanists in their adherence to a scheme of work righteousness, or Socinians in their rationalistic conception of Christ and the atonement. They thus inwardly ceased to be Lutherans, and should have been expelled from

the Lutheran Church to save the innocent people from contamination, as the believing individual by repentance expels the sin from all rights in his soul and refuses to hold fellowship with it. But the churches are composed of a number of individuals, and while the better part reject and renounce all unscriptural doctrines and practices in their sincere loyalty to the truth set forth in the Lutheran Confession, the conditions may be such as to render them powerless to secure the Church's performance of her duty. The Church does not cease to be the communion of saints on that account, because that which constitutes the Church in any visible organization of professed Christians is not the unbelieving element which refuses obedience to the Word of God, but the believers who have been rendered powerless by the unhappy prevalence of that unbelieving and disobedient element in the visible association.

The failure fully to apprehend and rightly to apply the doctrine of the Church which the Scriptures teach and the Lutheran Church accordingly confesses, has led to many a false practice even among churches of the Lutheran name, and many a false judgment in regard to the character and history of the Lutheran Church.

In organizations of the Reformed communion it was a consistent logical deduction from accepted principles that church discipline is an essential mark of the Church, as in the Romish Church subjection to the pope and the papal ordinances could not otherwise than appear as essential conditions of catholic communion and membership in the holy Christian Church.

But in the Church of the Augsburg Confession, which recognized the Church as a spiritual kingdom of Christ which is not of this world, and which exists only where the power of God's grace in Christ, exercised by the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament, regenerates souls by faith and constitutes a congregation of believers, the whole situation and consequent judgment is essentially different. The Church is the communion of saints, as the Bible teaches and the Church, which is the body of those who believe the Bible, always confessed. Faithfully continuing in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, the Lutheran Church perpetuates that Confession. She admits that in the visible society necessarily formed or the administration of the means of grace, on which her own spiritual life and growth depends and through which alone she can increase her membership and extend her borders, it cannot be otherwise than that many will be gathered in who, though they have various motives for associating themselves with the congregation

of confessors, are not believers. And she has suffered from conditions which she could not change and facts which she could not deny.

In our, and, and in the fatherland before, doctrines were preached and deeds were done, nominally in the Lutheran Church, which we cannot defend. Sin is no more defensible when it occurs in the Lutheran than when it occurs in the Romish or Reformed Churches. There were not a few things in the early history of the Lutheran Churches in our own country, as there were in other countries, which we cannot approve because, as we know from His Word, the Lord did not and does not approve them. But what we maintain is that the Church of the Augsburg Confession never lost her identity by unfortunate aberrations from her faith and publicly declared principles and profession, whether in this or in other lands.

In the question of what is Lutheran, the appeal to her Confession was always recognized as legitimate; and while her true life and character was often ignored and not infrequently denied by people who continued to bear her name and sought to trail her honor in the dust which they had stirred to their own dishonor, her flag was still the same in its confessional loyalty to the Gospel. The early Lutheran congregations in our American history were congregations of the Augsburg Confession; and never, even in the saddest days of our history, did the Lutheran Church cease to admit the rightfulness of an appeal to the Augsburg Confession as her historically fixed and honored banner. There have been many instances of unfaithfulness to her standard on the part of those bearing her name, but in all her sufferings she never perished from the earth as the great Evangelical Church of the Reformation, whose identity was determined by her precious symbolical treasure, the great Augsburg Confession. While other Protestant churches talk of revising their creeds to adapt them to the often fundamental departures and apostasies from their original Reformed professions, and sometimes effect changes which destroy their historical identity, the Lutheran Church has remained so firmly devoted to her evangelical faith that she was never even strongly tempted to alter her confession, but had vitality enough to rebuke the erring of those who sinned in her name and brought reproach and suffering upon her, and in her loyalty to the truth of the Gospel to secure the restoration to honor of the Church of the Augsburg Confession.

Attempts to transform the Lutheran Church into a mere sect of religionists courting popularity among other sects, such as is notable in the move-

ment to adopt a “Definite Platform” to be substituted for the great Confession, only subjected their authors to ridicule.

The Lutheran Church, in its Protest against papal usurpation and tyranny and its organization of Protestants on the basis of the pure Word and Sacrament as the congregation of evangelical believers, did not pretend to be the only holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, which is set forth in the Apostolic Creed as an article of faith. That creed was accepted by her from the beginning. She had no desire and no motive to separate herself from her Christian brethren of all past time, who believed in Christ unto the saving of their souls and sought to glorify Him as the Savior of the world through faith in His name. They preserved their fellowship with the Christian believers of all ages, who constituted the Christian Church in all the periods of her history. But the enlightenment which the Holy Spirit had given them through Holy Scripture enabled them to see that, while their visible organization on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, as witnessed in the Augsburg Confession, rendered them in the eyes of all intelligent Christians who knew and revered the Word of God in comparably superior to the papal organization with its human traditions and decretals, they saw by the same divine light that the Church of Christ, as the kingdom which is not of this world, is essentially an object of faith, not of outward organization that could be essentially distinguished by visible marks, though these as divine appointments and connected with divine promises would make its existence certain to those who believe the Word which makes the appointments and the promises.

They knew that not all who gathered around the Augsburg Confession were for that reason necessarily Christians who believed the Gospel unto the saving of the soul: it was possible that other motives would lead to such a step.

And they knew that some who did not join in their good confession might be Christian believers still, who were hindered from joining them by other causes than those of disbelief of the Gospel and conscious rejection of Christ as their Savior. Not all who believe are in the visible Lutheran Church, and not all who are in the visible Lutheran Church are sincere believers.

Our fathers knew the truth of the Gospel and confessed it at Augsburg. Insisting on the exclusive authority of Christ and of His Word in the kingdom of grace which He established as the Communion of Saints, and intent

upon that grace, they established the visible Evangelical Lutheran Church as a body of confessors binding themselves in the Augsburg Confession to teach and observe all things whatsoever the Lord had commanded them, and thus organizing a Church of believers on the basis of the pure Word and Sacrament, in which Christ alone should be Lord and His Word alone should rule. Hence the Evangelical Lutheran never claimed to be the only holy Christian Church, which includes all Christian believers and without the pale of which there can therefore be no salvation, as only believers can be saved; but it did claim, and does claim, that it has set forth the truth of the Gospel in its Augsburg Confession and is therefore the true visible Church of Christ on earth with which all sincere believers should unite and cooperate, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, under her glorious flag of the Augsburg Confession.

Our calling now, as Evangelical Lutherans who know the truth of the Gospel and therefore adhere to the great Confession delivered in trying times at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, must be plain at least to those who have embraced that truth in a living faith unto their own present peace and eternal salvation. It is plain and pressing. They cannot do otherwise than stand by it and propagate it, that not only they and their children and their children's children may inherit the promise of eternal blessedness when this poor world with all its stern realities and frivolous trivialities shall be no more, but that as many as are willing to hear their testimony may escape the wrath to come upon human sin, and find deliverance in the hope set before them by a merciful Savior.

The path of duty, which is the way of divine wisdom and ultimate peace, is as clear as it is imperative. If we would be faithful we must teach the truth of the Gospel as our fathers confessed it and were willing to make every sacrifice to maintain it, whether men will hear or forbear. The acceptance of that truth must continue to be the condition of membership in our churches and communion at our altars.

Our ministers must pledge themselves to teach what the Church confessed as her faith and to administer the holy office committed to them in accordance with that faith.

Our vocation plainly is to build the great Church of the Reformation by preserving the pure Word and Sacrament as set forth in the glorious Augsburg Confession, because this is the very truth of God that shall stand when all human devices and schemes and opinions have fallen into decay and

been numbered with things that were. Only the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.

Our readers cannot be more deeply impressed with the magnitude and difficulty of the task thus imposed upon Lutheran Christians than is the writer. If it were merely a question of human policy and were thus one of the ways among others by which a desirable end might be attained, we could hardly find it in our heart to insist on it and suffer persecution for such insistence. There are probably few who are dogged enough to die for their opinions, when they know them to be merely human probabilities among a mass of others equally probable or equally improbable. Not only in human superstitions, but even in science and philosophy, such conditions present themselves.

But we are not writing about that kind of thing.

Nature, in mind and matter, is capable of different interpretations, and human hearts and intellects vary much in their feelings and their reasonings. The differences in this respect are of little import for man's temporal life and welfare, if only charity is not violated; and for his eternal life and welfare they are of no import at all, so long as they do not presume to criticize and set aside the Word of God, which sinful man in his proud presumption is prone to do.

But our Augsburg Confession and the duty which devolves upon those who embrace it as the expression of their faith and carry it before them as their banner in building Christian congregations, do not lie in the domain of human science and are not subject to natural reason. They are matters of supernatural revelation, which the Lord of all the earth has been pleased to make known to His intelligent creatures for their salvation from the sin into which they have fallen and the consequent curse which has come upon them. Of these things the human mind knows nothing by its natural constitution and endowment, and concerning them it has no intelligent judgment and can pronounce no rational verdict. God alone decides what pertains to the saving of our sinful souls. That decision is given us in His Word.

Our fathers accepted that decision in the faith which God wrought in their hearts, and that faith they proclaimed to the world in the Augsburg Confession. It is the glorious banner of the Reformation, and the children of the Reformation have no higher duty than to carry it forward in the name of the Lord. Not for human policies and opinions, whether called Lutheran or otherwise, are they called to labor and suffer, but for the truth of God re-

vealed from heaven for man's salvation, which the Lutheran Church confessed and still confesses. What is required of us is that which is required of all Christian believers. We are to be found faithful. This involves trial and trouble.

If any reader is not in harmony with the precious Gospel declared in the Lutheran Confession at Augsburg, we cannot expect him to accept it, least of all can we assume that he would be willing to suffer for his enlistment under its banner. But if it sets forth the truth which his soul recognizes as the very truth of God who shall judge him on the last great day, how can he otherwise than stand up for it and help to build up the Christian Church by insisting on its acceptance as a condition of membership?

Let us not try to conceal the fact that this will subject to virtual persecution. No one can follow the Lord faithfully if he is resolved to shun the cross. Ours is called a liberal age, and ours has the reputation of being an enlightened country. But let us not court disappointment and suffer disheartenment by mistaking what meaning our times attach to these captivating terms.

The enlightenment and the liberality are leagued in lamentable measure against the fidelity to the Gospel as a light shining from heaven into the darkness of earth, which is characteristic of the Lutheran Church. The great progress which our age has made in learning is to a large extent utilized for the disparagement of the supernatural revelation recorded by inspiration of God in Holy Scripture. The immense erudition employed in the so-called higher criticism has dealt with the alleged human factor in the Biblical Books until the divine factor has become an incidental matter of slight moment, if of any moment, or even existing at all; and hand in hand with this has gone much of the learned labor and laborious thought in evolutionary science, with its strenuous effort to glorify nature and make the God of the Bible a superfluous appendage to the universe, and the miracles narrated in the course of His wonderful government were idle tales for benighted peoples. The modern notions about the evolution of man, religiously as well as otherwise, leave no room for sin and salvation as the Bible teaches them, and Christian believers experience them and thus find peace and comfort on earth and blessedness in heaven. Christianity is reduced to a religion of nature in common with other religions, and to claim for it infinite worth and universal supremacy must needs seem a mark of unenlightened narrowness which is unworthy of our advanced age.

Liberality in religion is thus a natural concomitant of the alleged scientific enlightenment. Although this science and this liberality are both falsely so called, and have no promise of continuance beyond the usual term allotted to the various hypotheses emanating from the same source of human sin, which continues its ravages amid all its variations of form in thought and life, they are dominant in the world and exert a lamentably large influence even among those who have no thought of renouncing Christ.

Our Lutheran claim and contention are not popular. It is painful to say it, but they are not popular even in many a circle which is by no means to be accused of a disinclination to follow Christ. The accusation of narrowness and illiberality and intolerance are evidently hard for human nature to bear, and many a poor soul has been driven into infidelity to escape it.

We desire to forewarn our readers. They cannot escape fiery trials if they remain faithful children of the Reformation and determine by the grace of God to adhere, whatever betide, to the Augsburg Confession. If the faith there confessed is not their faith, the best they can do is to renounce it and the Evangelical Lutheran Church which maintains it and means to maintain it at every hazard and every cost. Why should they subject themselves to persecution or the sake of a mere name that to them has nothing of eternal value in it? If they are not Lutherans at heart and have no motive in the glory of God and the salvation of their own souls and those of their fellow men to uphold the Lutheran faith and the Lutheran Church which confesses that faith, it is neither reasonable nor right that they should be asked to suffer, or that they should submit to suffering for a cause which is not theirs and which from their point of view is not worth the sacrifice.

But if a man has been led by the Spirit of God to become an evangelical Christian and has faith in his heart which found expression in the Augsburg Confession, from the fulness of his heart his mouth will speak, and he will not refuse to follow that banner, though persecutions are imminent. He must expect to suffer these, because of his contention that the Word of God is given us in Holy Scripture, that this Word is supreme in heaven and earth and admits no claims of authority by any power to which appeal from it might be taken by erring mortals, and that the truth of Holy Scripture is absolute and eternally decisive, along side of which no religion of whatever name or nature, can have any reasonable claim to reverence, except so far as Christian charity has compassion on the erring.

In short, the truth revealed in Holy Scripture by the Lord of all for the enlightenment and salvation of His sinful creatures on earth, is the absolute truth which endures to eternity, and is therefore the rule by which all must eventually be judged. Hence Christians can recognize no other religion as true but that revealed in Holy Scripture, the sum and substance of which is Christ. Other religions may appeal to nature and claim acceptance on natural grounds, and we can estimate and judge of these claims and seek to be just between parties contending on the same natural grounds. But we stand on another foundation, on which that of all natural religions is not comparable.

The contest is between religions devised by man and the religion revealed by God who knows all, governs all, will be the Judge of all, and who glorifies His majesty of mercy by providing a Savior in His only begotten Son for our lost race. There is no other name by which we could be saved. There is no other religion comparable to this. Other religions are human, this is divine. Therefore this stands infinitely above all others. For purposes of science we can compare and estimate the worth of others; for purposes of salvation and worship in spirit and in truth there are no others: the Christian religion stands absolutely alone. And of this the Bible alone gives us any knowledge, because it is a revelation giving heavenly light in the darkness into which sin has plunged the world.

We Lutherans, holding fast the difference between the truth revealed from heaven and the products of human reason and feeling groping in the darkness which sin has brought into the world, cannot for a moment think of yielding to a liberality of the flesh which puts the divine revelation of the Bible on an equality with the human speculations and devices of sinful man, though he calls the product science and religion. We cannot be faithful to God and at the same time, in a carnal semblance of liberality, admit that man is equal to God, and that his imaginings are entitled to equal reverence with God's Word.

Christianity by its very nature as a divine revelation is exclusive. Hence true Christians are ever prepared for persecution on that account. They know that science and natural religion is liberal and tolerant only so long as the common ground of natural reason and feeling, and volition in accordance with these, is occupied. The principle is that of equal authority and equal rights. On that basis there can rationally be congresses of religion and mutual recognition. Buddhists and Confucianists, Jews and Mohammedans,

Christians and Mormons, can all recognize each other as religionists who have the great human virtue of sincerity, provided always that the Christians as well as the rest of these religionists recognize the common ground of all and admit that they have no higher claims than the others, and are therefore willing to submit their religion to the same tests of human reason as the final judge. No absolute authority and antecedent claim of supremacy on that ground can be tolerated by natural reason and sentiment. As soon as a religion becomes exclusive and denies the equal rights of other religions to exist, or even of their same claim to acceptance on a fundamental principle recognized by all alike, the cordial relations based on equality of human rights are ruptured and war is declared.

If we Lutherans could by any possible means be lured or deceived into any such congress of religions, our claim that Christ is Lord of all, and that the revelation of God's will to save all men by the redemption which was effected through Him is the only hope of our lost race; that, moreover, this revealed will is plainly written for all men's learning in the Holy Scriptures, and that this divine record is alone authoritative in deciding what must be believed and done by all men, — would be announced in the Scriptures. The great salvation is made known to all the world. Our fathers embraced it and found peace in believing, and were everyday ready to die for it. With the intensity with which they appreciated the blessed truth of the Scriptures which bound their believing and rejoicing hearts to the Gospel, they gloried in the liberty which what gave them from all chains, human or devilish, that sought to enslave them to other powers than those of the Triune God, who made them, saved them, sanctified them. And that is the heritage of the Church of the Augsburg Confession. It is mere ignorance that would strive now to teach that Church the lessons of liberty which she so powerfully promulgated and on which those very pretended teachers stand, though they stand very unsteadily, as those who think they have made a new discovery and are not quite sure of the ground on which they have set their unsteady feet.

Evidently they are not sure of their ground when they presume that the liberty which the Reformation preaches is an absolute dispensation from all authority and a proclamation of freedom to all human desires and volitions. What a perversion of the reformatory insight into the glorious liberty of the children of God! Poor, purblind human nature took up the proclamation of liberty to human souls, bound for ages in the chains of sin, with its darkness

and consequent enslavement under papal tyranny and cruel superstitions, and let loose all the wicked passions of those enslaved souls. There are not many more sorrowful aberrations of benighted reason than that of proclaiming liberty to the flesh on the pretense of emphasizing the liberty of the Christian man as the Reformation maintained it. The error underlying it is the fundamental error which vitiates so much of the thinking and dominates so much of the practice of erring churches since the Reformation. Starting from the idea of liberty from all bondage of the soul, which the Reformation asserted with all the earnestness of liberated slaves that had come to rejoice in the heritage of Christians made free by the Gospel of God's grace in Christ, many who little heeded this grace and knew little of its liberating power, took up the cry of liberty, which most men are able to recognize as a boon of value, and made bad work of it by mistaking it for carnal license.

It is very hard for human nature to make distinctions which presuppose the operations of divine grace. The proclamation that we are free, will naturally mean to the carnal mind that we can now do as we please, and that we have no account to render but to our own minds. Private judgment, of which much is made among Protestants, in such minds means accountability only to the mind of the individual concerned. The cardinal idea of the Reformation, that human souls are subject only to the Lord of all, who reigns in all the earth and has revealed the only way of salvation from sin and death by giving us the heavenly light of Holy Scripture, is utterly ignored; and as a necessary consequence the liberty so highly extolled is a fancied independence of God and consequent continuance in the bondage of sin, which is none the less slavish and deadly because it works in civilized communities among people of intellectual enlightenment; and the false and deceptive notion of liberty brings in its train, by logical necessity, a liberality equally false and deceptive. Things of no essential import and the very substance and foundation of things are confounded, and every thing is declared to be subject to human judgment and nothing obligatory but the individual will, from which anyone may dispense himself as expediency may dictate.

Accordingly liberalism is in its nature tolerant so long as no principle or doctrine is maintained which, by insisting on the absolute and thus exclusive sovereignty of God and of His Word, denies all human right to demur or set up counter judgments when God has spoken. Liberalism cannot tolerate that, because that rejects the very right of liberalism, with its principle of the sovereignty of human reason and the supremacy of its science, to exist

in the world, which God has made and which He governs according to His own wise and good will, whether men, created in His image and therefore originally competent to admire and enjoy His government, now that sin has blinded them like it or dislike it. Least of all can such liberalism, bloated with the wisdom of this world in its defection from its Maker and subjection to the prince of darkness, tolerate the Christian contention, that the world lieth in wickedness. and that there is no way of rescuing the souls, ruined by the sin that has come upon them and that is hurrying them to the doom of everlasting death, but through faith, which only the Holy Spirit of God can work in them through the means divinely appointed for the purpose and given to the Church for administration – through faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world by obedience to the Heavenly Father’s will unto death, even the death of the cross.

Congresses of religion, higher criticism, evolutionary science, and all other devices and speculations of the human mind, with all its wisdom of this world, know nothing of this, and can know nothing of it so long as the source of their knowledge and the standard of their judgment is the understanding blinded by the fall from God and groping in the darkness which sin has spread over the earth, and so long as they refuse to admit the light which God graciously sheds from heaven above through His holy Word to give light in the gloom. In the extreme of possible tolerance for all sorts of opinions, the learned ignorance of this world in regard to spiritual things can tolerate no such exclusiveness, which would destroy its occupation and scarcely leave it a respectable place among the great delusions of the world. But just those claims which are so hateful to all adherents of natural religion and all advocates of the supremacy of human intelligence in the world’s government, are those which the men of the Reformation put forth and which form the foundation of the Augsburg Confession.

The Papists might have been satisfied if our fathers had declared that God and the pope, the Divine Word and the human decretals, should be recognized as equally authoritative. That would have been an acknowledgment of a principle in which the shrewdness of the papacy would probably have found all concessions requisite for its purpose. They might also have been appeased if only it had been admitted, that human merit and the merit of Christ have equal claims to recognition. They would have known how to manage all that. It was the persistent contention that the Word of God must alone rule and that faith in Christ *alone* saves, that formed the insurmount-

able wall of separation. The exclusiveness was the intolerable barrier. All the religions of the world would be satisfied with us if we agreed that Christianity is one of the historic religions that enters the arena with others that have found their way into the world, whose claims must be tested by the same human reason which is alleged to be the ultimate criterion of all truth. We Christians can make no such admission and accept no such standard of judgment in the things pertaining to our eternal salvation. God has given us a Savior, and revealed the truth unto salvation. That revelation is recorded in the Holy Scriptures. That is authoritative for time and eternity. There can be no appeal from God's eternal throne and proclamation of eternal truth. There is no court of revision. No emperor or pope, no learning or science, however skilled and worthy of esteem in the domain of its competency, has any title to submission, or even to a respectful hearing, when, with a presumption equaled only by its fatuity, it declines to accept the decrees of God and cites Him before its tribunal for judgment.

It is the great offense of Christianity that it will allow no equality of human and divine, recognize no authority in spiritual matters but that of the divine Word, and admit no rights of men's errors in the face of God's truth graciously given us in the Gospel. It is the exclusiveness which is inherent in the very essence of God's revelation to man and of the salvation in Christ which is the sum and substance of that revelation, that all human religions and philosophies and systems find intolerable. We do not doubt that, if we Lutherans would concede that the Bible is entitled only to the same consideration as the so-called Sacred Books of other religions, and that the salvation of men through faith in a crucified Redeemer, by whose vicarious merits, we are justified and have peace with God is an opinion that may challenge respect among other opinions of thinkers, who regard the individual competent and obligated to secure his justification before any and all tribunals by his own merits, we would escape the condemnation which the wise men of the world pass upon us as narrow-minded bigots.

Why should not Mohammedans and Latter Day Saints, for instance, be on friendly terms with us, if we were stupid and godless enough to declare that the Koran and Book of Mormon and our Holy Scriptures are entitled to the same reverence as rational results of man's effort to find the truth, and in all investigations of their relative claims to acceptance they are equally subject to the same criticism and the judgment of the same science? It is our evangelical Christianity that is hated.

We Lutherans could get along nicely with all the world and with all the churches, if we would only stop pressing the exclusive claims of the Bible and the way of salvation which it teaches, and quit — being Lutherans. But as those who believe the truth confessed in the Augsburg Confession, and confess it because they believe it, and find their peace in it amid the tribulations of time, and their comfort in it in view of the judgment that decides their destiny in eternity, they cannot relinquish their Christian claim. And therefore they are everywhere spoken against as a bigoted sect!

Let Lutherans for the glory of their Lord and for the welfare of souls which He has purchased at a stupendous price, continue to carry high their banner of the glorious Augsburg Confession, but let them be ready for all sorts of persecution in doing their necessary and noble work. They would deceive themselves if they supposed that they could be faithful and still acquire the world's commendation and enjoy its plaudits. "If any man will come after me", our Savior says, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Matt. 16:24-26.

Our fathers were men of faith who endured fiery trials and won victories of glorious import in the great Reformation: shall we, their children, shun the fiery trials, abandon the great Confession; and lose all the fruits of their glorious victories, — lose even our own souls in our cowardly unfaithfulness? "The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, whosoever believeth in Him shall not be ashamed." Rom. 10:8-11.

Our fathers could not do otherwise, when God had given them faith in the Lord Jesus unto the saving of their souls, than confess Him before men to the glory of His great name. It was not their human opinion that was set forth in the Augsburg Confession, but the truth of the Gospel which they apprehended by faith and held against all human opinions of Papists and all manner of men, who imagined that because they were men, equally with the men of faith, their human judgments and decretals and ordinances and va-

porings must have equal authority with the Word of God which the Lutherans believed. These were ready to die for their Confession, if it should come to that, because the truth had made them free and brought them peace in believing, and their eternal hopes were bound up in its maintenance. They sought the salvation of their otherwise lost souls, and not their honor, but only the honor and glory of God, who pitied them in their lost estate and saved them with an everlasting salvation. Believing the truth in their hearts, they could not do otherwise than confess it with their lips. The devil and the pope and the emperor, and all that was and is in league with them, might do their utmost, but they could not, whatever these adversaries might undertake in their rage, and even be permitted to execute in their fury, do otherwise. Believing in their hearts unto righteousness, they must, by an inner necessity linked with their liberty, confess with their mouths unto salvation. They could die and enter into the joys of their Lord, but believing, they could not refrain from confessing. They stood as Luther stood:

“I cannot do otherwise, God help me.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church began her distinctive existence as a visible organization on this basis of the Gospel, accepted by faith and confessed as the very truth of God, that makes souls free from the curse of sin and from every yoke of bondage that sin has wrought, and on this basis she has, under varied vicissitudes of war and victory, of suffering and deliverance, lived and labored until this day. If the faith which assured her triumph in the fierce struggles of the Reformation and won her victories over the many foes that have marched their armies against her since, has perished from the earth, she lives no more and has no more battles to fight in the name of the Lord and victories to win for the glory of His name. She has then passed into history as that which was once a living and blessed reality, but which has departed from us. Then the great Church of the Reformation is no more. That were a sad case, but it is not a fact. She is not dead; she may be sick and debilitated and enfeebled, but she is not dead. We would not be writing this, if she had gone from the earth.

There are some people living whose hearts are sustained and gladdened by the faith of the Augsburg Confession still, and who are willing to confess that faith as our fathers did at Augsburg. Therefore the Evangelical Lutheran Church exists today as the great Church of the Reformation and

still holds high her banner of the Augsburg Confession, and does this in times only less trying than those of her earlier days, because the persecution to which she is subjected is less threatening of physical violence, but is still sufficiently trying to call forth the earnest cry in the name of the Lord:

“Go forward; fear not; quit yourselves like men: be strong!”

For there are many in our times who, though they still retain the Lutheran name and are not willing to give up the Confession which their fathers so highly honored, and which has assigned the Church that bears it so glorious a part in history, have lost the faith which it confessed, and many who, though it would be incorrect to say that they have renounced the Lutheran faith, have either become doubtful about the estimate placed by her faithful children upon its value for time and eternity, or have grown weak in the conflict with pretensions and popular human error and the worldliness that can tolerate no Christian earnestness in any form, or have unconsciously fallen by the way in the general indifference to sound doctrine. This lies in the very nature of the liberalism that makes its appeal to human reason and issues in a broad humanitarianism that makes little account of sin and less account of grace, because it refuses to know anything of Christ and Him crucified.

In view of the perils besetting us, there is urgent need for Lutheran vigilance and warning and admonition, that the Church of the Augsburg Confession may not have a mere name to live, while it is permitted to die by the abandonment of its pure faith, which alone can sustain its life.

Believers in Christ must confess the truth of the Gospel recorded in Holy Scripture, not because they are constrained by divine law commanding the performance of such necessary duty, but because, first of all, the Spirit in their hearts moves them thus to give utterance to the gratitude which flows from their faith, that the Savior may receive the glory due His precious name, and, secondly, because they are conscious that the great salvation which they enjoy is designed for all people, and the love which flows from faith constrains them to make it known to all whom their proclamation can reach.

So long as critics consider our confessional principle and practice from their usual legalistic point of view, they are incapable of even understanding our position or making any just estimate of its spirit and its import. We

therefore do not wonder that their blind thrusts are often so savage, and their doughty assaults upon the phantasms which their own brains have conjured up are proclaimed as victories over the Lutheran Church and greeted with loud acclams by gaping crowds as triumphs over effete symbolisms and illiberal dogmatisms. Knowing the source and the nonsense of it all, and experiencing of a scratch from the brave shots fired into the dim wilds of nature where the Lutheran Church was supposed to be lurking, we do not wonder at it all, though the matter is too serious for mere laughter and holiday merriment. It is devilish, although some who are engaged in the nefarious business have not the least desire to be engaged in Satan's plans, to prevent the success of the Gospel in leading souls to Christ, and are quite unconscious of being enlisted in any such detestable cause.

The matter is too serious for fun, and therefore we write, not for the amusement that the situation from its comic side might furnish, but for the instruction of those who might be misled or disheartened by the assaults made, sometimes even by people who call themselves Lutheran, and thus covet and claim the honors which history has accorded to our heroic fathers, without possessing the faith and fortitude which gave them their name and fame in the mighty struggle of the sixteenth century and which issued, as the result of the conflict with popery and tyranny, in the great Reformation, in the glorious Church of the Augsburg Confession, as the outcome of the stupendous conflict of forces at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. Ever since those palmy days of revived evangelical faith in Christendom here has been on earth an Evangelical Lutheran Church which has confessed that faith. There never was a time since then when there were no souls that found the utterance of their faith and their eternal hopes in the Augsburg Confession.

The outward vicissitudes of the Lutheran Church are sometimes confusing, especially in view of the fundamental truth in regard to the Church, that Christ's kingdom is not of this world and is subject to none of the tests by which earthly kingdoms are judged. Where two or three are gathered together in the Lord's name, there He is present, and there His kingdom is set up, and there He reigns and His Word exerts its heavenly power and supreme authority; and where two or three, by the grace of God exerted in the Gospel, have been led to the pure evangelical truth confessed and suffered for in the days of the Reformation, there a Church of the Augsburg Confession was formed as an Evangelical Lutheran Church.

So it has continued until his day.

In our own dear country Lutherans who came here established Lutheran congregations, and the Church of the Augsburg Confession became a factor in the history of the United States. It grew with the growth of our country, notwithstanding that Christians of other confessions came here and founded churches on other bases than that of the pure Word and Sacrament set forth by the Augsburg Confession. The Evangelical Lutheran Church had to fight for its life, not without persecutions, on this soil as everywhere else, and lived and still lives as a blessing to our land, though so many evidently regard her presence needless and her work superfluous. If only poor, erring humanity could be made to see what a benediction comes to man in the Evangelical Lutheran faith.

We who are members of this Church of the Augsburg Confession, which has such a glorious history, but which is far more glorious for the faith that made such history, have now a high calling and a pressing duty in this land of liberty and great prosperity, where ease of living and personal freedom offer so many attractions.

We are called to be coworkers with God in the administration of those means of grace which He has appointed and through which, according to His promise, He does His saving work on earth. In fulfilling this holy vocation we, too, are witnesses of the truth unto salvation, confessing it before men and teaching and preaching it, in season and out of season, that others may possess it with us in faith and with us confess it to the glory of our Savior. How could we now do otherwise than adhere to our good old and tried Augsburg Confession and build on the foundation on which our fathers stood and on which we stand?

If we love our children and earnestly desire the salvation of our fellow men, what else can we offer them but that precious treasure of the Gospel which fills our hearts with peace in believing and joy in the Holy Ghost?

On this ground we know that the Church is built securely, and building thus, we are certain that God is glorified and souls are saved. Our mission is thus fulfilled according to the Master's Word, and all is well, though sometimes appearances should not be encouraging.

What can Christian people mean when they intimate, if they do not always positively demand, that we children of the Augsburg Confession should, in deference to opinions which are not in harmony with the faith there expressed, but which have become popular in many communities since Reformation times, consent to teach otherwise than the Lutheran he-

roes believed and taught in that period of hell's most furious struggle against evangelical truth? Did not then the faith of the Augsburg Confession prove itself the victory that overcomes the world, though popes and emperors, with all the carnal power of the state and the secularized Church, with its pompous pretense of being the only holy Church of Christ, were leagued against it?

So far as can be seen the devil did his utmost then to overcome the Gospel and annihilate the Church which confesses it. It is not a common thing that the concentrated powers of Church and State cooperate with him for such destruction, as was the case in the days of the Reformation. Such tremendous mustering of forces, considering the deadly wounds which popery received in those stupendous days of battle between light and darkness, are not likely to recur, although mighty conflicts will come before the advent of our Lord to consume the Antichrist with the Spirit of His mouth and to destroy him with the brightness of His coming. This Antichrist continues to sit in the Church and still exercises his deadly influence. "His coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." 2 Thess. 1:8-10.

Satan is not dead, and his venom has not ceased. The outlook is terrible. Were it not for the promises of God, who could face it without despairing? But these promises sustain us only when we believe them and while we believe them. What then can those people mean who, calling themselves Christians, ask us to put our faith in abeyance while we gather our congregations and build our churches! Surely and truly, if they are sincere Christians they know not what they do when they ask us to desist from our purpose to build only on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. We shall not desist, our prayer is that Lutherans may never desist, whatever it may cost them.

What are they, or we, or any sinners profited, if they shall gain the whole world, but lose their own souls?

To us, who have escaped the damnation of hell by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus and who rejoice in the good tidings of the Gospel proclaimed for the comfort of all poor sinners in the Reformation and fixed in the Augsburg Confession as the creed of all poor sinners who, feeling their helplessness and hopelessness in all human remedies and contrivances or

ills in which God alone can help, flee for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel and find it there, appeals of worldly wisdom and humanitarian sentiment against the Word, are vain.

Satan will not cease to trouble us.

He is desperate.

Shall his new schemes of appeal to human pride and love of ease, since his efforts to dethrone God by human power have failed, be successful? Alas for the weakness of man, we do not know. But we do know that the grace of God is sufficient for us. O brethren, trust in that: the temptations are many; trust in that!

We do not know with how much success Satan will ply his dreadful trade of destroying souls even where the light of the Augsburg Confession, with the glorious history back of it to enhance its lustre, shines on this benighted earth; but, enlightened by the warnings given us in the Scriptures and the miseries of neglecting them and trusting in the wisdom of men instead, as history records these neglectings and trustings and their baleful consequences, we do know that the Word of the Lord shall stand and that the counsels of His enemies shall come to naught. Our concern is not about this, though by reason of the flesh we sometimes tremble about it.

We firmly refuse to give way to the suggestion of the devil and the flesh and the world, that the gates of hell shall prevail against the little flock that by faith possesses the kingdom. But we know something of the forces mustered against the Church of the Augsburg Confession, and therefore see the need of taking to heart the Holy Spirit's admonition, and this in its bearing first upon ourselves that, while we think we stand, we do not fall in the powerful sweep of temptation. God, who is alone our refuge and strength at all times, in every day's trouble, but who alone is our rock and our fortress especially when the waters come in to our soul — God, who alone can help us, help us in the hour of trial! The gates of hell shall not prevail against us. How can they prevail against the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth!

O Lord, increase our faith!

In building up the great Church of the Reformation in this land we would be blind if we did not see the difficulties to be encountered, and we certainly would be lacking in the faith which inspired the Augsburg Confession if we were unwilling to encounter them and suffer whatever consequence might ensue, even if this consequence should be temporary defeat and shame before the world that lieth in wickedness.

If the grace of God unto salvation meanwhile wins some souls to find peace in the Savior — is that not worth the cost of the sacrifice?

And if our suffering inures to the preservation of the Gospel of salvation in Christ as against the falsities of humanitarianisms and philanthropisms, which never saved a soul from the wreck which sin has made in the world, is not that worth suffering for and even dying for, if the world's wisdom should doom us to death?

Our high calling is to uphold the truth of the everlasting Gospel of the grace of God for the salvation of sinners, and therefore to gather souls into churches of the evangelical faith that finds its proper utterance in the Augsburg Confession. Unhappily some of our people listen to the popular cry of science and criticism and the consequent clamor of freedom from old creeds and churches, as if the poor efforts of science to spell out the mind of God in His wonderful works had changed the eternal truth which He has in mercy plainly revealed for the enlightenment of our darkened understanding, that we might know the truth and that the truth might make us free. It is a pity that Christians should thus be lured into the snares of the devil, seeing that they ought to know better, since they have the Bible before them and the glorious Augsburg Confession with its history to sustain them. But it all shows how much need there is for vigilance and prayer, that God may give believers steadfastness in their faith, the heavenly power of which the world's science is incompetent to understand and the world's philosophy naturally scoffs at as devoid of all rational grounds of assurance and to be accounted for only on the hypothesis that brains have become disordered and wild vagaries have been permitted to grow like weeds in the garden of reason.

We must be prepared to bear such slings and arrows, as our fathers were prepared by the grace of our Lord to bear persecutions more galling to the flesh. Hardest it is to bear them when even many Christians of other denominations and sometimes, wonderful as it may seem, of our own Lutheran denomination, join the foe in such persecution, and do this on a plea that is subversive of all revealed truth and destructive of the whole Christian Church as a kingdom that is not of this world. For the head and front of our offending always is our firm and unalterable declaration that God, who alone can save us, has made known to the lost world His mercy for our salvation in Christ, by faith in His name, and has shown us His way of salvation in the Holy Scriptures, that all men may know it and avail

themselves, through the faith which the Holy Spirit works by means of the ever lasting truth thus revealed, of the pardon and peace and blessedness brought to us by the revelation given us in the Gospel of Christ. As many as received the Savior of the world, who came unto His own and His own received Him not, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in His name.

And now when God has fulfilled His promises and worked faith in our hearts, to our peace in believing, to our comfort in the tribulations of earth, and to our assured hope of eternal glory after these tribulations are past, men tell us that this is all a delusion, as nature has no record of it, and human speculation can find no trace of it in the rocks of the earth or in the reason of the ages.

The world knows not the plan and ways of God, and in its ignorance denies the possibility of any such knowledge. Shall we on that account admit that we know nothing of God's purpose and plan in regard to this sinful earth, and its salvation from sin and death?

Men may despise us for our faith, but we know in whom we have believed; they may pronounce us ignorant and superstitious, and enemies of all enlightenment, but we know whence light comes. And we rejoice in it, and are gladdened when other eyes are opened to see the heavenly light. Therefore we Lutherans labor to build up, to extend and defend the Lutheran Church, not because of its Lutheran name but because of its evangelical faith.

The truth in Jesus is the only hope of salvation for a lost world, as it is our comfort and stay as individual believers; and as we find that truth set forth in the declaration of our fathers in their great Augsburg Confession as the faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, we know of no basis on which to build Christian congregations that is at all comparable to this for children of the Reformation. who believe that truth and have been made free by its heavenly power and happy in its saving grace. If others think they have something better to offer a sinful world and determine to build churches on another foundation which seems to them more sound and sure, our land allows them all the liberty and opportunity they can desire. Let them do so if they think there is a blessing for mankind in their deed and they feel able to render an account for it on the judgment day. But why should they be angry with us when we resolve by the grace of God to abide by the old, well-tried faith of the Augsburg Confession and decline to have

any part in what they think better, but what we know to be at variance with the Gospel truth which it confesses?

3. The Fundamental Principles

USUALLY TWO PRINCIPLES of the Reformation are spoken of as determining and governing the great world-historical movement. One is the sole authority of the Holy Scriptures, the other is the central truth of these Scriptures as the Word of God, the justification of sinners through faith alone in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The first is commonly called the formal, the second is named the material principle.

We have no objections to the division and classification. But as our aim is to help our people to understand God's gracious work through Martin Luther, we see no reason to lay special stress on the analysis thus made for purposes of further theological exposition. We retain the customary distinction and distinctive names as correct, but desire to impress on our readers the fact that when the Lutherans of the Augsburg days pressed the article of justification by faith alone, they did so because the Scriptures demanded this, not because some principle other than that of the sole authority of God's Word and coordinate with it required insistence on this central doctrine as primarily fundamental. It fully met the requirements of their own troubled hearts, but they did not alone on that account present it as the great central truth of salvation.

They were of men who in their deep experience of the ravages of sin and in their deep distress on account of it could flee for their refuge to their own devices and put their trust in a panacea of their own invention. That was not what their troubled souls needed, and the grace of God had led them beyond any confidence in their own imaginations. But the Word of God did tell them of a Savior who had come to destroy the works of the devil and to found a kingdom of grace and truth, in which lost souls should find salvation through faith in His name, and by the power of the Holy Spirit exerted in that Word they believed and experienced what is written:

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” – Rom. 5:1.

The material principle is derived from the Holy Scriptures and is therefore in its root the same principle, in its realization by faith, as the certitude of salvation through the testimony borne by the Holy Spirit in the inspired Word. The Holy Scriptures are the revelation of the truth of God, and are infallible because divine. On their authority the truth in Jesus, realized by the power of the Holy Spirit exerted in their own hearts by His Gospel, is received as the gracious proclamation from heaven of salvation through faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

“As many as received Him; to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12-13.

Of these things the Evangelical Christians of Luther’s day were sure, as true believers of every age have been and must needs be. They are not opinions formed on earthly evidence and human judgments, which may be correct and are accepted because they seem highly probable, but eternal verities resting on the unerring testimony of God, who cannot lie and can make no mistakes. Luther and his fellow believers had drunk from the pure fountain of the Gospel and become strong in the Lord, so that henceforth they were:

“...no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” Eph. 4:14

They knew whereof they affirmed, and knew it upon testimony that could not fail. Whatever man might say or do against them, they could always say to those who heard and believed the Gospel which they preached, and say it with the full assurance of faith, that this would stand, though the heavens should fall. For it is written:

“Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” 2 Tim. 3:14-17.

Trusting this Word, as the Holy Spirit teaches all hearts to trust it as the very truth of God, they knew that salvation has come as a free gift of grace in Christ to our sin-cursed earth, and that whosoever would, might drink of the waters of life freely.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

The infallible Word taught them the infallible truth. There were worldly-wise men in those days, as there are now and always have been, who tried their cunning logic upon the minds of believers, alleging that the infallibility of the Scriptures does not imply the infallibility of those who accept their testimony. Let reason do its best or its worst with its dialectics, then let the believing heart ask itself whether, with all the cunning craftiness which the flesh can bring to bear on the subject, the truth has been shaken, that God did so love the world, that the Savior did come, and that whosoever believeth in Him shall be saved. Unbelief can of course have no assurance of faith, but the confessors at Augsburg were believers, and their reply to all the sophistries of carnal reason could only be what is written, “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.” 1 John 4:16. The Word of God, the Holy Spirit bearing unerring witness in that Word, makes believers quite sure of the heavenly truth revealed, according to our Lord’s own words:

“If ye continue in My Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31-32.

Two things thus stood fast in the hearts of our evangelical confessors, as they stood fast in the testimony of God, that the Scriptures alone are authoritative in the congregation of believers, and that Christ alone through faith in His name can save sinful souls from the curse that is upon them.

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.” Is. 8:20.

That is a criterion that is everlastingly sure: for by that law and testimony the world shall be finally judged. And the central truth of the divine revela-

tion is beyond all controversy plain:

“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead. even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:10-11.

Surely it is plain to all people who are willing to hear the words of the Spirit, as Christ Himself testified:

“I am the way and the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” John 14:6.

On this principle the Reformation was inaugurated and consummated, and on this the Augsburg Confession was built and maintained against all the powers of earth and hell.

Closely associated in the hearts and lives of the confessors with the fundamental principles of the absolute supremacy of the Scriptures and of Salvation through Christ alone, by faith alone, was their abiding and unwavering conviction that the Savior had established a kingdom on earth, in which He reigns by His Word, and in which His subjects by faith appropriate the righteousness which He has acquired for all men by His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. Before our Lord was parted from His disciples and carried up into heaven He said to them:

“These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms concerning me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you, but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.” Luke 24:44-49.

He parted from them as to His visible presence, but he continued with them according to the comforting words which He spake, when He gave them the great commission of the Church, saying:

“All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore. and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Matt. 28:18-20.

In executing their glorious mission they would encounter enemies and suffer persecution, but as a company of believers they were cheered by the constant presence of their Lord, whose voice kept resounding in their hearts:

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32.

The disciples were a congregation of believers, the communion of saints, who heard the Lord’s Word and believed in Him to the peace and salvation of their souls, and believing were sure that those things which were written of Him in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and which He spake and did before their ears and eyes, and which were afterwards written by inspiration of the Holy Ghost in the New Testament, are the very truth of God; and they executed their grand commission to bring the great salvation of which their faith made them sure to all people by the administration of the means of grace committed to them, and did this with an assurance which no human power could give them or take away. They believed and therefore they spoke, and the little flock became the great host which now gladdens all lands with the glorious tidings of salvation.

Our fathers in the days of the Reformation heard these tidings and believed, and because they believed they were in the true apostolic succession and spake with the assurance which the infallible Scriptures and faith in the Lord Jesus unto the saving of the soul inspires. The great Reformation whose results it fixed for all time, was a work of faith, God’s people gathering their forces in protest against human usurpations of the King’s prerogative and consequent substitutions of human ordinances for His gracious proclamation of salvation through faith in the redemption which He effected, and a humble but unwavering insistence upon the exclusive authority of the Scriptures in Christ’s kingdom and of salvation by grace alone through faith in His merits, who loved us and gave Himself for us. It was the Church witnessing in trying times to the old truth in Jesus, and going forth conquering and to conquer as in apostolic times.

The kingdom which our Lord established, and of which the grace of the King had by His Gospel proclamation made the reformers true and loyal citizens, is unlike all other kingdoms with which human reason and human history deals. The failure to notice this lies at the root of many an error. It is a kingdom; or it is a community that has a King, who has published a constitution and laws by which His subjects are governed. But it is a kingdom of grace and truth, and therefore entirely unique. In reply to Pilate's questions Jesus answered,

“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” John 18:36-38.

Pilate's only reply to the statement was the perplexed question. “What is truth?” And that is the question that is repeated to this day by the millions who do not hear the great King's voice.

Truth seems a variable quantity, in regard to which there can be no certainty. Amid the conflicting systems of thought and wordy wars among men, what is truth? If our fathers had been men who were guided by human opinions on the basis of ocular and logical demonstrations, how could they have dared to set their judgments against all the learning and reason and power of popery? But they were no such men. They were of the truth and heard their King's voice, which settles everything in His kingdom. There are many men of many minds, and the observations of sense and the deductions of reason may differ vastly in matters within their domain and jurisdiction; but here is a kingdom which is not of this world and in which accordingly the sense and reason of this world, precious as they are in their secular domain, have no voice. There the heavenly King of truth speaks, and His subjects hear. That is truth, and therefore no further question as to what is truth can arise in that domain. The truth has made the happy subjects of that kingdom free from every form of slavery under the mastery of usurping creatures. Hence our Lord prays to the Father for them:

“Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth. As Thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them who shall believe on me through their Word, that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me.” John 17:17-21.

The Word, “the only Begotten of the Father. full of grace and truth,” was made flesh, that out of the world which He redeemed by His sufferings and death a goodly company of believers might be gathered unto Him, who should live under Him in His kingdom here and inherit its glory hereafter, when this world shall be no more. The framers of the Augsburg Confession were men of this kingdom, who set down in that document the truth which made them free, and were sure that the Holy Scriptures communicated that truth with its power of salvation to all who should believe it. This made the question of Pilate entirely irrelevant to their minds in their conflict with the world and the flesh and the devil.

The failure of the Romanists to hear the voice of the King in Zion, and the consequent construction of a kingdom under the sovereignty of the pope, which is of this world, as a human substitute for the kingdom set up by our Lord, which is not of this world, is responsible for the false doctrines and erroneous practices against which the Lutheran confessors were called to contend, and against which they manfully testified at Augsburg. For ignoring our Lord’s testimony unto the truth and His establishment of a spiritual kingdom of redeemed souls who by His grace were of the truth and heard His voice, they persisted in proclaiming the Church of Christ to be a civil state like that of Venice, whose test of citizenship must be loyalty to the pope, who is the head of the State, disloyalty to whom must subject them to punishment as rebels. To men who are not of the truth and do not hear the Lord’s voice. this is frightful, little as it could terrify the true subjects of Christ in His kingdom of truth.

But it is one of the astounding things in the history of the Church that such a theory could gain the ascendancy among Christians in the very face of the express declarations of Him who was acknowledged to be the Lord of All. For not only did He plainly tell us that His is a kingdom of truth, which is not of this world, but in various ways explained its nature, so that none of His people might fail to understand it.

“When He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here, or Lo there, for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” Luke 17:20-21.

Evidently the expectation was that the promised Messiah would restore the kingdom of David and reign in Judea with unexampled temporal power and glory, and they were anxious to know when that kingdom, whose nearness they understood Him as announcing, would be set up. He tells them that His kingdom has already come, although not yet in the glory in which the King shall reign forever in heaven, when His purpose of gathering His elect host on earth shall have been accomplished, and they shall then forever be with the Lord and see Him in His glory in His Father’s house with its many mansions. Meantime they should understand that His is a kingdom of truth, a congregation of believers, which is not of this world and is not discernible by the senses; for the truth works inwardly and is received by faith, so that the Messiah reigns in the heart, and all believers are His blessed subjects. They constitute the one holy Christian Church, and as the Lord reigns over them by the truth unto which He came into the world to bear witness, and they by His grace believe it, this Church, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, is “the pillar and ground of the truth” as its chosen custodian and witness. 1 Tim. 3:15.

The Roman Church has perverted the ways of the Lord to an extent which, in view of the plain declarations of the King in Zion, is amazing. For His kingdom of grace and truth, in which there is forgiveness of sin, life and salvation, a secular institution, in which there is the torturing effort to find release from the curse of sin by human works, as substituted; and for the gracious reign of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us, and who is mighty to save, was substituted the pope, who could not know the truth in Jesus by nature and would not learn it from the revelation given in the Bible, and therefore ruled with an usurper’s iron rod by human ordinances which could not save.

Such a papal kingdom, which comes with observation, and which is utterly and by implication even confessedly of this world, astonishes all enlightened Christians by claiming to be “the Church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.” How could it be under such conditions? Severed from the fountain of truth, both in formal and material respects, cut loose from Holy Scripture and recognizing other mediators be-

tween God and man than the only One recognized in the court of heaven, the man Christ Jesus, how could it be?

There were still some in the world who saw this. The truth had not wholly perished from the earth, although the great Roman Church, which should have been a witness of the heavenly power of truth, had proved unfaithful to its charge. If little use was made of them, the Holy Scriptures still existed. And a little flock still knew the truth in Jesus. Then the great Head of the Church, who still reigned in His kingdom of grace and truth, notwithstanding the usurpation and tyranny of popery, gave Luther the Bible and sent him to lead the little flock who believed it and whose hearts were gladdened by the truth in Jesus, which it so clearly and cogently proclaimed. The witnessing Church of the sure Word and Sacrament lifted up its voice. It was the voice of God which heaven and earth must hear. The Reformation and the Augsburg Confession as the result. According to Heaven's decree the truth must prevail.

“Thy Word is truth.”

On that principle the great battle of the Reformation was fought, and on that principle the Church of the Reformation with its triumphant Augsburg Confession stood and stands.

That truth is not hidden. Since sin has come into the world with its blight upon the good and beautiful creation of God, it is not naturally in the heart of man, nor is it inferable from earth or sky or sea.

“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Eph. 4:17-18.

But God had mercy on our ignorance and gave us light.

“Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith — to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever.” Rom. 16:25-27.

What man by nature could not know, God graciously gave us by supernatural revelation and had it recorded in Holy Scripture for all time. Therefore it is said of those who “have purified their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” that they are:

“...born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” “And this is the Word by which the Gospel is preached unto you.” 1 Pet. 1:23-25.

It makes known to us things which we could not otherwise know, but which, and which alone, it is necessary for our salvation from sin and death that we should receive and believe.

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith. as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Rom. 1:16.17.

The great principle of the Reformation that salvation is by faith alone in the redemption which is through Christ Jesus is revealed to us alone in the Holy Scripture. From this alone we can learn the truth unto which He came to bear witness and on which His kingdom is established, which is a kingdom of grace and truth unto salvation. Therefore the divine authority of the Word in all matters of faith and conscience, which are the domain of the Church, must be maintained in its absolute supremacy and exclusiveness. For the Church what it decides is decided forever. It is the organic principle without which there could be no assurance of faith, and the Church not only could not flourish, but could not live.

How could we know the mind of God, if He had of been pleased to speak to us and tell us His will and His way of accomplishing it? And what could we in our ignorance and blindness effect with all our surmisings and devisings, if we were left to grope in our natural darkness? We can know the truth unto salvation only when we have the Word of Him who alone can save us. But this gives us light and makes us certain.

“We have also a more sure Word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” 2 Pet. 1:19-21.

The individuals who were chosen as instruments to communicate the will and way of God did not set down their own thoughts and plans, but said and wrote what the Holy Ghost instructed them to say and write. Therefore the Word is adapted to convey to us the mind of God and make believers certain of His will, as this was evidently necessary for the accomplishment of the Lord’s purpose in giving us a revelation.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Rom. 15, 4.

Thus equipped our Lutheran forefathers entered upon the work of teaching and preaching with an assurance of faith which only the Word of God can give, and which alone could make such strong and patient and persevering men as were the heroes of the Reformation. Had they entertained the notions which are now so prevalent about the dogmas and dogmatism of Christian believers, about the uncertainty of creeds and confessions, about the necessity of according to every man the privilege of framing his own religion and of indulging a large-hearted liberality that declares each and all to be equally probable, we would still be under the heel of Rome and know nothing of the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Such opinions can produce only weaklings who could wield no weapons against the kingdom of darkness and suffer no privations in the cause of heavenly truth. Our Augsburg Confession would never have come into being, if the Christians who embraced the Gospel in Luther’s day had not been men whose hearts were made stout and stalwart by the faith which was stayed on the infallible Word of God. It was not needful to tell them that they were fallible men, and that they remained fallible notwithstanding the infallibility of the Scriptures, even if this be conceded. They knew that quite

well. They knew it better than those who claimed the infallibility of the pope. All such sophistical efforts to befog the subject and undermine their faith were superfluous. Their own experience in their inner conflict between the spirit and the flesh, as well as the Word of God, had taught them that. But their own experience had taught them somethings which these sophists did not know, and which they could not learn so long as they declined to lean on the infallibility of the divine Word and find in this their constant and unfailing support.

They were tempted as other men were, and are, but the Gospel sustained them in their severest trials; and when the devil and the flesh, reinforced by the pope and the emperor, made assaults that bade them pause and hesitate, and caused them for the moment to waver, they knew where to find comfort and whence new strength was to be drawn. They might weaken and vacillate, but that to which their faith clung still stood fast and upheld them until the calamity was overpast. God was their refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Not trusting their own hearts which were fallible every way, they trusted in the Word which God had given them in the Holy Scriptures, which they knew and believed to be infallible every way. Even if their own hearts were sometimes dismayed, because of the sinful flesh which remained until death even in the believing children of God. the Spirit of God that was in them by faith would direct them to the Word and they would be reassured.

“Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; he will not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.” Ps. 46:2-5.

The faith which the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation, clings to the promises of God as infallibly true and renders the believers sure of the things promised. The flesh may suggest doubts in the believer’s heart, but faith is always sure, though the believer may be troubled by the carnal suggestions. In such a conflict some may fail to flee for refuge to the sure Word of promise and succumb to the wily foe of God and man.

“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.”

Such defection is possible, because faith, failing in being constantly replenished and invigorated by the Word to which it clings and whence it derives its power, may fail.

“If ye live after the flesh ye shall die, but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” Rom. 8:13.

In the days of the Reformation men were fallible as they are now, and could go wrong, though the Word was infallible. Some did go wrong. But as long as faith remained and adhered to the Gospel, it was always sure, and the assurance could fail only when faith failed, because, while it existed, it lived and was supported by the Word of God which could not fail. To say that Christians are fallible as well as other people therefore only means that they may fall away from Christ and from His truth. This is admitted by all who adhere to the Word of Holy Scripture. Lutherans never doubted it. But neither did they doubt that the Word remained true and infallibly sure if some did doubt or deny it. They were sure that the Scriptures are the very truth of God, even if their faith was sometimes in fierce conflict with the flesh. Even Luther, whose persistence in faith is exemplary, was not free from the torment of the flesh in its incessant warfare against the Spirit. Indeed he was a special target of the devil and the world and the flesh, as men of Christian energy like him are always sure to be. But he adhered to the Word, and that always rendered him invincible. He and his fellow believers fought the battles of the Reformation in the assurance of faith that the Word of God is infallibly true, and they won the victory over Rome and Satan and sin not by any pretense of their own infallibility and power, but by their faith in the infallibility and power of the Gospel which they preached and defended and confessed.

We are not unaware of the difficulties which some minds conceive in such statements and explanations concerning the full assurance of faith which characterized our fathers in Reformation times, and which it is our endeavor to have our readers properly to appreciate and imitate in our own times of such little faith, and consequently of so little trust in the Word of God and so much doubt and difficulty about its promises. We are reminded of the fact, which we realize more fully than those who urge it in opposition to the assurance of Christian believers, that sin affects all the faculties of the

human mind, and that accordingly we are never secure against its evil effects in our intellect, sensibilities and will.

This is undeniable.

We are therefore no more absolutely secure against error in our perceptions and thought than we are against violations of the divine will in our feeling and volitions. We may err in doctrine as well as in life, and the facts prove that men, even Christian men, do frequently err in both. But the error does not affect the inerrancy of the standard when this is the Word of God, neither does it imply the insecurity of all doctrinal and moral perceptions and judgments when formed according to that standard. Deviations from the Holy Scriptures may occur as well in regard to the Gospel as in regard to the law. But when a man sins, this aberration from the rule of righteousness does not prove that we can have no certainty in regard to the requirements of the rule, and that murder, adultery and theft must therefore be accorded equal treatment with obedience to the law forbidding these vices and crimes. There are libertines and "lewd fellows of the baser sort" whose moral sense has become so depraved that they demand equal liberty for vice and virtue. But happily these are few, as even the wicked rarely sink so low as to venture upon a defense of wickedness on the ground of its equal claim to respect with righteousness. Nor do even the most liberal of professing Christians maintain that wrongdoing can never be certainly determined and that therefore all condemnation of sin, admitting that somethings are wrong, is a violation of charity and an infringement of Christian liberty.

Notwithstanding their liberalism they can not wholly close their eyes to the fact that not everything is right and that there must be some limit to the indulgence of unrighteousness and the tolerance of iniquity. In the end the principle is admitted that there is not only a difference between right and wrong, but also that the two can be distinguished with the certainty necessary for the protection of human rights as God ordains them. The comparatively few cases of differences in judgment, the law written in the Scriptures being the acknowledged rule, are of a kind and lie in a sphere which make it apparent that practically the rule as apprehended by all minds whose judgment is entitled to respect is the same everywhere and always for our guidance and carries with it the same authority. The sins of ignorance and of weakness, which are so frequent among otherwise good Christians, are not in conflict with this. The one class of sins does prove that the Christian's knowledge of the Word of God, which is recognized as the source of light

and the standard of judgment, is not always coextensive with the rule itself, and that violations therefore occur without consciousness of the aberration; but it does not prove that the rule, when it is diligently studied, cannot be known with certainty. On the contrary, it only shows that due diligence has not been observed in learning some of the most important lessons of life, and that such aberrations, though they may be exempt from the charge of malicious transgression, are by no means innocent. They are violations of the divine rule, which could and should have been known, and of which Christians are required and are prompt to repent as soon as they are supplied with the requisite knowledge of the divine will.

The other class of sins, those usually called sins of infirmity, can with much less appearance of reason be adduced as evidence that certainty cannot be claimed for the rule of right. They do prove that persons to whom the rule is given are not as unerring as the rule itself. But they do not prove that even assuming the publication by divine authority of an infallible law, the apprehension of its meaning and import is uncertain. The very name of the sin in question refutes such an assumption. It is a case in which it is not even pretended that the law is not clear or that it is not distinctly known, or that in the form which it assumes in the intellectual apprehension its requirement is uncertain. By the concession made in its designation as a sin of weakness the meaning of the law is admitted to be well enough known, but, assuming that the person implicated is really a Christian, by a lack of proper vigilance the flesh in its conflict with the Spirit has been permitted, in the special sin of action involved, to gain the mastery.

Not only was this rule plain enough, but the knowledge of the rule was quite sufficient. The sin consisted not in doing wrong because the rule of right was not as clear in the intelligence as it was in its objective statement, but in doing the wrong in spite of the better knowledge, though in the turbulence of passion under the excitement of temptation the better knowledge was thrust into the background and failed to exert its regulative power. Hence in all such cases the soul, as soon as the disturbing elements have ceased to harass it, comes to itself and repents of the sin without any need of further enlightenment in that particular. In both cases the rule is acknowledged to be clear and the fault to lie not in the impossibility of complete assurance of its requirements, but only in the sinful negligence of the individuals concerned.

When articles of faith are under consideration, which form the chief point in our present contention, the subject assumes somewhat different aspect. But the difference is not such as to inure to the advantage of those who advocate uncertainty in regard to the revealed truth, and consequent indifference to sound doctrine and admission of all beliefs on equal terms.

First of all, let us not lose sight of the principle on which the whole battle of the Reformation was fought and the Augsburg Confession was brought into being. The Word of God as given us in the Holy Scriptures is the only source of our knowledge of the truth unto salvation and the only judge of controversies arising among men in regard to that truth. From this alone articles of faith can be derived. What this declares must be received; what conflicts with this must be rejected.

The Church can recognize no authority but that of God, and no revelation of His will unto man's salvation but Holy Scripture. From this no appeal to any other authority can be allowed. If any person or church will not recognize this sovereign authority, the difference in principle is such as to render all discussion of differences in doctrine useless. There is no common ground on which we could meet, and all efforts to effect an agreement are antecedently hopeless. With those who will not accept the decision of God's Word we therefore can have no conference with a view to secure harmony on a common Christian basis. They do not recognize the organic foundation on which alone a Christian structure can be erected. In fact they are not Christians, and all dealings with them can be only on that assumption.

It is well to keep this in mind when societies which call themselves churches, or claim to secure the salvation which is alone in Christ through the means committed to His Church, endeavor to start controversies with us, while they refuse to submit to the decision of God's Word, which to us is exclusive authority. With such people it is waste of time and patience to enter upon religious discussion except for determining the regulative principle.

But opponents of the Lutheran contention, that their Augsburg Confession sets forth the pure truth of the Gospel, from which they can under no circumstances deviate, endeavor to shake our faith and justify their dissent by emphasizing the uncertainty of all human knowledge, and what seems to them a necessary consequence, that Christian charity and love of peace must lead sincere believers to accord to churches of other confessions the same rights and duties which we claim for our own, all being equally uncer-

tain. This looks reasonable, and it undoubtedly would be reasonable, if the false premises were granted from which the false deduction is made. Such opponents, so far as they accept the inspiration of Holy Scripture and its consequent inerrancy, occupy common ground with us. Some of them even profess to accept the exclusive authority of the Bible in all matters which pertain to the constitution and government of Christ's kingdom on earth. It might therefore seem easy for all sincere Christians to come to an agreement on this ground. But what is professedly conceded by these opponents is virtually rendered nugatory by assumptions that are designed to give error the same standing in the Church as truth. For the contention that, while the Bible is all true, no one can assuredly know what it teaches, practically amounts to the same thing as the contention, that there is no revelation of God's will and way that could render a soul sure of the truth unto salvation.

On no condition could Lutherans with the Bible in their hands admit that they are in agreement with other churches on such a basis. They cannot for a moment admit that the faith of their Augsburg Confession is built on such a sandy and insecure foundation.

The argument of sectarians, that the creeds of their churches must in Christian love be held in the same esteem as the Augsburg Confession, because, where there is a doctrinal difference, the one is as little certain of confessing the heavenly truth as the other, is founded on the double falsehood, that such sects confess as their faith what they do not believe as the truth of God, and that they impute to us the confession of articles of faith which we do not know to be true.

The difference is radical, and people of unionistic proclivities should pause and consider what they do when they strive to neutralize the destructive effect of error in the Church and in the world by denying the possibility of knowing the truth, even admitting that God has revealed it, and moved holy men to rite it in Holy Scripture for our learning, and thus rendering all who will hear them indifferent to the truth of God as indistinguishable from human falsehood in the realm of religion and the way of salvation. The Lutheran Church can make no such concession, and can see no spark of love in pretending to make it, even if peace with other denominations of Christians could be purchased at such a treacherous and pernicious price. She knows whereof she affirms: she speaks in her Augsburg Confession because she believes. It is the expression of her faith founded on Holy Scripture, in which God has graciously revealed the great salvation through the

mission of His own dear Son and the obedience of the incarnate Son even unto death as a sacrifice for the sins of he world.

These things are not uncertain.

Nothing written in the Bible for the salvation of our sinful souls is uncertain. If other denominations are not sure about the doctrines which they set up in opposition to those declared in the Augsburg Confession, why do they profess to believe them and thus cause divisions contrary to the doctrine which our fathers learned from the Bible, believed and confessed and thus established the great Church of the Reformation?

Lutherans built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone. They confessed only what they were sure of from Holy Scripture. How could they then make concessions to those who doubt or those who deny portions of the truth revealed in the Bible and believed because there written? They were sure. If others are not, that is a pity. There was certainly nothing lacking on God's part to make them sure. At any rate we are not in a position to concede that we stand on equal ground when we profess to have known and believed the truth, and they confess that they are not certain that what they set up in opposition to our faith is the truth of God. Surely there is no reasonableness, much less Christian soberness in their suggestion that we should come over to them, who confessedly are not sure that their doctrine is right, instead of their abandoning their dubious opinions and coming over to us, who know and confess the truth and are sure that we can teach it to all who are willing to learn it.

In reply to those who think they are laying a good foundation for their sectarian departure from the truth which won such glorious victories in the heroic days of the Reformation, and for the false charity which accords equal rights to false doctrine with the true, on the ground that truth cannot be certainly ascertained by the human mind, it might be sufficient to refer to St. Paul's words:

“If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” 2 Cor. 4:3, 4.

And for the encouragement of those among us who are troubled by the repeated charges made against us of harboring a vain conceit of our own in-

fallibility when we insist on the evangelical truth proclaimed in the Augsburg Confession, it might be sufficient to call to mind our Savior's words:

"If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall now the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31, 32.

But the matter is of such fundamental importance that something more than this seems desirable. The position of those denominations that still professedly recognize the supreme authority of Holy Scripture is not the same as that of those who reject this principle. Their professed acceptance of it places them on common ground with us, and so far there is a basis for argument and discussion. Virtually, as we have indicated, they have abandoned the principle of the Reformation, on which alone it is possible, in the view of true Protestants, to attain or preserve church unity; for a little reflection must render it plain, that the denial of the possibility of ascertaining the truth, even when it is admitted that it is revealed in Holy Scripture, is practically the same thing as denying that a revelation is given us and that the Bible is such a revelation. Evidently in either case we can be sure of nothing, except so far as the human mind, without such revelation may furnish or discover truths and facts which may be accepted as certain knowledge.

But it is conceded by these opponents that the human mind is subject to such limitations by nature and is so darkened by sin that there can be no sure knowledge of God's mind toward us and of His will respecting us, unless He be pleased to give us a revelation. In all this they are in agreement with the Lutheran principle. Even their contention that the blindness of the human heart makes it impossible to see, as its depravity makes it impossible to accept, the glorious Gospel of the grace of God in Christ when a revelation is given, is conceded to be correct. It is clearly what the Scriptures teach in such words as those of St. Paul:

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. 2:14.

All that the Lutherans claimed when they gave to the world the Augsburg Confession as the faith of the Reformation, and all that Lutherans in hearty accord with that faith and confession claim now, seems to be conceded by Protestant denominations that do not accept it, and that censure us as nar-

row and self-conceited and uncharitable and intolerant, and pelt us with other unkind words, for no cause or reason but that we believe what the Augsburg Confession expresses as our Lutheran faith, and that, being sincere in our confession of its doctrines as the very truth of God revealed in Holy Scripture, we cannot admit that those are also right and therefore are also to be approved as loyal to the Scriptures who dissent from that Confession. and make divisions contrary to the doctrine which those Scriptures have taught us.

It is a sad condition and it is worth our while, both for their sakes and our own, to endeavor clearly to understand what the great principle of the Reformation and its outcome in the Augsburg Confession really means. It may be that some among those who are constantly wronging us and grieving us and hindering our work will see the inconsistency between their profession and their conduct and amend their ways, while some of our people who are harassed by sectarian persecutions and confused by their specious accusations may, by the blessing of God, be rendered more steady in their confession and more persistent in their endeavors to advance the cause of the Gospel by their devotion to the Church of the Augsburg Confession.

When Luther and his fellow believers appealed to the Word of God in support of the truth which they preached and in its defense against Rome, they did this in the childlike assurance of faith, that what the Lord says is so, and must be so forever, whatever men or devils, or even their own sinful hearts might say. That this Word of God is given us in Holy Scripture they were certain, so that the Word of God and the Bible was the same thing. They appealed to the Scriptures and what these declared was certain to their believing hearts, in spite of any opposition becoming manifest in their natural intelligence or sensibilities or will, and in spite of the opposition emanating from the papal church and the imperial throne, and in spite of the devil's suggestion that the pope and the emperor are greater than Luther, and the great Roman doctors are wiser than the obscure Lutheran preachers.

To the man of the world the cause of the Reformation certainly must have looked dubious. But a man of faith like Luther could go cheerfully on his way, and without any conceit of his own ability to cope with the great powers of the world, make reply to all such opponents, that God has spoken in His Word, and He surely knows more than all the learning of the pope and his cardinals, and has more power than the emperor or the devil. What His Word says is true, and His foes may make the most of it, whether they

like it or dislike it. The Word of God is sure, and it will stand, though the heavens fall.

The Lutherans believed, and in quietness and confidence was their strength.

It is utterly useless to argue against the faith which by the power of the Holy Spirit is stayed upon the Word of God. It is sure, and therefore proof against all opposing argument. unless the argument be drawn from the same source whence faith derives its assurance and its strength. It is the same now as it was in the days of the Reformation and always was and always will be.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.” Ps. 19:7.

When a soul has, by the witness of the Holy Spirit given in the Word of God, received in faith the truth which that Word reveals, the faith so wrought and so founded is itself assurance. For

“faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Heb. 11:1.

No array of proofs, whether drawn from the nature of the matter declared in the Word or of the mind receiving it, can have any weight when faith embraces the declaration as God’s eternal truth. When the heart believes unto righteousness, the world and the flesh and the devil have numberless difficulties and doubts and even impossibilities to suggest in the matter, but as long as faith remains it is sure of the truth contained in the Word, and the enemy of souls never succeeds except by removing the object to which faith clings or separating the soul from it. The believer may fall and faith be lost, but it cannot, while it continues, be rendered uncertain about the truth of its object as presented in the Word.

Faith is undermined by Satan’s work of denying the truth of the Word to be divine, or perverting the Word, so that a human opinion comes to stand as a substitute for it, or by turning the soul away from the Word on whatever pretense or plea, but never by its own failure to be certain of its object as long as it steadfastly adheres to the Word. Hence those who strive to inculcate the fancy that all faith is uncertain about the truth, and all religious opinions are equally entitled to respect, are only promoting Satan’s effort to

undermine all Christian faith by destroying its foundation in the sure Word of God. For we must insist on it, and repeat again and again for the purpose of making the import of our contention apparent and impressing it upon minds which love the truth, that practically the denial that the truth is revealed in Holy Scripture and the denial that we may certainly know it from Holy Scripture, is the same thing.

Denominations that dissent from the Augsburg Confession and institute a church of their own with a different confession should see, and the endeavors of our faith and love and hope should be directed towards helping them to see, that while they deny all certainty in regard to the truth of the doctrines in which they differ from us, and therefore plead that the articles of our faith which they refuse to accept must be treated as in different because uncertain, they are acting inconsistently with their own profession of agreement with us in the fundamental principle of the Reformation, that the Scriptures are the Word of God and the absolute rule of faith in the Church of Christ. They should act according to their profession, which the Lutheran Church must in reason and righteousness require of them, or renounce the principle which they claim to accept but refuse to apply. A clear and honest decision in this respect would enable opposing denominations to deal more justly with the great Church of the Reformation, to which they all owe so much, and enable us to deal with them with a better view of their purpose and a safer ground of trust in their sincerity.

An example may serve for both friend and foe to bring to our reader's consciousness the import of the subject here involved: The Scriptures say:

“The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:7-9.

When a Christian believes what they say, can he admit that it is questionable whether he is a sinner or not, or whether or not God gave His only Son to die for our sins and to cleanse us from our unrighteousness? If now some men, though they profess to believe the Scriptures, say that we need no forgiveness, our own efforts to obtain holiness being all-sufficient, or that in any case the shedding of Jesus' blood could not avail for our forgiveness, could that, we sincerely believing God's Word, destroy our comfort and our joy in the assurance that we have forgiveness?

“Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom. 5:1.

That peace believers would not sacrifice in deference to a baseless contention that, because they are not infallible, they cannot be sure that these things are so. They are sure because the Scriptures so testify, and they believe the testimony of God.

It requires no great power of thought to discover the fallacy which misleads the unwary, or by which crafty minds deceive others, that because our mental powers are not infallible their operations must result in failure. Without maintaining the inerrancy of the human intellect, we accept the testimony of our senses that the sky is blue and the grass is green, and of our reason that two and two are four, and that two contradictory propositions cannot both be true, and of our inference that where there is an event there must be a cause, and that when a man lies he ceases to be trustworthy. We may err, but that does not prove that in any given case we have erred.

Ordinarily we act upon the presumption that our faculties serve the purpose for which they were created and that, though they are liable to error, they are in their proper province to be trusted and are not to be charged with having erred unless the proof can be adduced. What my friend told me this morning as having occurred yesterday under his own eyes I accept as true. He may have erred in his vision, he may have failed in accurately representing what he saw, I may have misunderstood his words. But I have no reason to assume that any of these possibilities has become reality in the case, and am reasonably sure that what he reported to me is the exact truth. My belief on these human grounds may be erroneous, but they have not been proved to be such, and I could not therefore justify disbelief or even doubt, unless again there were moral considerations involved, such as those bound upon the conscience by the eighth commandment. No reflecting person fails to see that in the operations of the mind in regard to the affairs of the world which are properly within its scope, and in the reports which men make to other men of occurrences which have come within their observation, errors are constantly occurring, and the necessity is laid upon us of sifting and testing evidence if we would ascertain the truth; but notwithstanding all the various forms of error that may occur in the process of arriving at the truth, it will still be regarded as unreasonable, and even immoral, on that account

to pronounce truth unattainable and error and truth of equal value and therefore entitled to equal consideration.

Applying this to the higher sphere of the Church, which more especially engages our attention here, we find our “assurance doubly sure” when we speak of faith. For in that domain the factors which tend to render the whole ground insecure are mostly wanting. God makes no mistakes. Lack of knowledge and insight and foresight cannot without irreverence be imputed to Him. He knoweth all things. In the matter of that which He is pleased to reveal there can therefore be no error. His knowledge and wisdom are infinite. In this Christian denominations generally confess themselves in agreement with the Church of the Augsburg Confession.

The same may be said of the communication of truth made in Holy Scripture. He who is unfailing in His knowledge of the truth is equally unfailing in its statement. At least the Protestant denominations that still admit the inspiration of the Bible and accept its communication as the very truth of God, professedly agree with us that its statements are infallible. What we read there is unerringly true and worthy of all acceptation. The Lutheran Church believes it and accordingly confesses it. She confesses it upon precisely the same ground as she believes. Because she believes it does she speak.

No private opinions of individuals, no theories of parties based on secular learning or deductions from it, no scientific speculation or philosophic system, no results of particular tastes or utterances of party sentiment — nothing but her Christian faith is declared in her Augsburg Confession. Not even the theological thinking and systematizing of her scholars is there presented. It is not the erudition and the dialectic power of her theologians with their grand systematic architecture, which will always remain the admiration of the learned, that was and is here set forth. It is the simple Christian faith, the faith which makes the hearts of our common people glad as well as the hearts of scholars and princes. These enjoy it, just as the poorest and most illiterate peasant enjoys it, only when in child-like confidence they by the power of the Holy Ghost simply believe the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ, which is proclaimed to all people. It is a confession of the faith of Christian people who by the grace of God believe the good tidings of salvation in Christ as that is made known to all men in the Holy Scriptures.

The Lutheran Church is sure of the things embraced by faith in the sure Word of God. She would be glad to have all Christians join her as witnesses

of her faith in her glorious Augsburg Confession. But she asks no one to accept the truth for the mere reason that she confesses it. She has no power to lay anything upon men's consciences by her own authority. She has no such authority. She is simply a witness of the truth that makes souls free and enables them to rejoice in the great salvation which Christ has secured for all men. As such she refers them to the same Word of God whence she derives her heavenly truth, and does this with the full assurance of faith. The Gospel is not the power of God because she preaches it, but she preaches it because it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. She knows whereof she affirms and therefore bears her testimony without being in the least disturbed by the reminder that we are all fallible mortals. No one among us doubts that. But that is so far from being to us a motive for regarding our Confession, or any article in it, as doubtful, that it only urges us to cling more closely to the words of Scripture which are infallible.

If some who also profess to be Christian believers, while they disallow some articles of our Augsburg Confession, claim also to accept the absolute authority of the Word of God given us in Holy Scripture, and therefore so far rightly maintain that they have the same right of faith and duty of confession that we exercise, they can effect nothing against us by telling us that we may err as well as they. Our reply is that it is so written, and we believe what is written, and thus have not erred in confessing what they refuse to accept.

“To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isa. 8:20.

Let them with us search the Scriptures: these are sure and make sure the hearts that trust in them.

It would be pitiful if we listened to the voice of the tempter seeking to entice us from the truth by the flimsy pretense that we must be in error because others have erred, or that the refusal of some to embrace the truth which we confess must stand as convincing proof that we are not sure of what we read in the Bible, and confess because we believe it. The great principle of the Reformation that the Scriptures alone are the source and rule of our faith, and alone must guide our conscience, directs our attention to some attributes of these Scriptures, the earnest consideration of which will help us more fully to understand and correctly to appreciate the posi-

tion and practice of our fathers in building the Church of the Augsburg Confession. Their acknowledgment and treatment of the Bible s God’s Word was sincere and unreserved. When this told them that all Scriptures are given by inspiration of God and directed them to it as a lamp to their feet and a light to their path, and when it declared that they were profitable for all the purposes of doctrine and life, thoroughly furnishing the man of God unto all good works, they could not for an instant think, as the Holy Spirit had blessed them with faith, that it could err, or lack clearness, or leave the soul in darkness that trusts in it as a light that shines in a dark place. With them believing in he Scriptures as the inspired Word of God meant, as it must mean to all who with unquestioning sincerity appeal to it as the divine law and testimony, the entrance of which giveth light to the soul, that what we must learn for our salvation and for the pure worship of our Savior is written for our learning in the Scriptures, and this so plainly that “he that runs may read”. To them it seemed, and it seems to us, an absurdity to speak of a light that does not shine or of a revelation that reveals nothing. If some, though they profess to be believers, “speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isa. 8:20. And that is surely not because the light from heaven has no power to dispel the darkness which sin has spread over their benighted hearts, but because they refuse to give due attention to the

“...sure Word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts.” 2 Pet. 1:19.

The very purpose of the revelation given us in the Word is to enlighten us, that we may know the truth, and the truth may make us free. The Scriptures are not designed to be a treasury of divine wisdom which is locked up and hidden away, so as to be accessible to nobody, and therefore for all practical purposes, so far as man can see, useless to the world. They are a precious treasure meant for the enlightenment of men in their darkness and the enrichment of men in their spiritual poverty. This not only lies in the nature of a revelation made to man for his rescue from the darkness of sin and death which is its wages, but is expressed as clearly as words can make it. For St. Paul writes to Timothy:

“Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Tim. 3:14, 15.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God that it might be profitable to man, and therefore it is able by God’s grace to make all who give earnest heed to the things therein written, wise unto salvation through faith in the Savior of the world. The Scriptures are designed to reveal the wisdom of God, and therefore impart the needful light as well as the needful power, that the reader may know and believe the truth of God.

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek: for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Rom. 1:16, 17.

The Lutherans never doubted that light has come into the world by the Scriptures, and that through the revealed Word of God every believing soul might know the truth and stand firm in its maintenance and defense against all who doubt and all who deny.

“The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above;) or who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Rom. 10:6-9.

The Word and the precious treasures which it bears are not far away, but in the believer’s very heart and mouth, so that not only is it sure, being the very Word of God that is yea and amen for ever, but the heart also is established in faith, and the mouth confesses with assurance what the heart believes. The infallible Word makes the soul sure in the faith that clings to the sure Word. No obscurity or doubt that may be in others’ minds can disturb our joy in the blessed truth which the Gospel brings and faith receives, nor deter us from joyfully confessing that truth, though not all men have faith and there be many adversaries.

The ill-advised argument by which so-called liberal Christians seek to excuse their unkind assaults upon the adherents of the Augsburg Confession or their unflinching faith, representing this to be merely opinionated stubbornness, plainly militates at once against the inerrancy and clearness of the Word of God and the assurance and integrity of the faith which by the operation of the Holy Ghost thence receives its light and comfort. If Christians mean what they say when they claim to accept the great principle of the Reformation in regard to the authority of Holy Scripture, they must abandon such argumentation as inconsistent with their profession, whilst Lutherans will watch and pray that they may not be led astray by such fallacies and the persecution to which they are subjected by those who urge them. The Word of God they shall let stand.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Isa. 55:8-11.

The truth unto salvation is made known in the world through the Scriptures, and “blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.” Luke 11:28. The revelation of God’s grace and truth as given in the Scriptures is not in vain. It enlightens the eyes and gladdens the hearts of believers, so that they too become witnesses of His abounding goodness and mercy. They believe and therefore speak, and believing they know whereof they affirm.

“How excellent is Thy loving kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house, and Thou shalt make them drink of Thy pleasures. For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light. O continue Thy loving kindness to them that know Thee.” Ps. 36:7-10.

The Holy Scriptures were accepted by Luther and his fellow believers not only as the Word of God, whom all the world is bound to hear as Lord of all, but as the only authentic and sure revelation of His will. For Christians they are exclusive authority in all matters of faith and conscience. That

means that the Scriptures are sufficient in this domain. The law of the Lord is perfect.

We need nothing more than the Bible to give us light in regard to God's purpose and way of salvation; if we give due heed to its teaching we shall have everything necessary to make us sure of His will and to guide us on our pilgrimage through this world of sin to the home prepared for us in heaven, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. The Scriptures given by inspiration are fully adequate to the purpose of the requisite revelation. God knows better than all the wisdom of all men united could know what is required to make wise unto salvation the souls stupefied and lost in sin. In His infinite goodness He gave us the revelation adapted to all our wants, and that at least His people, who by His Spirit, powerfully working in the Word by which the revelation was made, believed the truth thus declared, might be sure of its sufficiency, He graciously embodied that assurance, which could not be had from other sources, in the revelation itself. We are thus taught the truth and at the same time referred to the only source whence it can be derived, so that we might be sure when we follow the Bible, and at the same time know that no one can be sure of that which is necessary for the soul's salvation and for true godliness from any other source. The principle is not that the Bible contains some truth and must therefore have a voice in deciding questions of faith and conscience, but that the Bible only must decide; nothing else can have any authority in the decision. "Thy Word is truth." Nothing can be allowed to come into competition with that. By that everything that claims to be divine truth, and thus have authority in the kingdom of God, must be tried and tested. This is all distinctly set forth by St. Paul when he gives express instruction regarding the purpose and import and power of the Bible in his second Epistle to Timothy 3:14-17. "All Scripture," he tells us, "is given by inspiration of God." He, not the penmen who were called to write down the revelation, is the author of the inspired book.

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 1 Pet. 3:21.

And so much depends on our having the very mind of God made clear to us, that He did not leave the wording and formulation of the contents to the

chosen speakers and writers, but gave them the words which should adequately express what He purposed to make known.

“For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God, which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” 1 Cor. 2:10-13.

And this Scripture, whose very words are “given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”: it “is able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”; for it is given to the very end “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.” Nothing more can be needed to know and do God’s will in doctrine and life. Therefore no additions shall be made to it and nothing shall be taken from it.

“Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it.” Deut. 4:2.

Insistence on this exclusive authority of the Scriptures in the whole realm of the spiritual, as constituted in the kingdom of God, brought the reformers into many conflicts, and compels the Church of the Reformation to contend against many adversaries now. The Romanists did not deny the authenticity of the Bible or the truth of its contents. They allowed an appeal to it, and appealed to it themselves. But they did deny and still deny its sole authority. So, many of the Protestant denominations that reject the Augsburg Confession in our day accept the authority of Scripture, and thus seem to agree with Luther in adopting the great principle of the Reformation, whilst in fact they agree with Rome in declining to acknowledge that the Bible only is decisive. This means that the words of the Scripture given by inspiration of God alone can furnish articles of faith and bind the conscience, and that from these no appeal can be allowed to any other source of knowledge or forum of judgment, by which the decision of God’s Word might be reversed or altered or rendered questionable. On that principle the great battle of the Reformation was fought and the Church of the Augsburg Confession still stands and works and wages its warfare against all who oppose the truth which it confesses. Chief among the falsely alleged authorities to which ap-

peals are made to escape the exclusive authority of God's Word as given in the Bible are the Church, Tradition, Reason, and alleged immediate Inspirations.

It is not difficult to impress unwary Christians with the belief that the Church and its ministry must be endued with authority and therefore have power to dictate what must be believed as divine truth and what must be done to please God. The fact that it is a divine institution, in which the Holy Spirit rules and works, gives plausibility to the assumption. Not only Romanists give it credence, but many so-called Protestants also, some even in theory, many more at least in practice, accept it. No doubt, if the Holy Spirit reigns in the Church, it is reasonable to infer that what it requires of its membership must be binding. There is certainly nothing illogical in concluding that, if the Spirit who inspired all Scripture presides in the Church, the dicta of the Church are infallible. And this is strengthened by the statements of the Scriptures which seem to confirm the conclusion. For they tell us that he who heareth the minister whom God has sent heareth Him; that we should obey those who have the rule over us and watch for our souls; that those who neglect to hear the Church are to be regarded as heathen men and publicans, and that the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The Romanists knew how to use such statements for the furtherance of their own ambitions and errors, while they did not know the Holy Spirit's own interpretation of them in the Bible, which is its own interpreter and needs no light from extraneous sources, or if they did know, were not willing to receive it.

The Church is the communion of saints, whom the Holy Spirit has gathered by faith into one body in Christ. Hence the Church is called His Body, of which all true believers are members. To this He has entrusted the Word and Sacraments for administration of His means of grace. We can do nothing of ourselves. No man can save the soul of another. Salvation is God's gift and God's work. All that is done for the rescue of man from sin and death and for the glory of God our Savior, is done in the Church. Nowhere else are there any means of grace unto salvation. Hence it may be remarked, by the way, that it is all nonsense to talk about saving souls and glorifying God in deeds of love by societies, secret or open, other than the congregation of believers. This congregation of believers, or communion of saints, this holy Christian Church, can do nothing of itself. If it depended on its own power, although this is greatly enhanced by the faith which is the essen-

tial element in its organization, it could accomplish nothing towards rescuing souls dead in sin from the damnation that is upon them. All that is done or can be done to deliver souls from the death of sin and make them heirs of heaven the King of saints Himself does in His kingdom. To Him all power is given in heaven and on earth. The hearts are all astray that look to any other source for help when they are in distress in the realization of their doom under the sin that is driving them to despair. Only Christ can save them: there is no Savior else. Whatever blind humanity may think or dream or say, there absolutely is no other Savior and no other help. Erring Christians may mean it well when they talk eloquently of what saints, living and dead, have done and can do to deliver condemned mortals from the jaws of hell, and of the genius and wisdom that comes as an inspiration to lift the fallen from their degradation and damnation, but it is all misspent energy. The Son of God, made flesh and crucified for our sins, is our Savior, and there is no other. Believers are saved, but they do not save themselves and have no power to save others who are equally powerless.

“By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”
Eph. 2:8.

But the means of communicating the grace which saves is entrusted to the Church. She is commissioned to administer them. To this end she needs ministers, and has the power and the duty to appoint them. According to the divine ordinance they are “ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” 1 Cor. 4:1. Accordingly St. Paul says:

“God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them: and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors or Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” 2 Cor. 5:19, 20.

Therefore it is that he who heareth the minister of the Church heareth God. He has the Word of God, and his high calling is to “preach the Word” and be a “steward of the mysteries of God.” The responsibility of such an office is tremendous.

“It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” 1 Cor. 4:2.

And this of only for his own sake as his own soul is in peril, but for the sake of the Church and the world, whose welfare is so largely dependent on his work and therefore involved in his faithfulness in doing it. So far as human eyes can see, many a soul is lost and many an evil is suffered on account of the negligence and indolence of pastors and of the churches that fail to call them to account and hold them to their duty. The ambassadors whom Christ sends with the message of mercy to men in the proclamation of the good tidings which shall be to all people, sometimes prove unfaithful. Then it comes to pass that he who heareth them does not hear the Lord that sent them. And the faith and the spiritual life of a church may become so low and so near to extinction that false prophets are not only not sharply rebuked and eventually silenced, but that they gain ascendancy and the effort to call them to account and stop their depredations in the vineyard of the Lord is branded as heresy-hunting and all uncharitableness. Then is the devil's opportunity, who is as alert and expert to prey upon the blindness as upon the lusts of men, and to lead them to trust in lies as to induce them to seek the pleasures of life in the indulgence of the flesh. He is the grand master in applying and plying all deceivableness of unrighteousness. And thus the Church with its ministry comes to cut itself loose from the exclusive authority of the Word which alone through faith gives it authority and makes it a pillar and ground of the truth as a faithful witness.

This results, through Satan's wiles, in a twofold evil. On the one hand the Church sets up an authority of its own, and thus substitutes a human organization for the communion of saints that exists by the power of the Word as a congregation of believers, and knows no authority over the soul but that of the Lord who speaks in that Word. On the other hand some organizations calling themselves churches, having sundered themselves from the authority of such a human government that professes to be the Church, and not sufficiently sure of the truth revealed in Holy Scripture to be an unflinching witness of that truth, and misunderstanding the principle of individual rights and private judgment — as if this gave to each man the authority of a court to decide what shall and what shall not be binding in the decrees issued by the sovereign Lord in His Word — profess the alleged liberalism which accords to every member the privilege of deciding for himself what is to be believed and to be done, with the result that every one believes and does what he pleases, on the understood if not expressed stipulation that no one shall molest him in the exercise of his privilege and with no explicit

distinction between the public and private exercise of such presumed right. The former is the error into which the Roman Church fell, and which gradually developed into the Romish papacy and reached its acme in the doctrine of papal infallibility. The latter is the position of many a modern sect that calls itself Protestant and that is dominated by the carnal thought that the reformatory protest against papal authority means a protest against all authority in matters of faith and conscience — as if the enthralled sinner's liberation from the chains of the devil made him independent also of his rightful Lord, who liberated him that he might be happy in serving his Maker and Savior.

Luther and his fellow workers in the cause of evangelical truth found a formidable adversary in the Roman Church, which adopted the first of these two erring theories. That Church had been long established and had acquired power and prestige. It put forth the claim not only to be the depository of revealed truth because it was made the recipient and custodian of the Holy Scriptures, but to be the divinely constituted court of appeal in all matters of faith and conscience because it was made the recipient and authorized agent of the Holy Spirit. There was enough truth in its claim to make it palatable to unsuspecting and unvigilant Christians and sugarcoat its enormous lie.

It is true that the Lord committed the Holy Scriptures to the Church, that she might hear the Word of God and keep it, and edify and perpetuate and extend herself by preaching and enforcing and defending the truth unto salvation which they reveal. Had Rome done this there would have been no Reformation, because none would have been needed. It was because she became unfaithful to her trust that Luther entered upon his glorious work with his earnest appeal to the Scriptures, which the Church still possessed, but to which the Papists gave so little heed. Gradually they came to regard the steward as the lord of the heavenly treasures, and instead of drawing the waters of life from the fountain of God in Holy Scripture they drew a filthy stream from the well of their own corrupt hearts and set the poisonous stuff before the people by pretended divine authority. The Church was substituted for the Bible, and when Luther appealed to the supreme authority of Holy Scripture, Rome's reply was that the supreme authority is the Church, and we are the Church. Even to this day, notwithstanding all the enlightenment which has come to the world in consequence of the Reformation, high dignitaries of the Roman Church are not ashamed to maintain that Luther's

work was disorderly and revolutionary, because he did not humbly submit his cause for absolute adjudication to the “powers that be” which were the pope and his adherents, instead of appealing to Holy Scripture, and thus making trouble and finally producing a rupture. What was desired, and what even now seems to benighted Romanists the reasonable course, was that Luther and the Lutherans should cease to protest against the papistic maladministration of the Church’s trust and treasure and substitution of human ordinances and abuses that were leading souls to perdition, and appeal to the authorities at Rome against whose abominations the protest was made. He should quit appealing to the Bible and reverently bow the knee to the pope as the final court of appeal, though it was the pope, who as the head of the Roman hierarchy was the chief offender, that was under impeachment. It is the case of a lamb condemned for not fleeing for refuge to the wolf that sought its blood.

It is well known that Luther did all that a Christian who sincerely believes the Gospel could do to settle in a peaceful way the controversy which arose in consequence of his famous 95 theses in 1517. He had then no doubt that the pope was disposed to hear the Word of God and submit to its authority, and he accordingly, in the beginning of his great warfare against the Antichrist, spoke and wrote and acted in a way that now seems strange to us, and in after years seemed remarkable to him. But he learned many a thing of importance as the war went on, and the subsequent developments explained the conditions, so that we cease to wonder.

Luther did not know that the papacy was in league with the devil — perhaps consciously, perhaps unconsciously: probably consciously on the part of some, unconsciously on the part of others — and trusted the papal leaders until they refused to hear the Word of God and plumed themselves upon possessing a prerogative which raised them above such appeals to the Scriptures as were relied upon by the insignificant monk at Wittenberg. The Bible was not rejected, but the authority of the Church was regarded as supreme, and there was no need of explicitly rejecting it as long as the papacy could ignore it and decide matters of faith and conscience without it, in virtue of an alleged authority given to the Church, which Papists always understood to be the Roman Church as a visible institution under the pope.

Of course Luther’s cause was lost, if such a figment of the human brain were admitted. Luther did not admit it; the Lutherans did not admit it; no true Protestants admitted it. The evangelical believers continued to appeal

to the Bible, and the war went on. It became a question not only of errors in doctrine and of abuses in practice, but of fundamental principles. Shall God decide by His Word, or shall the Church decide by its ordinances? The Church of the Reformation, led by the great reformer, did not hesitate when confronted by such a question. Of course God must decide, and as He speaks by His Word, written in Holy Scripture for our learning, the Bible only must decide.

The Lutherans, having found their assurance and peace and joy in the Gospel, were ready to make their choice, whatever might result in their earthly lives: they would cling to the Bible as the Word of their God and let Him, in His infinite mercy, care for the outcome.

The outcome was the Church of the Reformation with its Augsburg Confession.

The reformers were thus under the necessity of contending against not only the errors in doctrine and life, that had crept into the Roman Church whilst the vigilance of Christians had declined and the wiles of the devil had become correspondingly successful, but also against the false principle of Church authority as co-ordinate with that of the Scriptures, and practically as supreme, and so superior to the Word that was written for our learning and our guidance.

The arrogance of the Roman Church, as well as the false results of such arrogance, had to be met and contended against in the great battle of the Reformation, and the struggle was therefore doubly severe as well as doubly important for the life of the Christian Church. All earthly power had been usurped by the devil and the pope. There was no human hope for the success of Luther's work in opposition to such a combination of Antichristian forces. But he depended upon no human power.

Ultimately the truth must prevail, and falsehood, though the devil and the world and the flesh combined in its support, must suffer defeat. Luther believed and accordingly sang his song of triumph: "The Word of God they shall let stand and not a thank have for it." The Lord Almighty would in due time arise and plead His own cause. The principle that the Word of God, given by inspiration in Holy Scripture, is alone authoritative in the Church, achieved the glorious victory of the Reformation, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church with its Augsburg Confession lived and lives. The truth prevailed, Satan was foiled, souls were saved, and God was glorified. The Captain of our salvation, the Lord God of Sabaoth, led His hosts to victory

according to His Word which endureth forever. By that principle the Evangelical Lutheran Church stands to this day, and lives and flourishes and gains victories still.

Not that the vain idea of Church authority over human consciences has been expelled from the earth. It still haunts Christian minds and leads them astray, thus making the work of extending Christ's kingdom more difficult. It is still argued by Romanists that the only safety of the people lies in their obedience to the priesthood, and that for them it is a sufficient reply to all questions concerning their faith that they believe what the Church believes. With them the heresy has become a fully developed system, culminating in the comparatively recent declaration of papal infallibility as an article of faith. But also among Protestants the error is largely accepted in practice, even though the Romish theory is not expressly admitted. Instead of searching the Scriptures, that by the power of the Holy Ghost they may obtain the full assurance of faith, but too many prefer the easier way of assuming that what their synods and councils declare or require must be true and right, if not because of their infallibility, yet because of the strong probability that an assembly of Christians will be correct in their position rather than a single individual left to his own judgment. Thus it happens that in some churches the Bible has become a neglected book, and the members are dependent for such faith as they still have upon their traditions and their preachers. That under such conditions the certainty of faith for which the Lutheran Church contends should not be appreciated, and its profession should be regarded as the result of arrogant self-conceit, is not surprising. The effect naturally must be that there is certainty about nothing, except so far as favorable conditions have raised individuals above their denominational level, and some portions of the Word have become effectual in their experience by faith, which alone can make the soul sure. For the tendency always must be, as history shows that it always has been in fact, when absolute authority is rejected or at least abandoned in the Church, to resort for the support of the doctrines propounded and works commanded to the natural sources of knowledge and sentiment. The preaching and the criteria applied in the hearing thus become what may be observed today in many a denomination — the preaching of human opinions, which the hearers test by their own opinions, and take for what each regards them worth, without a thought of dealing with spiritual verities, on the reception of which by faith the soul's salvation depends.

Indeed in not a few of the denominations in our land it can hardly be said with truth that the Gospel continues to be preached at all, although the word Gospel is still used as a designation for the opinions propounded and expounded as the gospel of evolution, of good government, of sanitation, of cleanliness, and of all manner of good earthly things — only not the Gospel of Christ, which alone has any right on Christian pulpits. So far has this cancer eaten into the vitals of some churches that a goodly number of their preachers have taken next to the last step of publicly stepping out of the Christian Church by avowing that the Gospel which they preach has nothing to do with an alleged world to come, but deals only with the present world and the improvement of man's condition of living here and now.

The departure from the great principle of the Reformation, that the Holy Scriptures, being the Word of God, must alone rule in the kingdom of God, can only result, as it has resulted in many an instance, in deadly evil, and Lutherans cannot abandon it now when, as sad aberrations from the truth of the Gospel and bold avowals of them indicate, it enters upon a stage of conflict second only to that of the great Reformation itself. Even some Lutherans are becoming careless and are content to let preachers and synods say and settle things without searching the Scriptures whether these things be so. True, we have our Augsburg Confession as a safeguard against departures from the blessed Gospel of the grace of God in Christ. But let us not deceive ourselves. If Satan can succeed in making a Lutheran Christian careless in regard to the Scriptures, do you suppose that the confession of the truth would offer a greater barrier to his work than its authentic proclamation? Let us not deceive ourselves, or allow ourselves to be deceived. "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it."

The Romish Church not only clung tenaciously to its wanton error, that it was itself an original source of divine authority in virtue of divine delegation of power, although no warrant for the bold assumption could be shown, but added to this the presumed authority of tradition as a means of counteracting the work of the Reformation, which was conducted on the principle that the Holy Scriptures only are authoritative in the Church. The Papists felt reasonably secure in the authority of the papacy, because all earthly power, as the natural man could see it, was in its possession. By the cunning of the flesh and the craft of the devil the civil power was under the control of the pope, and seemingly he had nothing to fear, though Luther threatened him and his adherents with the terrible wrath of God, if they presumed to

scorn His Word. But while they did not stand in awe of the Word, they could not be entirely indifferent to the effect which it might have upon others. They therefore appealed to the traditions which were in vogue among them, and which were thought to furnish some ground for the errors in doctrine and the abuses in practice which were assaulted as unscriptural. Their contention was that the Word of God was handed down from age to age since the time when it was revealed, and that while much of it was written in the Bible, much more was not recorded in the Scriptures. It was a cunningly devised fable; for in this way the Papists thought to rid themselves of the exclusive authority of the Holy Scriptures, in which the Reformation depended, and to introduce a means of setting aside their declarations and demands without renouncing the authority of the Word of God, which was alleged to be contained in these traditions as well as in the Bible.

The entire theory is nugatory, because it is impossible to prove any alleged contents of tradition to be really the Word of the Lord except by an appeal to the Scriptures, and because these Scriptures, according to their own statement, are given by inspiration of God to the end that all that is necessary thoroughly to equip the man of God may thus be authoritatively communicated.

Of course in the minds of all true believers the Romish theologians virtually confessed their cause to be lost, when they declared that they could refute the doctrines of the Lutherans from their traditions, but not from the Bible. The papistic appeal to other sources of information and authority than that of Holy Scripture complicated the reformatory struggle, but never did it divert the Reformers from the inspired Scriptures as the express revelation of God's mind to men, that they might know the whole truth unto salvation. On that basis the battles of the Reformation, of which the Augsburg Confession is the result, were fought and won, and on that basis the Church of the Reformation stands and continues the fight today, holding firmly to her Augsburg Confession with a faith founded on the Holy Scriptures alone, but a faith that is sure of its ground and therefore cannot be shaken.

The Lutheran Church has never despised or even disregarded the traditions that have come down from the ancient fathers of the Church. What has been preserved by the teachings and doings of Christian men from the apostles' time down to the present day is precious. The light which it gives in regard to the faith and the labors of love which the Holy Spirit wrought in other days, the lives which were rendered luminous by rays from heaven, as

others were rendered dark by obscuring blackness from hell, in its rage against the Anointed of the Lord, the Church is not willing to forget. She desires to learn the lessons of history and rejoices in her fellowship with men of God who lived and suffered in the same glorious cause in which she is still engaged with the same assurance of faith which made believers strong in other days. But she knows that some professed to be Christians who were not such, and that Christians could err in the past as in the present, and therefore she applies to the Christians of other times the same unerring rule that she applies now, and holds fast as God's truth only what is declared in God's Word.

More delusive and more generally effective as a false rule of faith is the reason of man substituted for the Scriptures given by inspiration of God. It is more delusive because the mind so frequently overlooks the difference between the sources whence its knowledge is derived, and therefore fails in a proper valuation of the different kinds of knowledge as determined by its source, thus often, unconsciously confounding its natural cognitions with the revealed truth apprehended by faith; and it is more effective in producing the pernicious result of departing from the Word of God, because it is an error so easy of occurrence and so difficult of detection. Thus even honest Christians, who have no desire to uphold doctrines which are contrary to the teaching of Holy Scripture, and who are shocked by any suggestion that the authority of these Scriptures is to be rejected or overruled by human reason, sometimes are found in the ranks of errorists, of all of whom are honest Christians. This becomes manifest when their error is shown by reference to incontrovertibly plain texts of the Bible. Then those who have faith, which accepts God's declarations as eternal truth, will abandon their error in obedience to the Scriptures, while others, as experience has amply proved, will defend the unscriptural doctrine with arguments drawn from other sources than the Scriptures.

This does not always mean a conscious renunciation of the Bible as the Word of God. In many a case it would no doubt be a violation of charity to prefer such a charge, because the conduct in question is capable of explanation on other grounds which are less incriminating. Experience has shown that those who confess false doctrine even after the light of Scriptural truth has been shed on the points in dispute, are not all of the same mind in regard to the authority of Scripture. Some openly renounce it. Refusing to accept important doctrines of the Bible because they conflict with what are re-

garded as he plain dictates of reason, they reject the Bible. But this does of apply to all who maintain their error in spite of the plain words of Scripture.

Some insist that they are as loyal to the Bible as the ancient Church or the Church of the Reformation. According to their allegations the entire difference resolves itself into a question of interpretation. But even supposing that this s a correct account of the situation, the difference after all is one of principle, inasmuch as it really resolves itself into the question whether God's Word is to be accepted by faith as it stands and reads, or whether it must first be submitted to the higher court of reason, and faith be referred to its decision for its assurance. The Church of the Reformation never hesitated and never vacillated when confronted by such a question, but clearly and boldly and joyously proclaimed its principle, that the Bible only must decide in matters of faith, and no intervening courts or authorities can be allowed to interfere with its decision which is final and absolute.

Untold mischief has resulted from this substitution of human reason for the Bible. It is perhaps the most successful of all Satan's devices to undermine and counteract the power and work of the Gospel and the Church. And the people of God were not always as vigilant as the importance of the treasures committed to their trust required. Even in the Lutheran Church, where the Augsburg Confession always was a conservator of the faith once delivered to the saints, the members did not always prove faithful. Some are not as faithful now as the great interests at stake demand. While the enemy of our souls goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, some watchmen on the walls of Zion are drowsy, and some are asleep, and some blow the trumpet with an uncertain sound.

A new gospel of evolution, meaning that the powers of nature are developed according to inherent laws in plant and animal, in matter and mind, in individuals and communities, and nothing can help or hinder its all-controlling force, is preached among men. And many churchmen bow to the new idol. It is this that makes the situation so sad. Human theories have come and gone by scores and hundreds, and the Church has gone on with its glorious work of saving what could be saved from the wreck that sin has made of humanity. But when those who profess to have fled from the beggarly elements of this world for refuge to the hope which the Scriptures set before them in Christ, succumb to the tempter's pleas, the case becomes pitiful, if not alarming. If the salt have lost its savor wherewith shall it be salted?

Although the Lutheran Church in this country has been affected but little by the new science that is making such havoc among the sects and in American schools of learning, thus threatening to deluge our land in the coming generation. she is not wholly innocent. Professed members of her communion have furnished much of the ammunition which is fired into the stronghold of the Christian Church. It is a humiliating confession, but it is needful to make it, not only because it is true, but also because in the providence of God it may serve as a warning to believers in our own land, that they may stir up the gift that is in them and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

In an evil time Rationalism swept with its desolation over our Church in Europe, not failing to reach our own land in its wide sweep, though the Augsburg Confession still stood as a beacon light in the darkness and the storm. Then there were any who threw off their mask of devotion to the great principle of the Reformation, that the Lord rules in His kingdom, and that the Bible is His sovereign Word, and declared what they professed to be the deeper principle of Protestantism, that of emancipation from all authority in the domain of faith and conscience. Private judgment ran riot, and every man claimed the right to believe and do what he pleased. The Word of God, so far as lay in these faithless men, was dethroned. But He that sat in the heavens laughed, and His Word, which endureth forever, continued to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, and the gates of hell did not prevail against the Church which confesses it. She suffered in many of her recreant members then, and she is suffering again by reason of the unfaithfulness of many of her professed members to her principle and her resulting Augsburg Confession. The human wisdom which has gained ascendancy in her universities in Germany, as it has in most of the universities that are not Lutheran in America, is not in harmony with the Scriptures. Some are again trying to find expedients for reconciling the Bible with their theories of the world's government and its outcome for man in the future world, if such be allowed to exist: they do not want to renounce the Holy Scriptures, nor to admit that these renounce them with their unscriptural speculations of science falsely so called.

Others have become bolder and more reckless, some of them pursuing the methods of the so-called "higher criticism" to eliminate everything from the Bible that does not suit their notions, some caring little whether anything is retained or not of a Book which has been proved to their satisfac-

tion to be a human compilation of little value, and that little simply historical. What our fathers prized as the very Word of God with a gracious message of salvation to man is to them neither an authority nor a comfort.

That such theories should be taught by professors and preachers in denominations that never appreciated the Lutheran doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture and the assurance of faith, is not surprising. But that such fundamentally destructive speculations of the human brain should gain a foothold in Lutheran schools and churches, certainly is ground for surprise as well as grief. While the Augsburg Confession is still held in esteem, and that not only as a relic of heroic times, venerable for its age and valuable for its history, but also still regarded as the adequate expression of the faith and spiritual life of the great Church of the Reformation, such things would seem to be impossible. How can errors which are not only in conflict with the doctrines which are there confessed, but are subversive of the very principle which made the Reformation possible and gave its noble Confession birth, be endured by the children of Christian men who would rather sacrifice all earthly treasures, and even life itself, than yield one jot or tittle of that precious Word of God on which their peace on earth and their hopes of heaven rested? It seems impossible, but it is a bitter fact. In Germany institutions manned and managed by Protestants are allowed to teach pretty much as professors, who clamor for liberty under the plea of maintaining the rights of science and scholarship, think right and expedient, regardless of what the Bible and the Confessions say. We confess that the fact has the appearance of going far towards overthrowing our whole contention and proving our whole plea for the Church of the Reformation unfounded. But the case, bad as is the fact, and humiliating as is its admission, is not so hopeless.

We are positive in our conviction that such things could not occur in a properly organized Lutheran body, as they have not occurred and are not likely to occur in the Lutheran Church of our country. Not that the evil is less active and that Christians are more vigorous here to resist his truculent assaults. In our land, too, some watchmen are drowsy, and while they sleep the enemy sows his seed, as is painfully shown by his successes in many a sectarian church, showing conditions similar to those in Europe. In our synod, if preachers or professors wander away from the Bible and the Augsburg Confession in their public teaching, they are called to account, and their power for evil through the promulgation of unscriptural doctrine is

stopped. If our brethren in Germany are of the same faith and spirit, must they not proceed in the same way, and would not their action produce the same result?

And to such a question men who are not in harmony and not in sympathy with us are prone to add another, which is designed to show that we have no good ground for our Lutheran claim of unity of spirit among all who are joined together in a common faith by the Augsburg Confession. They rather sneeringly ask whether, if our brethren of Germany had the same assurance which we claim as a characteristic of the same faith, they would not proceed in the same way against aberrations from the truth of God's Word, and especially against the fundamental errorists who deny the absolute authority of that Word. Our reply is ready. In the first place, we concede that it is possible that Lutherans, as well as Christians of any other name, may fall away from the truth and become heretics or even infidels. Nay more, history shows that the possible has in some deplorable instances become real. We do not deny this, and have no inducement to deny it. But we do deny that this proves anything against Christianity or against the pure truth set forth in the Augsburg Confession, and we confidently expect that all sincere Christians of every name, if they are at all capable of judging sound reasoning, will approve the denial.

In the second place, our brethren in other lands do raise their voices like a trumpet against the abominations mentioned, though thus far without succeeding in their efforts to exterminate the evil, which pains them as it does us, and even more because they have the sad results more directly before their eyes. But, if in the name of the Lord they faithfully adhere to the truth of God revealed in Holy Scripture, they will succeed, notwithstanding the great difficulties to be overcome. as they did succeed in the similar fierce conflicts with Rationalism in an earlier period.

And in the third place, the unhappy conditions which handicap our Lutheran brethren in the fatherland render the work of expelling Satan and preserving the pure faith a gigantic work, of whose magnitude our people in this land of the free have no adequate conception. We have no desire to defend these conditions. They should never have been permitted to exist. They are wrong, and if the Lutheran Church can be shown to have had a hand in the wrong, we have no excuse to offer. Lutherans may err in their work, as well as other people. They are not inspired and not unerring mortals: only God and His Word is infallible. Their glory is in trusting this infallible

Word and believing and unflinchingly confessing what it says: for that is what God says, who makes no mistakes, and who will bring it to pass. If from that Word they are shown to err in a thought which they entertain, or a word which they speak, or an act which they perform, they repent of the sin, or they fall away from the infallible Word which requires repentance. They claim no exemption from the rule of God and no respect of persons. "God be merciful to me a sinner" is the cry of all Christians alike.

They judge us ill who assume that, because we realize and praise God for the unspeakable blessing of the Reformation and the pure Gospel proclaimed in the Augsburg Confession, we proudly claim prerogatives which do not belong to all Christians. It is the Christian Church that we love and honor in the Church of the Augsburg Confession. and what is promised to members of the Christian Church and what is required of them is promised to us and required of us. If we sin as any Christian may, we have nothing to urge in extenuation of our fault. On the contrary, according to the light given us we ought to have known better and according to the grace given us we ought to have done better. Our fault is all the more heinous because of our greater advantages, according to the rule, that to whom much is given, of him much shall be required. But we must protest against the violation of charity and reason involved in the idea that this constitutes an argument against the pure faith of the Reformation and the Church of the Augsburg Confession. It was not well that the Lutheran Church entered into an alliance with the State, by which she was to a large extent crippled in her efforts to use the Word of God as a living power to sanctify the lives and enterprises and labors of her people, and which worked itself out into a union of churches that had no unity of faith and rendered her powerless to exercise the vigilance and discipline necessary to preserve the integrity of her principles and the purity of her faith.

When the civil government controls the Church and her institutions, how can she help it that the requirements of the Word of God and of the Confession derived from it are ignored, and that the reason and ordinances of men in an alarming degree take the place of Holy Scripture? Until the conditions are changed it is a gross wrong to revile our brethren across the sea for suffering what they cannot help, and against which for the present they can only with sighing protest, while they are abundant in labors and prayers to the end that the great Head of the Church may in His own good time and in His own gracious way grant them deliverance and let the Church again put

on her beautiful robes and hold high the glorious banner of her Scriptural Augsburg Confession before all people. But the lesson of history should not be lost upon us who are untrammelled in our possession and use of our Bible and our Confession. When Christians became careless and indifferent about the Word of God and trusted in their own common sense and sound reason, the papacy came upon them with its blighting power and crushing tyranny. When the pure Church in the home of the Reformation relaxed its vigilance and permitted human reason to usurp the throne of divine revelation, Rationalism with all its brood of carnal follies spread over the land, and the quietness and confidence, which was its strength and its happiness, departed.

The Church is prosperous and mighty only when it leans upon the Lord and trusts in His Word, because only then does the Lord accomplish His gracious purposes and execute His thoughts of peace among His people, and only then do these become vigorous and joyful coworkers with Him and effectually resist the devil who hates the truth and is the enemy of all righteousness. The plea of reason is captivating, and human wisdom needs little stimulating to arouse a fond conceit of itself and of its powers to work wonders for the world's improvement. Were it not so, its crude devices for the amelioration of man's condition in time and his blessedness in eternity, if notions are still entertained of a life after death, would not be unhesitatingly accepted by such multitudes of people, and more heed would be given to the preaching of the Gospel which it accounts as foolishness. But the world goes on in sin, notwithstanding all the strenuous efforts put forth by worldly wisdom to help and elevate humanity, and notwithstanding its seeming success in covering and concealing human iniquity or putting a polish on it by studied forms of education and culture, and sin still continues to be the way of misery and the sting of death. How sad that even among Christians this enticing power of evil finds a hearing, and the Church is made to suffer by it.

Surely those who profess to accept the Holy Scriptures as their exclusive rule and guide in all things pertaining to salvation ought to know better, and, standing in awe of God's Word, ought not to sin willfully, as they have no excuse for sinning ignorantly.

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God: because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” 1 Cor. 1:21-25.

In the days of the Reformation there were some Christians who, while they renounced popery and on that account are classed with the Protestants and adherents of the Reformation, declined to accept the pure Gospel which Luther preached and the Lutherans declared in the Augsburg Confession. Of these there were two parties, although in their opposition to the Evangelical or Lutheran as well as to the Roman Church, they were one. These were the so-called Swiss reformers, at whose head was Zwingli and afterwards the more circumspect and in all respects except in the doctrine of predestination more moderate Calvin, and the wild fanatics led by Carlstadt and subsequently becoming notorious as the Anabaptists and Socialists under the leadership of men with as little faith as moral character. We distinguish between them because, although in the principle which determined their movement in dissent from the Lutheran faith and confession they were virtually agreed, they differed in the mode of its formulation and the extent to which they carried it in practice, as sectarians generally do in our times.

The Swiss party, which it as become customary with writers to call the Reformed Church, in distinction from the Evangelical, as the Lutheran Church was officially called, did not deny the authority of Holy Scripture. Neither did the Romish party. But the latter denied its exclusive authority, which the former did not. In principle there was therefore in this respect an agreement between the Reformed and the Lutherans against Rome. But there were doctrinal differences of a nature so grave that the Reformed could not on alleged conscientious grounds accept the faith confessed at Augsburg, and the Lutherans could not in conscience consent to make any concessions.

Strange that they should disagree on articles of faith when both agreed that the Holy Scriptures alone must decide.

The Lutherans made their appeal to the law and the testimony and pressed the argument that it is so written, and so they teach and confess, and cannot do otherwise. When the Zwinglian answer was that it is indeed so written, but — the “but” contained a fatal admission. It was evident that

there was not only a difference in the doctrine, but in the principle by which differences between Christians are to be adjusted, and the assurance of faith is to be attained. Must not the reason of man, since God has so endowed him, be heard when its voice is by the necessities of our nature called into exercise? The Lord does indeed say in the sacrament of the Holy Supper that what is presented to the communicant is His body and blood, given and shed for the remission of sins; but consider! Can He really mean this, when we see nothing but bread and wine; when we know that His body has ascended into heaven and is not visible here: when we are certain on rational grounds that a body cannot be at more places than one, while the Lord's Supper is administered at thousands of places at the same time, and when it is manifest that the body of the Son of God, even if it were as big as our globe, would have been eaten up long ago, and so on, and so forth, — in view of all the sound reasons presented. could He mean this that is written? And what good could it do us, any way, to eat His body and drink His blood? What possible connection could there be between this physical act and the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. which are purely spiritual matters? And what has the kingdom of God to do with meat and drink? And why lay an absurdity, which all the wisdom of the entire world eschews, on the people of God? And — but why further enumerate the objections which reason raises against the Christian revelation and the Christian faith?

If reason is to decide, the Reformed must be accorded the victory, because even in our replies we are restricted to the authority of the Word of God, and every proposition derived from that source may again be set aside by human reason as was the first plain statement of Holy Scripture and the first argument, “so it is written.” It was a fundamental difference of principle. And so it is in our differences with other churches now.

The allegation that we are all substantially one in faith, notwithstanding our differences, must assuredly challenge examination by people who stand in awe of God's Word, when it appears that they not only disagree in fundamental doctrines, but in the fundamental principle by which all doctrines must be judged. The differences are so great that it was deemed necessary to organize other Protestant Churches with other confessions of faith than the Evangelical Lutheran Church with its Augsburg Confession, which makes it evident that these differences could not have been about trivial matters, as the Word of God requires that there shall be no divisions among us, and the conscience must be troubled unless it is clear that divisions and

offenses have been caused contrary to the Scriptures, in which case the guilty parties must be avoided instead of being pronounced innocent and fellowshipped.

The efforts made to effect an agreement soon make it manifest that the difference in such cases has its root in a different attitude toward the Holy Scriptures. What separated the Lutherans and the Zwinglians in Reformation times was clearly expressed by Luther's words at the Marburg Conference, that his opponents had a "different spirit." The clear-sighted old hero with his childlike faith and consequent manly assurance and stalwart strength is often criticized or his alleged stubbornness on that occasion and his conduct unfavorably compared with that of Zwingli who pleaded for charity and fraternity with tears. The criticism is of the same piece with the course of the party that dissented from the Lutheran faith. It manifests a different spirit from that which actuated the Lutherans. The dispute being on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, not as the outcome of theological speculation, as is sometimes alleged, but as it is in plain words written for our learning in the Gospels, Luther wrote on the table what our Lord said, and declared that he would stand by that and could not swerve from it because his conscience was bound by the Word of God, and that he could in charity yield all the earthly goods he had, but not that Word. On that his peace of soul and ultimately his salvation rested; on the principle involved, the peace and salvation of millions depended: he could not yield that. There the Word of our Lord stands, and earth and hell shall let it stand, and not a thank have for it.

Zwingli did not deny the Scriptures; he did not deny that the words which Luther wrote on the table as his ultimatum in the colloquy were the very words of our Lord; he did not maintain that Luther had no divine warrant for his doctrine, or that he was trying to bind some human ordinance on consciences that had just been liberated from the galling yoke of popery. But — alas for that but!

The Bible plainly teaches what Luther in humble reliance on the truth of the Bible and the power of God to make it good, taught and confessed, but — what shall we say? You who interpose a "but" to break the force of God's plain words have a different court of appeal and a different spirit. This is the simple truth of the matter, and we must deal accordingly. What have tears and pleas of charity and sentimental yearnings or fraternal fellowship to do with the question at issue? They are all good and beautiful

and praiseworthy in their place, but they are not in place when they are urged to support a “but” against the decision of the Bible, from which true Christians can allow no appeal.

Why should the charge of selfishness and opinionativeness and stubbornness and uncharitableness be urged by professing Christians against Luther, who on true Christian principles could not do otherwise, instead of against Zwingli, who on these same principles could have done and should have done otherwise? Zwingli could bring no forces into the field to do battle against the hero of the Reformation and the Church which subsequently declared its faith in the Augsburg Confession but those which were mustered by human reason against the clear statements of God’s Word. He claimed to be in full accord with Luther in accepting the absolute and exclusive authority of this Word. He admitted that Luther taught what the very words of our Lord declare. Why could he not and should he not as a Christian man throw to the winds his carnal “buts” with their attendant arguments from human reason against divine revelation? Was he ashamed to confess that man’s wisdom was overcome by the truth of God, and that he was involved in the defeat? Who was actuated by carnal stubbornness in the case, Luther, in his adherence to the Word in opposition to all the motions of the flesh, or Zwingli in his adherence to the dictates of his own reason in opposition to all the Spirit exerting its power in the Word?

We confess to a feeling of weariness when we read the iterations and reiterations of historians and theologians of charges against Luther and the Reformation, while the entire presentation shows no capacity to understand Luther’s position and contention, but does show a profound sympathy with Zwingli in his stubborn resistance of the Scripture truth on grounds of human reason, which has no voice in questions which the Scriptures decide. The situation has not essentially changed since the Reformation. Notwithstanding all the advancement of learning since then, human reason is the same power, limited by nature and darkened by sin, and the Scriptures are the same Word of God still, a light shining from heaven to illuminate the darkness of this sinful world.

God has not changed in His truth and righteousness, and man has not changed in his natural depravity and need of the Gospel of grace and salvation through Christ. Neither has the Bible changed. The conditions are all the same as they were in the days when the giants of Reformation days fought the battles of God against the gates of hell. Neither popery nor

Zwinglianism has any better ground or better plea or life now than they had when Luther lived and wielded the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, against their pretensions and their power.

When denominations round us confront us with the same claims, and finding us unwilling to make concessions which our fathers could not make, assail us with the same weapons which proved powerless in their day, we have no reason to be dismayed, but every good reason to take our stand boldly upon the Word of God which abideth for ever, and be at peace with God amid the turmoil of wars waged against us because of our unwavering adherence to the Scriptures and our consequent fidelity to the truth witnessed in the Augsburg Confession.

One other mode of escape from the exclusive authority of the Scriptures has been devised by some who refuse to, join our ranks under the banner of that good Confession. And yet strictly speaking it is not another. For that which characterizes the fanatical principle to which we refer, and which caused the Church of the Reformation so much trouble in the extravagances of the Anabaptistic and Communistic parties that raved and raged against Luther and his work and menaced all order in the State as well as in the Church, was really the root of the evil in the Zwinglian opposition to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and that of all the Reformed dissent from the faith of the Augsburg Confession.

It was indeed alleged by these dissenting parties that the difference between them and the Lutherans was merely the trivial one of the different interpretation of a few texts of the Bible; and as this was so much harped upon and continues to be a main refuge of escape from the Lutheran insistence upon the very words of God as they are written in the Scriptures, we cannot refrain from repeating the question: why should they stubbornly cling to their opinions and press them even to the causing of divisions in the Church, when with them it was a mere human notion without any warrant of Scripture, which they urged against the old faith of the Church and in opposition to Christian men who could not yield because their consciences were bound by the plain words of Holy Scripture?

The declarations of Zwingli and OEcolumpadius, and many others who were recognized leaders of the opposition to Luther and the Lutherans, make it plain enough that what they called an unimportant difference in the interpretation of a commonly accepted and decisive authority was in reality

a different principle, which rendered that divine authority nugatory and relegated the whole matter of controversy to a human court for adjudication.

The assault made by the fanatical Carlstadt upon the Lutheran doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar set the pace for all Reformed opponents, although not all of them chimed in with the raving and ranting to which many were driven. Some were more sober, as some are more sober now, and refuse to push their opposition to the Church of the Augsburg Confession to the extreme of Quakerism, in which the wildest fanaticism has found a rationalistic rest for the sole of its foot. But the Lutheran principle, that the Word of God must decide all questions of faith and conscience, was virtually abandoned by the Reformed parties, however quietly this may have been done and however carefully their receding steps may have been covered, and a new principle was introduced. It was that of an inner light as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture, or of an immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit by which individuals should learn the sense in which the words of the Bible must be taken. This was not only resorted to in practice by opponents of the Lutheran Church, whence it can be legitimately inferred, but as openly avowed by the leading men of the Reformed party.

Zwingli repeatedly insisted that the Word of God is not the power by which faith is created in the soul and salvation is wrought. Against the Lutheran faith that by the Word the heavens are made, that all things are upheld by its power, that it is the power of God unto salvation, he maintained that the Word which is heard is by no means the Word through which we believe, for if the Word heard or read could work faith, we would all be believers: the word of faith inheres in the spirit of the believers which is judged by no one, but by which the external Word is judged. OEcolumpadius just as openly avowed the same principle, declaring that “whatever the external Word has beyond the mere sound it has from the inner spirit and internal word.”

The effect of such fanatical notions, which actuated the more steady leaders of the Reformed party, as well as the wild and reckless swarmers and stormers of the Carlstadt and Muenster type, could not fail to destroy the purity and unity of the faith, which can be secured only by steadfast adherence to the Word of Holy Scripture as the infallible voice of God, to whose authority every believing soul cheerfully submits. It is therefore not surprising to any considerate Christian that the Church of the Reformation in its unwavering purpose to maintain the exclusive authority of this Word

as the infallible revelation from heaven uses such vigorous expressions in her Smalcald Articles as these:

“Enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world; its poison has been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the papacy and Mahomet. Therefore in regard to this we ought and must constantly maintain that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments, and that whatever without the Word and Sacraments is extolled as spirit, is the devil himself.” Part III, 8, 9, 10.

That spirit of evil that troubled the Church of the Augsburg Confession ever since it set up its banner of pure faith according to the Scriptures, is active still and still continues to emit its poison. It is noticeable that its assaults are directed mainly against the doctrines which are distinctively Lutheran, and evidently the malignant enemy of all souls, of those of our opponents as well as of ours, knows what he is about when he directs his assaults so openly against the means of grace, to which the Lutheran Church held and holds in their purity and integrity, while other portions of revealed truth are more covertly assailed and secretly robbed of their divine support. If confidence can be destroyed in God’s operation through the Word and Sacraments, the gates of hell have accomplished much, although they have not yet prevailed against the Church, which is still a communion of saints that has not bowed the knee to Baal, great as may be their reduction in number through Satan’s wiles.

The power of the Word of God, written in Scripture and preached in the churches, and of the Sacraments by reason of the connection of this divine Word in command and promise with elements divinely designated for the purpose, by which the ordinance becomes a sacrament and a visible Word, is still the great point of dissension between us and other Protestant denominations who are the legitimate posterity of the Reformed parties of Reformation days, and the lineal descendants of the men who fought against our fathers and who now fight against us in our loyal adherence as their children to the Augsburg Confession. Let us hold fast what we have in our Scripture principle and our scriptural faith, that no man take our crown.

4. Confessional Authority

AFTER THE FACTS and elucidations hitherto resented it would hardly seem necessary to add a chapter on the obligatory character of the faith confessed in the princely Confession of Augsburg, and thus of the Confession itself. But the subject is of such transcendent importance in itself and is involved in so many misunderstandings and complicated by so many sophistries of enemies, that a few words on it will not be thought superfluous, even though they should in some instances be a repetition of matter previously presented. Perhaps what has been said before may receive the emphasis which is its due by repeating it in a different form and in another setting.

In our days of pretended superior enlightenment, when the progress of science and historical knowledge has relegated much that former ages regarded as glorious intellectual achievement and precious possession to the junkshops, Lutherans are often intimidated by the reproach of old-fogyism and antiquated notions and effete opinionism. We are not wholly without experience of the enervating effect of such charges upon the soul that seeks the truth of God and the glory of His name. In the best of us the flesh is weak, and in the most devoted of Christians the ease that peace affords seems preferable to the turmoil that war produces, and the cross cannot to the flesh be made enjoyable above the delights of a life in which all men speak well of us. But if we live after the flesh we shall die.

We Lutherans have special reason to watch against the wiles of the devil and to pray for sustaining grace, that we may not be overcome by the temptations which beset our path and are so well calculated to unman us and destroy our faith. Aside from our trust in the Lord our God, whose Word endureth forever and against whom all foes are impotent, ours would be a hopeless contention for gospel truth which the world's wisdom has discarded. All the more must we be impressed by the need of clinging to the Lord and His Word, untrammelled by considerations of the flesh, and braced and cheered by the promises of divine grace. We are nothing, and can do nothing of ourselves, but we are able to do all things through Christ who

strengtheneth us. May He give us grace to be found faithful, that we may not grow weary in an untoward generation that subjects us to ridicule and scorn, of bearing testimony to the evangelical truth which made mighty heroes of the men of the Reformation and gives us peace in believing, while we pursue our humble way through tribulation into the kingdom of God.

Our policy, which is not a policy at all in the modern sense of adapting our church work to the current opinions of the people, but a work of faith in which the truth which God has graciously impressed on our hearts is faithfully followed and expressed in our practice, is disapproved by the modern forms of this world's wisdom, as it would be by that wisdom in any form, and was just as objectionable in the pristine days of the Augsburg Confession as it is now, notwithstanding the difference in form. Our fathers built and conducted churches on the foundation of the evangelical faith, which was the stay and joy of their souls in those trying times. They carried their banner of the Augsburg Confession with many a weary step and many a woe to the triumph which God guaranteed and secured them. By His unspeakable grace we have become heirs of their faith and their good Confession. Our churches have been built and conducted on the same foundation. How is it possible to blame us now if we, as children of the Reformation, insist still on gathering and directing congregations on the same ground? How could we, believing the precious truth which was confessed at Augsburg in 1530 and confessed by the Lutheran Church as her precious heritage ever since, do otherwise? Believing that truth as God gave it, and confessing it as our hearts' faith, how could we do otherwise?

Times have changed, we are told, and what was proper in 1530 is not therefore right and good in 1907. The argument is specious. It seems reasonable that in the progress of the centuries some changes in existing organizations would become necessary. Some things have become antiquated and some have become obsolete. Human learning and insight have advanced, and in some respects have advanced with rapid strides. In the advance of learning many notions and theories have been left behind and are now mere matters of history, not of belief. Progress in all directions is so manifest that no open eye can fail to see it. Must we not, in view of what is so plain to every man, admit that our Confession is antiquated and is no longer adapted to the wants of the times?

In reply we beseech Christians to consider that the Word of God is forever unchangeably the same. Men change, times change, but God does not.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and His will is, in accordance with His infinite Being and unchangeable nature, unalterably the same from everlasting to everlasting. That will, which is of course in accordance with His eternal Being, is revealed to us in His Holy Word. That is graciously written, for the learning of all men of all times, in Holy Scripture. How then could it make any difference as to the eternal truth of that revelation, whether it were read in the age of the apostles, or in the times of the great Reformation, or in our twentieth century — or even in the so-called dark ages? Those middle ages were dark because the revealed Word was not read and studied, and as consequence was not regarded and did not furnish the designed enlightenment. But the Word was the same then as it is now. No changes which have come upon the world and its people have had the least effect upon the Word of God. He is the same infinite Being who is subject to no change; His will is the same as it was from eternity and shall continue to eternity; His Word is precisely the same as it always was and ever will be, because He is always the same: how then could the age in which we live make any difference as to the authority of the everlasting truth as the Scriptures teach it and our fathers maintained it in the fierce battles of the Reformation and set it forth in their grand Augsburg Confession?

Has not the truth in Jesus the same absolutely binding obligation upon the conscience of men now that it had then, and is not the salvation of our sinful souls dependent upon its acceptance by faith now as it was then?

But while we expose the sophistry of those who would lead the people to believe that the progress of our age has rendered the old creed obsolete and makes new adaptations necessary to the changed conditions, we are told that we are overlooking essential factors in the argument. Opponents tell us that since the days of the Augsburg Confession human learning has disclosed facts that were then unknown, and human science has developed theories of which men in those times did not even dream. From these they argue that our position of faith in the old revelation and its confession in the old creed is untenable, and that our persistence in building congregations on the old faith which was maintained at Augsburg is out of date, in view of modern progress and improvement in science and philosophy and history.

It might suffice to say, in answer to all such irrelevant argument and reproach, that we are not in the least embarrassed by the suggestion that God, in view of man's immense learning, would change His mind in regard to the government of the universe and the plan of salvation. If the reasoning is to

be regarded as worth anything, that is the implication. Admitting all that is claimed in regard to the immense strides that have been made in the advancement of science since the glorious days of the great Reformation, we still have the same Bible and the same faith and the same Augsburg Confession. All human progress in learning has left that, as lying in an entirely different sphere, quite undisturbed. Not we children of the Reformation, but the devotees of science and philosophy are confronted with new light and new problems to vex them and perplex them. With our position and contention all this new learning has no more to do than the discovery of a new star has to do with the so-called "yellow peril." For Christians must keep the fundamental truth in mind, if their cause is to be maintained at all, that their faith rests on a supernatural revelation which God has given to man benighted by sin, and that the faith itself, which appropriates the blessed truth thus revealed, is a supernatural gift of God, and cannot be produced by human reason or other natural power. Therefore the whole procedure of modern theologians and religionists, who array their advanced science against the faith of the Lutheran Church, is absurd on the face of it.

Our human science with its dependence on human power and weakness, waxes and wanes, comes and goes, but the truth of God, which is revealed for our learning and our salvation, remains when heaven and earth, with all man's labored efforts to understand their mystery, have passed away.

"For all flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth way; but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." 1 Pet. 1:24, 25.

It will require something more powerful than the poor though proud science of this world to shake our confidence in the truth of God and its heavenly power declared in the Augsburg Confession. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it, much less he irrelevant argumentation and impotent vociferation of human reason and human wrath. We are well aware of the devices to which the enemies of our faith resort to mislead the unwary. They assert that we misapprehend their contention. They do not mean to deny the faith to which the Augsburg Confession gives utterance, but only to invalidate its scientific standing and historic prestige. Our people have little concern about that. When we gather our congregations on the basis of the heavenly truth recorded in the Scriptures and set forth in the Augsburg Confession,

we do not inquire what opinions are now prevalent in the learned world about this or the other point of doctrine. Plainly to say the truth, we do not care.

Maybe modern science has found a new argument against the divinity of Christ, or the real presence of His body in the Holy Supper, or the resurrection of the body on the last day. What need we care for that?

Our faith does of rest on human discoveries and reasonings, but simply on the Word of God, which reveals unto our salvation heavenly truth of which nature knows nothing and in regard to which natural reason can make no discoveries. It can only grope in darkness when it attempts to construct arguments against the plain statements of God's Word. We teach the eternal truth of God as it is given by revelation and written by divine inspiration in Holy Scripture. If by the grace of God souls are led, by the power of His Spirit working effectually in the Word, to believe it and find peace for their souls, what need we care what advanced science and historical investigation have done since the days of Augsburg? What concerns us is the truth which saves our souls and gives God the glory.

Therefore we gather the people that believe around the banner of the Augsburg Confession and organize Lutheran congregations on the same basis as that of our fathers in the Reformation. If some people have doubts and difficulties arising from the advance of learning and science since those glorious days, that does not concern us in our work of faith for the salvation of men, but at most could interest us only as men who desire the welfare of their neighbors in temporal as well as in spiritual things. We can sympathize with those who suffer losses in business, or defeats in politics, or crosses in literary and scientific aspiration. They are human and appeal to our human hearts. But these things are of a temporal nature and to sober thinking can be of only temporal import. As coworkers with God in the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, which is not of this world, they do not trouble us, because the perplexities to which they give rise lie in this world and its cares. We live and labor by faith in building the Church, and we build according to the Augsburg Confession on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone, whatever science and philosophy may say, with the full assurance that these things are infallibly and eternally so, as the Word of God says.

Learning advances and science makes progress. We not only do not deny it, but have many reasons to rejoice in it. God, who rules the universe,

makes this progress tributary to His gracious purposes in regard to the children of men, and we, His children, are glad that advancements are made. But God, who is Lord of all, has given us His word to guide us. It is the revelation of His will for our salvation from the sin and death that has come upon the world. That stands forever the same as the everlasting truth of God, amid all the advancements that human science makes in its efforts to read and understand the dim revelation which He makes of Himself and His will in the works of His creation and providence: a dim revelation, because the human mind in its best estate is but finite and comprehends the infinite work of the Lord only with inadequate approximation, and because the sin which darkens the understanding debilitates and corrupts even the otherwise existing possibilities.

Christians rightfully, and in the best sense reasonably, depend entirely upon the supernatural revelation recorded in the Bible which gives us the light of salvation fully and plainly, as nature never could give it, and makes us certain, as science even in its most advanced stage ever could make us. For the great salvation through the incarnation of the Son of God, and the redemption through His life and death and resurrection, are not, and in the nature of things could not be written in the revelation made in creation and providence, so that, even if our reading and interpretation of nature, which are both hampered by our natural limitations and obscured by our sin, were untrammelled and perfect, we would still grope in darkness in regard to our relation to God and our eternal destiny and doom.

Those who expect to intimidate us by the supposed mightiness of human learning or human greatness in any form, are led by the same spirit and are mustering the same forces which were arrayed against our fathers in the days of the Reformation, though the form be somewhat changed; and the same spirit of faith in the Savior of the world and His unchangeable Word is the victory which overcomes them. Our Augsburg Confession which endured the assaults of papal and imperial power, and all the forces of human reason which these potencies could produce, will be able to withstand all the assaults which later generations will be able to make upon it. Scarcely will all the science of the world be able to equal the power which pope and emperor arrayed against it; and though the forces of nature should be increased a hundredfold against the Lord God Omnipotent by the concentrated powers of human erudition and thought, it would still be the impotence of human effort directed against the Lord God Almighty.

It is argued that our people who are gathered into congregations of the Augsburg Confession are unfairly treated when their pastors do not inform them of the scientific progress of our age and the religious doubts which such progress suggests. We confess that we have no inclination to trouble our people with these doubts. For ourselves we are sure that they arise, where the foes of the Church succeed in instilling them, from a confusion of thought, in which the distinction between nature and revelation, and consequently of nature and grace, are confounded or quite ignored.

For the purposes of leading souls to Christ and establishing them in His grace unto their salvation, we have nothing to do with the doubts and difficulties of science. Our faith does not originate in investigations of nature and does not stand in the results attained by the process. They have no power to gather congregations of believers and govern them as the disciples of the Savior. Why should our people be troubled by opinions and theories and speculations that pertain to a field foreign to their life and work? If some students of nature cannot refrain from setting alleged discoveries and consequent hypotheses against the truth recorded in the Bible, and theologians think it needful to expose the sophistries designed to be damaging to the Christian faith, the learned world may have academic interest in it: but even the theologian's faith, resting on wholly different ground from that of nature studies, is unaffected by it, and our church members, except so far as their callings enable them to take an interest in human learning beyond the sphere of their faith and their congregational work, have nothing whatever to do with it. Nor have our pastors any further concern about it than that of exercising their shepherd's care of souls, when individuals in their charge are beset by temptations to doubt the truth in Jesus on account of alleged contradictions between science and the Bible. It is one of the forms in which the devil presents and presses his wiles, as he presents and presses them in a thousand other forms, and the watchman must be ready for them, as he must be ready for the onsets of Romanism, or Socinianism, or Mormonism, or of Christian Scientism, or Spiritism, or Dowieism.

To contend that for such reasons Lutherans should desist from building their churches on the faith of the Augsburg Confession, that faith being assailed by science and sects of every hue, must seem to reasonable minds, even if they are not in harmony with our Lutheran faith and practice, as bordering on the absurd, even if prejudices and foregone conclusions prevent them from pronouncing the thing preposterous. To minds which are reason-

ably disposed we are sure that our work of faith will seem rational and right from our point of view. And that is all that we can expect and all that we do expect.

Those who have not faith cannot realize the assurance of faith, and cannot know how impotent are all the argumentations derived from human sources against the truth which God has revealed from heaven and caused to be written by inspiration of the Holy Ghost in the Sacred Scriptures. On this heavenly truth our fathers relied, and on this our people are taught to rely, and therefore we, as they, by the grace of God believing it, abide by the Augsburg Confession which declares it.

Against the truth of God no power of earth or hell can prevail. Why should our people then, believing that truth and confessing it as our fathers confessed it and won glorious victories by its heavenly power, be troubled by the puny human forces of modern science and progress? At its best it is human, and cannot be otherwise than very impotency when it arrays itself against the Lord God Omnipotent. Therefore we abide by our Bible and our Augsburg Confession, pursuing the even tenor of our way in humble faith, and let the devil and the world do their best or their worst against us.

"Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved. God shall help her, and that right early." Ps. 46:2-4.

How little the advanced religionists of our liberal age are disposed to be fair and just in their judgment of our Lutheran work is evinced by their appeal to human rights as against the rights of Christians adhering to the Augsburg Confession. They condemn our Lutheran way of building the Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and pronounce our adherence to the old Confession of the Reformation as antiquated and obsolete. That they exercise the liberty to judge for themselves in matters of religion is no cause of complaint on our part. Nor have we a grievance against them because they judge adversely to the faith of the Augsburg Confession. We regret their error, by which they suffer a distinct loss. But we charge them with no infliction of wrong upon us by the mere fact of exercising a liberty which is

common to us all, much as we deplore the erring result which they reach. We can respect any sincerity of opinion which their lives may manifest and go cheerfully on with our gospel work notwithstanding their adverse opinion. Their judgment may to some extent place obstacles in the way of our progress, but, knowing what forces we must contend against in maintaining and extending a spiritual kingdom which is not of this world, we are prepared for such impediments and are taught to feel only pity for those who will not go with us.

We may burn with indignation against those who, in the service of the enemy of all righteousness, maliciously hinder our efforts to save souls by the promulgation of the Gospel of grace in Christ Jesus, but we know that not all our opponents are consciously enlisted in the army of Satan against the only Name by which we can be saved; and whilst we can pity them all we cannot in bitterness of soul seek vengeance upon the worst of them, remembering that vengeance is the Lord's and that He will repay in righteousness, whilst our indignant souls, in their excitement unmindful of the wisdom which cometh from above, and which is first pure and then peaceable, might do wrong against an enemy. We Lutheran Christians would not be faithful to our profession and to the purifying power of God which works effectually in believing hearts, if we did not seek, so far as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men, even if unhappily. They will not accept our Augsburg Confession and will not approve our efforts to build congregations only on that foundation.

In the interest of a clear understanding of the situation as regards the Evangelical Lutheran Church and its contention and its conflicts, it seems needful to repeat that the liberty of men to think as they are moved by a sense of right, and of Christians to believe as they understand the Bible, is not disputed in the abstract. We ask no special favors and are quite willing to accord to all others what we ask for ourselves.

Not in conflict with this, but in accordance with it, we accuse the opponents of the Lutheran Church in her earnest endeavors to propagate her faith and extend her blessings of peace in believing to future generation, by maintaining the Augsburg Confession as the foundation for Christian congregations, of violating right and reason. It is a grave charge, but we make it intelligently and hold our selves responsible for making it. Even unbelievers who can have no sympathy with the requirements of our faith, owe us a fair hearing and a just judgment on the ground of human right and reason,

which may decide against our faith, but cannot rightfully decide against our work, without denying our right to hold the Christian faith.

That is the vital point in our controversy.

Are the enemies of the Augsburg Confession reasonable when they deny us the right to build churches on the old foundation of the faith of the apostles and of the Reformation? It might be a debatable question whether any other religious faith has any rights in the world, which He who made it and redeemed it has blessed with His gracious revelation of truth unto salvation. To us believers that is a settled matter. But in opposition to the antagonists of our Lutheran Church and its principle of exclusive adherence to the Augsburg Confession we will not urge this point now, certain as it is that ultimately our faith must insist on it as against all claims of equal authority advanced by human reason, whether it presents itself in the form of tradition and popery or in that of Rationalism and Mysticism. For us the Word of God, written in Holy Scripture, is alone decisive in time and eternity, because that is the decision of the final Judge, which alone has authority on the last day. In this connection we will not urge all this, for we are well aware that our opponents will not understand our contention and are unable to appreciate the force of our argument. But we could not be just if we did not emphasize the undeniable fact, that we Lutherans have all the human rights which are conceded to all other people, and that accordingly we are antecedently no more fairly subject to condemnation for building churches that are exclusively Christian than are Islamics for building mosques that are exclusively Islamic. And if we believe that which our fathers confessed at Augsburg to be the very truth of God revealed in Holy Scripture, why should we be thought censurable as trespassers on other people's rights if our Christian churches are built as churches of the Augsburg Confession?

From no point of view can liberalists be regarded as treating us reasonably and righteously, leaving charity altogether out of the question, when the denunciation of us as an intolerable sect is a foregone conclusion as soon as the old faith and the old Confession are mentioned, and our purpose is avowed to gather congregations and conduct them on this old foundation. We surely have the right, like all other people, to examine and think for ourselves, and before others condemn us for agreeing with the men of the Reformation and accepting the Augsburg Confession as our standard, they unquestionably owe us a hearing. They will have no trouble to ascertain what

we believe and what is the purpose of our work, and they will always find us frank and free and ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us.

In our times and in our land it is not expected that the popular tide will float the Church of the Augsburg Confession to a haven of glory and wealth. That is not the Lord's way at any time and in any land. But we do most emphatically insist, as against all the Materialism and Rationalism and Mysticism and Liberalism of the age, that we Lutherans have the rights of all other people and must earnestly protest against the persecution involved in the condemnation of our faith and our labor of love without a fair examination of our claims.

By no means do we lay the flattering unction to our souls that the assaults of Liberalism upon the Lutheran Church will cease when our position is understood. We are not blind to the fact that the world which lieth in wickedness is against us, and that human reason and sentiment under the dominion of sin as it is by nature, cannot be brought to favor our contention when once our position is understood. We have not only not endeavored to conceal this from our readers, but have sought to make it clear to them and impress it upon their minds as truth which it is necessary to keep in mind as a preparation for coming trials and troubles. Men who have not our faith will, if they concern themselves about us and our endeavors at all, continue to oppose us, and only those who have this faith will favor our efforts and labor and pray for their success. But while we do not expect that liberalistic opponents, if they do us the justice of examining our position, will give us their approbation without accepting our faith, we do expect and claim it as a human right, that we should stand an even chance in the community to be heard and not be persecuted as a body of unreasonable people who are not worthy of being accorded a respectful hearing.

Our object in this is to protect our people against the insolent wrongdoing of opponents whose conduct even liberalists must condemn on the mere basis of reason and natural right, and to secure a hearing which, by the power of God exerted in the Gospel which we preach and confess, may convert some souls and bring them into harmony with us and the glorious Augsburg Confession. Let our church members not be scared by loud-mouthed antagonists of our cause: God is our refuge and strength, and those who trust in His Word shall not be confounded.

But this does not exhaust the subject.

It is alleged that by insisting on the Augsburg Confession as the basis on which congregations are to be organized, we are demanding more than is meet. Some cannot fulfill this condition. They have not the faith there confessed, and therefore they cannot honestly confess it. Have they no rights? Do we claim special privileges for those of the Lutheran faith?

Without all controversy, those who have not the faith confessed in the Augsburg Confession ought not to confess it, and ought not to be asked to confess it. They would be dishonest in making such a confession. They would thus thwart its very purpose.

Lutherans have no such wish and resent all insinuations which impute to them such dishonest proceeding. They ask nobody to confess a faith which he does not possess. On the contrary, they warn against it as damning and damnable hypocrisy. We want nothing of that sort. We want no members in our congregations who are at heart against us. though with their mouths they pretend to be with us. We abominate everything of that sort as wholly at variance without position and purpose. Our whole aim is to bring lost souls to the Savior, that they may have peace in believing and being assured of forgiveness of sins and eternal life, have their hearts purified by faith to serve the living God.

We want believers in our congregations, not merely pretended followers of Christ.

It is therefore quite correct to say that some are not able to join us because they have not the faith demanded for an honest acceptance of the Augsburg Confession, and it is just as correct to say that, such being the case, we do not want them to join us. They are manifestly not of us. As a result, it is argued our church government excludes them. It does this by their own consciousness of inability to accept our faith which is laid down as the condition of membership in our churches. It does this by the congregation's application of the rule, even though the person concerned should overlook the requirements made of all its members.

But is this not tyrannical? That is the charge made against us.

Minds hostile to the Lutheran Church conclude that we are interfering with their liberty by lifting up the Standard of the Augsburg Confession and making its acceptance the condition of membership. It is a strange conclusion for rational minds to reach, and only the hostility underlying it can explain its possibility.

Are not those whom we invite by the Gospel call as free to come as we are ourselves? No one ever heard of any attempt made by the Lutheran Church to coerce hearers into an acceptance of the call. All opportunity is given to examine our claims. No church is more intent on teaching the people and urging them to make full proof of our Confession and accept it only when by the grace of God they believe it. Whosoever will may come, but the divine order which we pursue is that each soul drinks of the water of life freely, and is expected to confess with us only when it believes with us.

So far are we from any desire to coerce poor souls that, even if any one for some reason satisfactory to himself wished to join us without being inwardly in harmony with us, we, if we knew the fact, would not permit him to do the wrong and would not accept him. And if a person, after hearing us and examining our faith and our conditions of membership, finds himself in disagreement with us, he is left perfectly free to express his dissent and manifest it by declining to join us. He may come if he will, he may decline to come if he chooses: what larger liberty could any soul desire?

What opponents manifestly do want, when they bring such railing accusations against us, is not liberty to do as they please about accepting our conditions of membership, but license to destroy the Church of the Reformation with its Augsburg Confession and its Christian faith, whose exclusive claims of divinely revealed truth and heavenly power to save the souls of men are hateful in their sight. It is a serious charge and reads as if it were made in anger, but a dispassionate consideration of the whole situation will convince any fair mind that it is the simple truth. The warfare against the Lutheran Church in its loyal adherence to its old faith and its old Confession has been one marked as much by unreason as by disregard of the supremacy of supernatural revelation. And our people should know this, that they may not be intimidated by the loud boasts of learning and reason made by antagonists who know little and believe less. In view of all the facts it is not only absurd but, as plainly showing enlistment under the banner of unbelief, positively wicked to impute to our church members a purpose to tyrannize over the souls of others by building congregations on the basis of the glorious Augsburg Confession.

Some of our people are scared by the imputation of things which never entered their thoughts or feelings, and while others of more intelligence laugh at the desperate effort to damage our cause by any means, satanic or human, that may seem to promise success, these humble people in the sim-

plicity of their faith and the limitation of their learning are disturbed. And in course of time the devilish work succeeds in unsettling the faith of one here and one there, and the error eats as doth a canker. Thus damage is done to our great work by reasons that seem insignificant and even contemptible, because they rest neither on facts nor on logical deduction. Our church members should be made acquainted with these wiles of the devil and learn to say, even if they cannot unravel the sophistries of assailants: Get thee behind me, Satan!

If a Masonic order lays down certain requirements for membership and insists that every applicant shall fulfill the conditions in order to be received, our heroic champions of human liberty as against the alleged encroachments of the great Church of the Augsburg Confession not only “roar small” against the hardihood of the lodge, but quietly betake themselves to their lair and do not roar at all. On the contrary, they usually appear as advocates of such orders. These are liberal in religion, and so are they. So far they are in harmony. In principle they probably are so throughout, and no difference of any disruptive sort is likely to develop. But there is in the conditions a matter for reflection that has a bearing upon our case. The Masonic order lays down conditions which we can not accept. All right, say they, you need not accept them: only those who want to join the lodge must submit to them; if you are not willing to do this, you are at liberty to decline receiving them and of course forego the privilege of joining the lodge. Of course we, who have no sympathy with the principles of Masonry and have no desire to join the order, are satisfied with the answer. Masons can do as they please about adopting principles and regulations, and we can do as we please about accepting them and joining the order. That is all clear, and we have no complaint to make. But is it all clear to the would-be champions of liberty against the Lutheran Church? What right have Masons to impose obligations which many people cannot bear?

The question must seem ridiculous to those who have any intelligent conception of human rights and human liberty. They impose no burden upon our consciences because we refuse to put our necks under the yoke. They do not try to force it upon us, and they could not if they had any desire to try it. So we breathe freely and, instead of complaining of any tyranny exercised over us we simply exercise the liberty of testifying against a human institution whose principles and policy in our judgment are iniquitous. But when we Lutherans quietly proceed with our work of building up the

Christian Church on the basis of the truth revealed in Holy Scripture and declared in the Augsburg Confession, the same people who clamor for the rights of associations to adopt any conditions of membership that may seem to them expedient, raise their voices in terrific cries of bigotry and tyranny against us.

Is it not strange that the common sense which laughs at any intimation of possible wrong done to others, when human associations and orders do as they think proper in establishing constitutional terms, at once, as though common sense had wholly forsaken them, raise horrifying shrieks of abominations committed against human rights and outrages perpetrated against human liberty, when Lutherans confess their faith in the Augsburg Confession and gather congregations and govern them on the foundation of that faith? No, as a general thing, opponents have not been reasonable in dealing with the labors and aspirations of the great Church of the Reformation, the glorious Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Our presentation of the case has shown that we are not blind to the deeper considerations underlying the whole subject of Church organization. We need not be told that the analogy is not perfect between voluntary societies formed on the basis of human reason and right, as human reason sees it, on the one hand, and the organization of churches formed on the basis of divine revelation as faith apprehends it, on the other hand. Our interest, as little as the truth which we advocate, could lead to the ignoring of things so manifestly different. Human institutions and associations are subject to human reason. The Church is not. The difference is fundamental.

We were far from overlooking it when we presented the analogy and argued from it to the unreasonableness of those who are not kindly disposed to our work and who in such unkindness charge us with trenching upon human liberty. They reason on natural grounds and on these endeavor to make our work seem in contravention of human reason and in violation of human rights. We meet them on the ground which they themselves have chosen and show that they apply different weights and measures, when they judge us, from those they apply when they judge other organizations and their work. They are inconsistent and condemn us on principles which would equally condemn other associations which they approve and extol. In dealing with us they are not reasonable. In the respect in which we urge it the analogy is plain.

Our opponents condemn in us what they recognize as right and good in other associations and in regard to which they pronounce the very argument brought against us to be void of common sense. Meantime we do not claim that this settles the whole question. The analogy is not perfect. Matters of essential import are involved of which natural reason cannot make proper account. The Church is not a human institution. It is the kingdom of Christ which is not of this world. Human beings are of members of it in virtue of their birth into this world and their ushering into the society of this world. They may live here and die here without being members of it. The conditions of membership are not fixed by human reason and policy. It is not a human institution at all, in which men have fixed or could fix the terms of association with it. As it appears in the world and men are gathered into it, who have a great and important duty to perform in the administration of the means of grace committed to it, human organization is necessary. Without this its work of saving souls and glorifying the God of our salvation could not be done in the world. So by the grace and order and providence of God we have church organizations in his visible world, though the Church of Christ remains a kingdom which is not of this world.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church, with its Augsburg Confession as the basis of union, is the organization of this kingdom as the outcome of the evangelical faith of our fathers and its protest against the human ordinances which had usurped the place of the Lord's decrees in His kingdom. Its members by the grace of the Holy Spirit believe the precious Gospel revealed in Christ for the salvation of sinners and written by inspiration of God in Holy Scripture. This faith they confess and thus bear before the world their testimony to the heavenly truth which alone can save. Around this confession as their standard they rally: it unites them in one body and separates them from all who refuse to accept their testimony and decline to join them in the ministration of the Word and Sacrament and the worship of the Lord for the perpetuation of the faith and the glory of their gracious God and Savior. They gather as a congregation of Lutherans, known as such by their Augsburg Confession, and edifying themselves and extending the Church by continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.

The Lutheran Church thus becomes a visible organization, as in the nature of things all Christians must become when they unite to do the work committed to the Church and to exercise their privileges in fellowship with

each other. And now comes the point which to many minds makes the difficulty, and which is so often solved not only against our Lutheran claims, but against all truth and righteousness. As long as the argument of opponents rests on merely natural grounds, as it often and even in most cases does, it resolves itself, when fairly analyzed, simply into the absurd assumption that, while all men have a right to organize societies on any basis they please and lay down any conditions of membership that may subserve their interest, Lutherans, as long as they will insist on their old Augsburg Confession as their bond of union, must form an exception, and they must be debarred from recognition when human rights are under consideration. Their unreasonableness renders that kind of enemies impotent in an intelligent community and puts them on a level with the rabble that, failing to give any reason for their hatred, throws mud and makes mouths at us. They trouble us in their low way, but their assaults can do little to cripple our work in the community and nothing to disturb our faith.

But when our contention is appreciated, that our congregations are not built on the foundation of human opinions, and that the conditions of membership are not expressions of our own sense of expediency and thus based on considerations of reason, the matter does present an opening for objections that are more worthy of intelligent minds and merit a more respectful consideration. Thinking men tell us that, when we insist on the acceptance of the Augsburg Confession as a condition of membership in the Christian congregations which we gather, we are laying a burden on some consciences that are undeniably Christian, but that are not in a condition to accept some articles of our Lutheran faith, ready as they are in a general way to confess Christianity and help to propagate it in the world. We have no contempt for such objection and no scorn for souls that in their honest perplexity are constrained to raise it. The reasoning up to a certain point is logical, and a sincere man may easily be induced to adopt a conclusion adverse to our Lutheran position and practice. But whilst we recognize the difficulty, it cannot shake our faith. For us Lutherans that is decisive, whatever may be the difficulties rising from its retention and confession. We speak because by the grace of God we believe.

Our fathers, in their fierce conflict with Rome, might have erred. They were humble souls, and were not of a sort at all to deny the abstract statement that man is subject to error. They knew too well the depth of human depravity to think of any denial of a truth so plain. But they believed, and in

the terrible struggles of the Reformation found peace in believing. In opposition to the darkness and tyranny of Rome, they trusted in the truth of God as He gave it to them in the Gospel. Romanists, too professed to receive that Gospel, and they argued with unwearied persistence that they were in the majority, and that therefore their interpretation of the Gospel's meaning ought to be accepted rather than that of Luther and the comparatively small company of his followers. The reformers never for a moment admitted the argument that the pope and his adherents could not be in error. They conceded neither the infallibility of the pope nor the inerrancy of majorities. But neither did they assume that they could not err. The possibility of their erring as plain to them as their sinfulness. But it did not disturb them in the least. It was not the question that stirred their believing souls; and when such a question was suggested by the proud pretensions of Papists, it only moved them all the more to seek assurance and comfort in the plain words of Scripture. They admitted all that could be urged in regard to the possibility of erring; but the question was whether they had erred in their reliance upon the clear statements of Scripture and their trust in the Lamb of God who was made known to their hearts by the words there written. They believed the Word and found rest for their souls; the Papists refused to believe the Word and fought for popery.

It was not a question of inerrancy, but of faith. And that is the great point now, when we build our churches on the truth proclaimed on the Augsburg Confession. Did the Lutherans err in the sixteenth century, and are they in error now when they accept the plain statements of the Bible? That intellectually they could err as well as other people is not questionable. But do we err when we are guided by the Bible, which is infallible because it is the Word of God, and when we believe the truth there clearly written for our learning and our salvation? It is a matter of faith.

When we preach and press the truth which our faith accepts on the authority of the infallible Word, some may find difficulty in accepting it. We can concede that some may have such difficulty, notwithstanding their sincere desire to follow Christ. But all this is irrelevant when the question is, whether or not a believer, clinging closely to the Word of God as his only guide and ground of assurance, may know the truth and have a steadfast faith, and whether or not he has not only the right but the solemn duty to confess and contend for that faith in spite of all adversaries. About this we

can have no doubt or misgivings, whether these adversaries are sincere or insincere, for we have the express words of the Holy Ghost to direct us.

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.” Jude 3.

The possibility that the reformers erred in their great contention of the sixteenth century against Roman apostasy, which resulted in the adoption of the Augsburg Confession and the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a visible organization maintaining that Confession, and gathering congregations determined by the grace of God to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments on the foundation which that Confession declares, and the possibility that we err when we continue the work on the same lines, with the same warrant and the same assurance of faith, is fully admitted. But when adversaries incessantly repeat what we well know and fully concede, with the covert intention of persuading the people that our fathers erred, and that we err in maintaining the truth set forth in the Augsburg Confession, the sophistical insinuation suggests a doubt whether the most positive professions of adversaries, that they are not enemies but devoted friends of the Gospel, are to be accepted at their face value. For the fundamental point is, whether or not there is revelation of divine truth which the poor, lost souls for whom it is intended may know and be assured of, and thus be rescued from sin and death, and by faith enjoy the peace of God which passeth understanding, or whether even after the revelation of God’s gracious will is given them, they must be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and despairingly inquire, what is truth?

Our answer to the whole system of sophistry by which souls are meant to be kept in doubt is the Word of the Lord hose we are and whom we serve, as it s written for our earning:

“If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31-32.

We believe that truth and with our fathers confess it in the Augsburg Confession; why should any doubts or difficulties that others may have disturb our faith or embarrass us in the exercise of the liberty which it gives us to

confess the Lord Jesus though all the world, sincere or insincere in its opposition. endeavor to dissuade or dismay us?

Our people, though they may not be learned in the philosophy and science of the world, can always give a rational and logical answer when they reply to all assailants. We believe, and therefore have we spoken in the Augsburg Confession. If these assailants do not believe, that is not the affair of our people and does not interfere with their possession of the glorious liberty of the children of God. They believe, and therefore they speak, and they cannot do otherwise. Those who have a different faith or no faith, cannot join us, but we cannot on that account change or abandon our confession.

We are ready to teach those who have honest doubts or difficulties; we are ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us to any inquirers after the truth; but we are not ready to favor opponents by abandoning one jot or tittle of the truth revealed from heaven for our salvation, because that would mean abandoning the truth on which all our hopes of salvation depend. No difficulties that men may have, sincere or insincere in their profession of Christianity, can alter our faith as it rests on God's Word and finds utterance in the Augsburg Confession.

In our days the argument is presented with all the increased force which modern science is supposed to give it, that our ministers, and especially our teachers in theological seminaries, should not be bound to teach what our Augsburg Confession and our other symbolical books, which develop the faith it expresses, set forth as the truth of God, because teachers must ever learn, and the increase of knowledge leads to new convictions. It is contended that, though the right of Christians to confess their faith, and make agreement in that confession the basis of union in their congregations be unreservedly conceded, it is still a serious question if it be right to bind their pastors and teachers to its unconditional acceptance, and some have not hesitated to decide that question in the negative. Indeed, some raise again the old cry of ecclesiastical tyrannizing over consciences when the Lutheran Church insists that her teachers must pledge themselves to abide by the Augsburg Confession in all their teachings. The argument used by them is well calculated to give a specious appearance to their contention, and for that reason if for no other challenges our attention.

It is rightly claimed that those who are called to teach in the churches and schools must have the privilege of investigating for themselves the sub-

jects to be taught, that in teaching they must follow their own convictions if they are to do conscientious work, and that therefore no alleged authority can be allowed to dictate what they shall teach, or to place any restrictions upon their liberty of action under the guidance of their own consciences. It seems to follow conclusively that the Church would violate her own principle of freedom from all human yokes of bondage and commit a wrong against Christian consciences, if she endeavored to impose the Augsburg Confession or any other symbol as obligatory upon her teachers.

The argument, reasonable as it seems upon the surface, and great as has been its influence in misleading unwary minds, notwithstanding the honest intentions by which some of them were moved, does not reach the bottom of the subject. In the interest of the truth for which we contend, and which is of the greatest importance to all concerned, we must, impolite as the declaration may strike those who urge the argument, declare it to be a tissue of sophistries. In the first place, the contention that pastors and teachers must be absolutely free from all authority in the exercise of their private judgment, has no proper standing among enlightened Christians and least of all among intelligent Christians of the Augsburg Confession. The carnal misconception of the liberty of believers should not in these enlightened days be charged upon the great reformer and the Church of the Reformation with its glorious Augsburg Confession and its other symbolical books, in which the faith of that Confession is explained and maintained. Never did it enter the mind of Luther and the Lutherans to renounce all authority outside of themselves and recognize only their own reason and feeling and fancy and their own will, which is naturally dominated by these powers of their own sinful souls, as the final court of appeal in matters of religion. First of all they were intent on saving their souls. They knew that they were lost in sin and could not save themselves. They fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel. If this should fail them, they were lost and all was lost.

How then could the thought ever be entertained for a moment, that their own benighted intellects and their own dead hearts could rescue them from the sin and death which had come upon the fallen human race? The light which they had by nature was the same in kind as that which governed the Romanists in their vagaries and monstrosities and all the abominations of popery and its oppressions and persecutions. They made better use of the reason and feeling as it existed in human nature, but they never could have brought about the great Reformation of the Church if that had been their

only recourse and their only resource. They trusted not in man or anything that is in man. They appealed to the light that came from above. That was divine, and from it there was no appeal. The Word of God is supreme. It is absolutely supreme. There can be no appeal from it to any other source of information or any other court of authority. The Holy Scriptures, because they present the Word of the Lord, are alone decisive. Their decision, because it is the decision of the Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth, is absolutely effective for time and eternity. To that authority all souls must bow. Against that all talk about rights of private judgment is not only glaring unbelief, but sheer nonsense.

All professed interest in religion and all concern about conscience and salvation are hollow pretense and idle trifling, if there be no recognition of God who rules supreme in heaven and earth, and to whom we creatures must give account. But if His supreme authority is recognized there can be no reason and no force in the plea, that pastors and teachers cannot be subject to any authority, but must have free cope to teach and do as they please. Only by full and cordial submission to the truth and the righteousness which God gives us can we have and retain freedom from the tyranny of Satan and of sin. Men may refuse to acknowledge God, or decline to accept His Word as absolutely obligatory; but such men must not expect Christians to make provision for the supposed rights of their infidelity, when congregations of believers are organized. Those who reject the Scriptures are not Christians, and all foundations of right and reason are abandoned when it is argued that Christian believers, when they gather together in the Savior's name to worship Him and administer His means of grace for man's salvation, must in order to escape the reproach of trenching on others' liberty and tyrannizing over their fellowmen, forfeit all their rights as believers in the kingdom of God and put themselves on a level with unbelievers. What it all means, when he preposterous claim is reduced to simple terms, is that the Church should have the kindness to tear out her heart, in order to conciliate the world which hates her — hates her notwithstanding all its blandishments.

In the second place, opponents of the Lutheran purpose and work to perpetuate the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation, with its pure faith declared in the Augsburg Confession, are all astray when they presume that any sound argument against the imposition of a human yoke on the necks of Christians holds against their position and contention. The very

truth which makes them free makes them advocates of the utmost liberty which the Lord of all accords to His creatures and antagonists of every form of human despotism, by which arrogant men usurp the power and authority belonging to God alone. It was their determination to be free in the service of God under the guidance of the Gospel that nerved the reformers by the power of the Holy Spirit which works effectually in that Gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to resist all the usurpations and consequent tyrannizing of popery over the souls of men, and to contend earnestly for the faith delivered to the saints and written in the Scriptures for the learning of all men who were willing to give it a hearing. And now when we, who have been blessed by the same Gospel of grace with the same faith which was bestowed upon our fathers, and publish it in the same glorious Augsburg Confession, and in accordance with our profession of faith in the old truth humbly seek to promote the glory of our Lord and the salvation of men by contending earnestly for the faith delivered in the Augsburg Confession and building churches on the faith which is our consolation and joy, it is not fair — before God it is not right — to bring against us without warrant in reason or in Scripture the railing accusation that we, poor sinners who flee for refuge only to the hope set before us in Christ, are making the presumptuous attempt to lord it over our fellow sinners by insisting on the faith declared in that Augsburg Confession. It is the faith of our hearts. It is our comfort in the woes of our earthly pilgrimage and our strength in its wars. It is our refuge in the assaults which Satan makes upon us in view of the awful day when heaven and earth shall pass away and the sinner shall stand before his final Judge.

We know the tremendous import of it all. But we believe — God help our unbelief! How could we do otherwise than build our churches on the faith of the Augsburg Confession, seeing that this is the faith of our hearts, than which we know no other for the salvation of our poor souls and the salvation of other souls in the same condemnation of sin? We cannot do otherwise: God help us!

But when men, some of whom profess to be sincere believers in the same mighty and merciful Savior — as merciful to them as to us — lift up their voices against us and seek to draw people away from our testimony and the truth and consolations of the Gospel by telling them that we are endeavoring to lay a yoke of human bondage upon those, who hear us, what shall we say? It is false! The devil, who instigates the falsehood, knows that

it is false. And all men have the opportunity of knowing that it is false. The Lutheran Church never imposed her Confession on anybody who did not believe the truth which it confesses. She never taught that she has any such power or any such right. She preaches the Gospel which she confesses and is right in expecting that those who believe this Gospel will confess it with her. Never did she ask any person to confess it without believing it. Of such a glaring sin she has never been guilty. Most earnestly does she desire that all who hear her voice should believe the precious Gospel which she declares, and that all should confess it with her and help her to maintain and propagate that truth unto the salvation of men; but whilst she joyfully confesses and patiently teaches her glorious Gospel of the grace of God in Christ and earnestly pleads for its acceptance, she has always acted as the servant of the Lord and entreated hearers in His name, never urging any authority but that of her Lord, and never countenancing, by word or deed, the carnal dream that any other authority could be desired or prove effectual to bind on creature consciences the word of the Creator.

The accusation made against us is in its matter so foreign to the entire faith of the Reformation with all its thought and feeling, that its very existence could be treated only as an insult to Lutheran Christians, were it not that these in their knowledge of Christian truth and experience of the warfare of the flesh against it, are aware that silly charges are often made by people who, in their confusion of thought, do not mean the wickedness which their words imply.

Meantime, whatever interpretation adversaries; whether sincere or not in their profession of Christianity, may put upon our action, we must insist on building congregations only on the foundation of the Gospel truth set forth in the Augsburg Confession. If some who profess to believe the Bible as well as we are unwilling to join us on that basis, alleging that our Confession proclaims doctrines which are at variance with Holy Scripture, whose authority alone is decisive, we concede the validity of their objection from their point of view. It does not enter our mind to argue that they must accept our Confession notwithstanding, because the great Church of the Reformation requires its acceptance.

If it will make our position any clearer, we admit that the great Church of the Reformation has no more right, aside from the divine obligation of God's Word which she teaches, to bind dogmas and decrees on human souls than the Romish or any other church. There is no such thing as church au-

thority binding the consciences of men. All authority promulgated in the name of the Church is usurpation, so far as it is not the simple enforcement of divine authority declared in the Scriptures. Christ alone is King in His Church, and nothing can bind us but His Word. Therefore if any soul declares that it is not bound by the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession and therefore cannot join our Lutheran Church which is built on that foundation, we have for an answer only the expression of regret.

Those who do not believe the Gospel as we confess it cannot join us in confessing it and of course cannot cooperate with us in propagating it. The case is plain and no ado need be made about it. If a number of such persons be found who are not in harmony with the Augsburg Confession, they will no doubt join a party who build congregations on a different confession. Some did this in the days of the Reformation and have continued to do it ever since. We regret it, but we cannot help it, because our Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, and we cannot, whatever may be the consequences, abandon our faith. If others think that the Word of God teaches otherwise than we believe and confess, the fact grieves us, but it does not shake our faith. They must answer for that on the judgment day. Only let people be fair, and not charge us with any attempt to lord it over them, when we joyfully go forward with our banner of the Augsburg Confession in loyalty to our Lord and His Word written in Holy Scripture for our learning and the learning of all men.

In the third place, our belief and confession of the truth, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures as the written Word of God, does not in the least interfere with the liberty of Christians to examine the records for themselves and to prove all things and hold fast that which is good. That is exactly what the Evangelical Lutheran Church insisted on from the start as a Christian right, and on that ground it won its glorious victories against the tyrannizing usurpations of Rome.

We are Protestants, and that means not that we are independent of God and the supremacy of His Word, but that we are determined not to submit to human dictation in matters which God, who alone has authority, has decided in the revelation of His will graciously given for our guidance. Subject to this revelation written in Holy Scripture, we are perfectly free. What larger liberty could the children of God desire? When it is argued now that our Lutheran Church, in adhering to its principle of building up congrega-

tions of believers and making the acceptance of the Augsburg Confession a condition of membership in her communion, restrains and restricts investigation of the truth and impedes and trammels all progress in its discovery and advancement, we lament the ignorance and resent the effrontery which would allow seemingly grave men to construct and bring forward such an indictment. The whole history of the Lutheran Church, from the Reformation down through all the centuries since, pronounces its premises false and its conclusion absurd. The Lutheran Church has always, more than any other, fostered learning and science and built schools and universities for the dissemination of light in all lands, and her scholars have been the accepted teachers in all the world.

The argument bears ill will on the face of it. Only one fact seems to lend it an appearance of respectability and gives it some force among men who are not Christian believers and among ignorant Christians who fall an easy prey to their sophistries. That fact is one to which we have had frequent occasion to refer, and which we have so little cause to conceal that we proclaim it aloud as fundamental in our whole work of establishing and maintaining churches of the Augsburg Confession. It is simply this, that we Lutheran Christians recognize the Holy Scriptures as absolute authority in all matters of faith and conscience and salvation; and we have no hesitation in declaring as the antithesis of our liberty in Christ under His absolute government as Lord of all, that all who reject Him and His Word are for that very reason the slaves of another master who makes great pretensions of giving larger liberty, but whom the Lord of all shall finally judge as the great enemy of all righteousness and all human salvation and blessedness.

Now. it does look as if those who object to our Lutheran work were right, when they maintain that the field of free thought and action is certainly wider if no restrictions of any kind are imposed on the individual, and that it is narrowed when any authority is interposed which binds him to its decisions and decrees. That is so, and it is this obvious truth, which cannot be refuted and which is cordially admitted, that gives the argument of our adversaries some semblance of soundness. But as against Christians it can claim no respect. To speak our mind frankly, from our point of view it can only appear frivolous. If those who set themselves in opposition to our Lutheran work are ready to confess that they do this because they deem all imposition of authority on human souls as an infraction of their liberty. and that their purpose is to maintain this against all claim of divine authority

laid upon us in the Scriptures, as well as from any other source, or in any form, we can understand their principle and respect them as men mistakenly contending for supposed rights, though the thought is pitiful that the creature could assert rights against the Creator. But when such opponents profess to be Christians and claim such rights in the Church as against other Christians, who recognize Christ to be King in His own kingdom and His Word to be absolutely authoritative, from which no appeal can be allowed, all the ground on which charity might still suggest and justify some respect for the egregiously erring is undermined and rendered dangerous. It is therefore a plain case, that when, on the plea of contending for man's liberty in opposition to any and every authority that restricts it, people fight against building churches on the faith of the Augsburg Confession, they cease to occupy Christian ground.

The Christian Church is a kingdom of grace and salvation under the dominion of its King, whose grace it proclaims and administers, and who alone has secured and grants and can grant that salvation. If adversaries desire to fight against that kingdom, alleging that they love the liberty to think and do as they please more than any gifts or blessings which any alleged kingdom of grace may be supposed to confer, we, knowing something of the blindness of human intellects and the perversity of human hearts, can understand the situation and on our part are ready for the fray, seeing that it is an incident in the great battle going on between the kingdom of light and right and the kingdom of darkness and sin. Only let our people not be deceived by the wily leader of our enemies, as though his enslaved followers were fighting the battles of liberty against those who come to liberate them from their chains and who are calumniously represented as their oppressors.

If liberty to pursue study and make ever new conquests in the realm of truth is desired, the Church of the Augsburg Confession grants it in a measure large and full. She desires her pastors to make constant progress in knowledge and in grace, and wants the professors in her universities to devote themselves heartily to the acquisition of learning, that they may all be instrumental in glorifying God by shedding further and still further abroad His glorious light. But, it is true, she desires that all this should be done according to His will, as He has revealed it in His Word, and that she knows nothing of glory given to her Lord by any contravention of the Scriptures. If pastors and professors are not in harmony with the Church in which they are called to teach, what business have they to accept the office of teaching?

If they are in harmony, as they were presumed to be when her call was accepted, what liberty could they want but that of pursuing the same path of truth in which they started?

Christians find the way of the Lord, as they study more and pray more and experience more, becoming brighter and brighter until the perfect day appears, and their joy increases with the increasing light. But it is possible that in the teacher's investigations he may transgress the limits of Holy Scripture and finally refuse to submit to its authority, asserting his liberty of conscience to follow whithersoever his thoughts may lead him. Unhappily such cases have but too often occurred. What then? Why, then a poor soul has withdrawn from the authority of the King in Zion and gone his own way, as thou sands have done before him, though mostly in the domain of morals.

A Christian may sin in thought and feeling as well as in action; and a Christian may fall by sinning in doctrine as well as by sinning in practice. There is no more Christian logic to favor sin in "free thought" than in "free love." Those who refuse to be bound by the Word of our Lord are all, so far as their relation to the Church is concerned, in the same category. Nothing could be plainer than that, when a person is no longer in accord with the fundamental position of the Church, he has no proper place in it. If he has not the good sense to go out, there is no reasonable recourse but that he should be put out. His piteous cry for freedom can have no effect on loyal hearts that recognize no liberty in the Church to deny allegiance to the Lord and seek to dethrone the King. If they want to rebel against His authority they should at least have the good sense not to expect aid and comfort among His people.

We are not, as some suppose, evading the main point of the argument directed against making the Augsburg Confession obligatory upon members of the Lutheran Church and especially upon her pastors and teachers. It is true that formally there is a vast difference between the Bible, which is inspired, and the Confession, which is not. In this respect the creed is human, whilst the Scriptures are divine. But it is not true that his concession invalidates our contention and establishes the claim of our opponents.

We have granted all that in fairness can be asked, and all that love of truth and right can require, when we have repudiated all desire or intent, as charged upon the Lutheran Church, of binding our Confession on the consciences of men by virtue of a supposed authority committed to the Church

over and above or beside the Gospel and Sacraments entrusted to her care. There is absolutely no authority in matters of faith and salvation but that of God, and absolutely no means by which that authority makes known its decisions but the Holy Scriptures. What they declare is binding and is recognized in the kingdom of God as binding, and nothing else. We would be subverting the whole foundation on which we stand and making the whole achievement nugatory for which we labor and suffer in hope, if we overlooked this fundamental point.

Those who are willing to give the momentous theme the attention which it merits must, if they are Christians, and right-minded men, be able to see that we ask only this, that the authority of God and the obligation laid on consciences by His mandates be recognized. It is of course a question of vast extent and tremendous import, what His declarations are and where they may be found. They are found in the Bible. Pagans of various sorts may question that, and Jews and Gentiles may argue against it, but for Christians the question is settled. They are ready to reason with any soul, Jew or Islamic, Buddhist or Confucian, about the matter, but by the grace of God they have settled the matter for themselves, build churches on the foundation of Holy Scripture, and never harbor the thought that a Jewish or Gentile cry for liberty should disturb them or their work for a moment. The Jew can have his liberty to reject his only Savior, and the Gentile can have his liberty to worship his idol — poor souls, deluded by the devil and in their abject slavery shouting for their liberty — but they cannot have such license to sin in the Christian Church. Whatever others may think or say about the grounds of our Christian certitude of the truth revealed in the Scriptures, we believe them as the infallible Word of God and hold their acceptance indispensable to all fellowship among God's people, that He alone may reign among us.

And now when we Lutherans, having searched these Scriptures and found the truth in Jesus unto the salvation of our otherwise lost souls, set forth that truth as the faith which gives us peace and joy, and seek to gather other souls around that confession and form Evangelical Lutheran congregations, a hue and cry of bigotry and oppression is raised against us, as it was raised in all time by Jews and Gentiles against Christians, whose bigoted narrowness could not allow equal rights in the Church to every sort of human religion.

The early Church insisted that Christ alone must reign in His kingdom and was persecuted with inhuman rancor and hellish barbarity. The Lutheran Christians, in the glorious but equally troublous time of the Reformation, in their Augsburg Confession declared the same faith, which in its exclusive adherence to the authority of God and His revelation in the Scriptures was so narrow as to exclude all the pretensions of popery and all the imaginary inspirations of fanatical reformers, falsely so-called: and the hue and cry against them, with the additional charge that they refused to submit to supposititious authorities, which by usurpation had obtained power in the Church, ran out into bloody persecution. And now, when we under the same authority of Holy Scripture believe the same truth, which prophets and apostles taught and suffered for, and which the reformers taught and confessed and suffered for, and confess that truth in the same Augsburg Confession, the opposition against us, and the accusations which are designed to render that opposition reasonable in the minds of the people, and the persecution, are all the same. The charge is still that of bigotry and narrowness and exclusiveness, and consequent interference with human liberty, because the Word of God alone is declared to be authoritative in the Church, and the faith founded on that Word must alone be the criterion of membership.

There is a difference between the authority of the Scriptures and that of a confession alleged to be based on the Scriptures. The Augsburg Confession has not the authority of the Bible. It is not inspired, and the Lord has no more deputed the Lutheran than any other visible Church to promulgate articles of faith or issue commands in His name. So far our opponents are right and are in accord with our Lutheran contention against Romanists and all other sectarians who usurp divine authority over the people and trample upon their rights and liberties. And because they profess agreement with us in a principle so fundamental in the organization and government of the visible Church, we deem it not useless to reason with them, although we see no reason for trying to convince opponents who reject the authority of God's Word and claim the human right of believing and doing just what they please.

But if the Scriptures are absolutely authoritative, what shall the soul that in faith accepts the truth which they declare and finds peace in believing, do otherwise than confess this faith as an utterance of its gratitude to God and a testimony to lead others to the same faith and the same peace in the blessed Savior of the world? And when we make this confession and in pur-

suance of the very purpose of making it before the world invite other souls to join us in our worship of the God of our salvation and our efforts to bring other souls to our Savior by preaching His Gospel and administering His Sacraments as the means by which He exerts that saving power in which we rejoice, shall that confession be something else than that which we believe and which gives us our peace on earth and all our hopes of blessedness in heaven?

Let men who know something of sin and the misery which it entails and of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the blessedness of believing the Gospel, answer that question. The answer will be a solution of the difficulty for them, as it is for us. It only remains to make a rational application to the case in hand. Our faith, founded on the Holy Scriptures alone, is expressed in the Augsburg Confession. Therefore those whom we by the grace of God can bring to the same faith which we enjoy are invited to make the same confession, and they are thus brought into fellowship with the glorious Church of the Reformation, which has the distinction of being the Church of the Augsburg Confession, and which is usually called the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

What sense can there be in the stupid cry that we are interfering with men's liberty when we beseech them, to hear the truth of the Gospel, and believing it to find the peace for their souls which nothing else can give them? If they will of believe it, that is a matter of their own and in that respect is of our concern. They are free to reject it, and the responsibility of rejecting it is equally a matter of their own. At farthest our offending against their liberty could consist only in reminding them of the absolute authority of that Word which we believe and by which they shall be judged on the last day, and on the exclusive authority of which we put forth our Augsburg Confession.

The case is very plain. If after we have done our duty in teaching and preaching the precious Gospel which our fathers believed and which the Evangelical Lutheran Church has believed and confessed until this day, and which we now believe and confess, some are unwilling to receive it and refuse to confess it with us, that is entirely their concern, and the responsibility is theirs alone. The thought does not enter the mind of Lutherans to dispute their liberty of declining fellowship with us. They should do as they think they will be able to answer for their deeds on that awful day of final account; but they must not presume to frighten the Lutheran Church out of

its faith by the plea that some who do not share it would gladly join the Lutheran Church, if its Augsburg Confession were not in the way. That only means that the Church of Christ would be larger, if faith were not exclusive.

The Lutheran Church accepted it as forever settled, that the Word of God, written in the Holy Scriptures, is absolutely decisive in all matters of faith and salvation, and that therefore neither pope nor councils, neither human traditions nor human ordinances of any sort, old or new, could have authority in directing consciences. We stand upon that basis still. Human reason and human science and human speculation can affect our faith in the absolute truth revealed in Holy Scripture as little as could the human pretensions of opponents in the days of the Reformation affect the faith of our fathers. We stand on the same foundation and only need the same firmness in our faith to be as immovable and as victorious as were they in the mighty battles which secured us our freedom from human yokes of bondage that we might serve the living God in the joy of liberty.

May the Lord of the Church increase our faith that we may continue undismayed to gather congregations around the banner of the Augsburg Confession in which that faith is declared to the glory of His name. That the Church built on this foundation requires her pastors and teachers to subscribe her Confession as a condition of being entrusted with the office is a mere matter of course. Common sense, when the situation is once understood, must dictate that and declare all objections stupid. No reasonable man could harbor the thought that a company of men would employ an agent and pay him their money for his work, if he declared beforehand that he is not in harmony with their purpose and their means of accomplishing it, but that his convictions would necessarily lead him to employ his time and talent and opportunity against their interest; and no reasonable man would wonder if, in such case, the whole company having the common sense to refuse the employment of such an agent, would have a hearty laugh at his silly complaint, that they are crushing all free thought and action by declining to hire him and pay him for hampering them and pulling down what they are trying to build up.

While common sense has no voice in determining what is to be believed unto the soul's salvation, its absence is certainly often to be deplored in the judgments which enemies pass on the ways and works of Christian believers. The objections which have been raised against subscription to the Confession of the Church never could be urged by one properly qualified to do

the work assigned to her pastors and teachers. They are always raised by people who are not in sympathy with her faith and her aspirations and hopes. We only voice what is involved in the nature of the case when we declare, that the very fact of raising the objection by any one offering himself as a candidate for the office of teacher in the Church is sufficient proof of disqualification. He is not wanted, because what he wants is not what we want. It is little less than an insult to our congregations to assume that they would call a man to be their teacher and guide who is not willing to give them the assurance that he has the faith which they profess and designs by the grace of God to remain steadfast in that faith which alone is the ground of their organization and gives value to their work. The imputation is insulting, because it assumes either that our people are hypocrites when they profess that their faith is founded on the Word of God, departure from which would be ruinous to them as individuals and to their organization as Christians, or that they are so stupid as not to see that by calling such a man they are endangering the whole cause to which they give their money and time and prayers.

Our congregations are gathered and built on the foundation of Holy Scripture and composed of people who on that ground confess the same faith which our fathers confessed in the trying times of the great Reformation. That is the faith which has ever since been declared by those who have accepted the truth which then won its victories against every form of error and oppression, and is the faith which our congregations now proclaim to the world in the Augsburg Confession, that the light and life and salvation which they enjoy may be extended to all people.

Members of our congregations sometimes fail to realize what a glorious heritage they possess. The world and the flesh and the devil assault them, and but too often in their weakness they become scared when the attacks are so furious. and sometimes in their doctrinal aspects so specious. When violence is ineffective, false prophets often appear as angels of light. The Christian life is a continuous warfare. If Satan fails in misleading souls by the allurements of carnal indulgence, he resorts to other means. Chief of these is to undermine the faith of Christians by false teaching. Error eats as doth a canker. The truth alone makes free and protects against the lies of Satan. Our people confess that truth in their Augsburg Confession. To help them in maintaining it against all the assaults of enemies, these chapters are written.

“We will rejoice in Thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners.”
Ps. 20:5.

“Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.” Ps.
31:24.

5. Relation To Our Other Confessions

THE AUGSBURG CONFSSION is not the only declaration of her Christian faith which the Evangelical Lutheran Church has thought it needful to put forth. Her authorized Symbolical Books contain a number of other Confessions of the same evangelical faith in other forms. Always desirous of having the truth as the Reformation restored it to the world fully understood, and of making her faith in harmony with the Gospel and the Church of Christ in all ages perfectly plain to all men, she accepted the creeds in vogue before her conflict with the papal apostasy and published lucid explanations of the evangelical faith set forth in her Augsburg Confession. To his her subsequent Confessions stand substantially in the same relation as it does to the previous creeds of Christendom. All of these confessions, setting forth the universally accepted creed of the Church of the Reformation, were published together in 1580 as the BOOK OF CONCORD or the SYMBOLICAL BOOKS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH. It is this collection that is meant when reference is made to our symbols, which is only another name for our confessions.

In this Book of Concord are contained three creeds which declared the truth in Jesus and were accepted by all Christians prior to the Reformation, and departure from which was regarded as heretical, if any professed Christian dissented from one or the other article of these confessions of the Christian faith. These are the so-called APOSTLES' CREED, the NICENE CREED, and the ATHANASIAN CREED.

The APOSTLES' CREED dates back to the earliest times of the planting of Christian congregations, and although he tradition that it was composed by the apostles of our Lord, each one furnishing an article, is undoubtedly unfounded, the creed certainly gives expression to that which the apostles believed and all Christians in all the ages since have believed.

The NICENE CREED derives its name from the Council of Nice, assembled in 325, and is a further expansion of the baptismal formula which underlies the Apostles' Creed. Several additions were made to it in 381, at a Council in Constantinople, on which account it is often more accurately called the Niceno Constantinopolitan Creed.

The ATHANASIAN CREED, so called because it was long erroneously supposed to have been written by the celebrated Athanasius about A.D. 340, expresses in clear terms the doctrine of the Trinity which all Christians believe according to the Scriptures, and the old name of Athanasian is still retained because Athanasius was the great champion of that doctrine in the controversies of his time. These three are usually designated the ECUMENICAL or UNIVERSAL CREEDS, because they are presumed to be accepted by all churches of every denomination, in distinction from those in our Book of Concord, which are peculiar to the Lutheran Church, namely the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the two Catechisms of Luther, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, which are therefore sometimes designated as particular.

The classification, though correct from a historical point of view, is inaccurate and misleading when the doctrine is under consideration, because the Church of the Reformation cannot admit that what she teaches is in any respect another faith than that which the Scriptures teach and the true Church of Christ always believed. The Bible being the judge, the faith published in the Augsburg Confession is ecumenical in the same sense and with the same warrant as that of the Apostles' Creed. It is precisely the same evangelical faith and appeals with the same authority to all men. The supposition that only Lutherans are bound by that truth which the Creed of the Reformation confesses, while all others are equally bound by the truth which the Apostles' or the Nicene or the Athanasian Creed confesses, is destructive of all faith, because it makes its entire foundation uncertain. For that which all true Christians receive and confess is the truth revealed from heaven for our salvation and which is written by inspiration in the Holy Scriptures for the learning of all men. That is the truth of which our Savior speaks when, having declared that His kingdom is not of this world, He answers Pilate,

“Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” John 18:37.

Notwithstanding the question of Pilate in his carnal desperation as to finding the truth in the diversity of human thought and conflict of human opinion in the sphere of reason without the enlightenment that comes from above, some have believed in our blessed Savior and Lord, and hearing His voice have known the truth. They confessed it in the old creeds before the Reformation and they continued to confess it at Augsburg. It was one and the same truth to which our Lord bore witness and which rings out clearly in the ears of all the world, notwithstanding all the quibbles of Pilate and his multitudinous host of followers and their supercilious sneers at those who hear the Savior's voice and therefore now the truth.

The Lutherans believed the Word of God, and therefore they spoke. What they believed was the same truth which all who heard the voice of the Son of God in all ages believed. That is the truth which was confessed of old in the ecumenical creeds; that is the truth which was confessed anew in the mighty struggles of the Reformation against the papal corruptions and usurpations. Lutherans never can concede that their Church is merely a sect contending for some pet opinion in the diversified clash of human opinions. If that were the import of our contention, the Lutheran Church would, according to her principles, have no divine right to exist on earth, and the Reformation would be admitted to be a revolution conceived in iniquity. Were that true, all the sincere Christians among us would abandon the lost cause of the Church of the Augsburg Confession and resign their former hopes to the Romish or any other sect that could make clear its claim to a foundation on the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the Chief Corner Stone. But the very thought is treasonable and is an offense to the children of God whose peace in time and every hope for eternity rests on the truth confessed at Augsburg in 1530, which is the very truth of God as made known in Holy Scripture, confessed in all the ancient creeds of the Christian Church and believed by all who hear the Savior's voice. That our fathers desired to confess nothing but the Christian faith of all ages, and had no mind to contend for novelties in opposition to the faith of all Christendom in all times, is manifested by their hearty acceptance of all the ancient creeds of the Christian Church.

Never was the congregation of believers the object of attack by the reformers. They fought for the Christian Church against popery, which was undermining its foundation and seeking to dethrone the King in Zion. It is a pity that the point of the great controversy with Rome is not better under-

stood. If Christians would look more seriously into the matter and appreciate better what our fathers contended for and suffered for, and what we are contending for with them, they would not pass such judgments upon us as is often done. They think of us as a sect contending for some favorite opinion: we are contending simply for the truth revealed for our salvation in the precious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what all true Christians contended for in all past ages and must contend for now, if they would be faithful to the Lord that bought them and called them into His kingdom of grace and salvation. Therefore the Evangelical Lutheran Church cordially accepts the old Christian creeds which express the faith of true believers in all time, and which are therefore the expression of her faith.

In the Reformation nothing was contended for but the one truth revealed from heaven, which all true Christians accepted. The Protestants desired to stand in the unity of faith and on that ground to maintain the unity of the Church. They wanted no divisions among God's people. In the preface to their Confession at Augsburg they said in reference to the emperor's call of the Diet and their readiness to obey the summons:

“Because, moreover, of dissensions in the matter of our holy religion and Christian faith, and in order that in this matter of religion the opinions and judgments of diverse parties may be heard in each other's presence, may be understood and weighed among one another, in mutual charity, meekness and gentleness, that those things which in the writings on either side have been handled or understood amiss being laid aside and corrected, these things may be harmonized and brought back to one simple truth and Christian concord; so that hereafter the one unfeigned and true religion may be embraced and be preserved by us, so that, as we are subjects and soldiers of the one Christ, so also in unity and concord we may live in the one Christian Church.”

No people ever showed a greater earnestness and zeal in the pursuit of Christian unity on the basis of the Gospel, on which alone it is possible, than did our fathers in their reformatory work and their suffering in its behalf. They were willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of concord, except their faith. On this the glory of God and the salvation of their souls depended, and nothing could induce them to sacrifice that. Hence with all their meekness and humble submission to the emperor as the temporal sovereign, they could not give him the assurance that they would submit to the decrees of the Diet in the matter of religion, whatever its decision might be. By the grace of God they were resolved so far as in them lay to preserve Christianity, though popery should fall.

Even in our day, with all the light which the centuries have added to the world's store, the depth and breadth of the evangelical enlightenment of the Augsburg confessors is little appreciated. Manifestly our age, humiliating as the admission may be, could not furnish such heroes of faith as God prepared for the era of the Reformation. Not only in piety and devotion as these grow out of a settled faith in the truth recorded in Holy Scripture, but also in the knowledge of that truth and its bearing upon the hearts and lives of believers — on their thinking and feeling and doing — were they eminently blessed. How easily the theologians of our day are thrown into confusion by the plea of men whose Christianity is generally recognized, that opposition to a reigning Church means opposition to Christianity!

In our times, as a rule, peace and concord are primary elements and aims of Christian organizations, and no rational limit can be found to the concessions which meekness is expected to make in order to conciliate those who doubt and those who deny evident articles of the Christian faith. And if any believing soul is troubled about these concessions the argument is usually effective to silence them, that they only manifest their self-conceit and bigotry by endeavoring to maintain their ground against the multitude that pronounces it untenable. The gist of the argument is that the drift of the multitude favors harmony in the Church at any price, and that therefore persistence in maintaining an unpopular article of the Christian faith is a mark of opinionativeness and obstinacy that cannot be tolerated in the Christian Church, because it would lead to a disturbance and finally to a disruption of its unity.

No one who has seriously noticed the current of our times, with its ever increasing volume of liberalism and latitudinarianism, has failed to see whither all things are tending. It is a matter to which all that love the Lord, who alone can save us from the wrath to come, should give most earnest heed. Thanks be to God that He gave our fathers in the days of Augsburg, and before and after that memorable Diet, a deeper insight into His gracious plan of salvation. Evidently on the scheme of thought prevalent in our day there would have been no Reformation, and even those who now shriek for license in opposition to the glorious liberty of the children of God under the Gospel, would still be groaning under the yoke of slavery imposed by the Antichrist of popery. It was by an eminent manifestation of the grace of God that our fathers were enabled to see that the preservation of the Christian faith is of infinitely greater moment than the preservation of unity in

the church organization under the pope at Rome. To them it was a painful thought that their refusal to subject their consciences to a human usurper of divine power, instead of remaining true to the Gospel, should cause dissension in the visible Church and eventually lead to separation from the Roman hierarchy in its determination to maintain its lordship over God's people. But they had the grace to see that the one holy Church of Christ would stand unharmed and go on with its saving work under the headship of its rightful Lord, even if the papal usurpation with all its human ordinances and cruel oppression of evangelical believers should be overthrown. The gates of hell would not prevail against it, even if the Romish Antichrist with all his power and pomp were swept away. Confident that their faith was founded on the Word of God, and that their confession set forth the pure truth of the Gospel, they could appeal to all Christendom in attestation of their cause. They accepted the universal creeds of the Christian Church, and desiring to maintain the ancient faith they had no need to fear that the Church of Christ would suffer by its maintenance, whatever the Diet might say or do in regard to their Confession. Hence they say in its concluding words:

“Those things also have been enumerated which it seemed necessary to say: that it might be understood that in doctrine and ceremonials among us there is nothing received contrary to Scripture or to the Catholic (Christian) Church, inasmuch as it is manifest that we have diligently taken heed that no new and godless doctrines should creep into our churches. In accordance with the edict of His Imperial Majesty we wish to present these articles above written, in which is our confession, and in which is seen a summary of the doctrine of those who teach among us. If anything be lacking in this Confession we are prepared, God willing, to present ampler information in accordance with the Scriptures.”

Luther and his co-laborers had no other interest in the great struggle which resulted in the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church than the preservation of the pure truth of the Gospel for the glory of God and the salvation of men, and they were therefore anxious to have all the world know that the ancient creeds, in which all true Christians of past centuries confessed their faith, were their confession, because they expressed the same faith which glowed in their hearts and which was now, in order to meet a want which Roman corruptions had created, set forth in a more extended form in their Augsburg Confession. This was never designed, as is so frequently assumed without any warrant in history or in reason, to be the particular confession of a party in opposition to the Christian Church, which

the papal party professed to be, but was meant to be, and in fact was, the confession of the Christian Church, holding fast to the Gospel and the old faith set forth in the old creeds of Christians since the apostles' times, now setting itself against the papal apostasy from the old Church and its old Creed. Romanism had usurped all power and used it for the suppression of Gospel truth and the oppression of believers, and hence the Christian Church, by the necessity laid upon it, became a Protestant Church.

That name has been so much abused that it can scarcely be said in our day without danger of being misunderstood. It was the Lutherans who protested against the tyrannical edict of Spire, which sought to suppress the Gospel and crush the Reformation. They were then rightly called Protestants. These men, who declared themselves ready to sacrifice all things rather than renounce their evangelical faith, and who placed all that they possessed in jeopardy, by protesting against the wrongs of the papal party that had the whole civil power of the empire to support them, were the men who delivered to the emperor their Confession at Augsburg. They were the Protestants, whose firmness in adhering to the Gospel of Christ and whose immovableness, in the face of the most horrible threats and most enticing allurements, even the bitterest enemies of the truth could not otherwise than admire. They were the Evangelical Lutherans, and the Church of the Augsburg Confession is the Evangelical Lutheran Church. But in the course of time, under the influences that were not born of the heroic faith of the Reformation, the good word Protestant which declared at once our Lutheran ancestors' faith and love of liberty, lost its original meaning. It was applied to every sect that was not affiliated with Rome. And many a sect of that kind has arisen, which is just as little affiliated with Lutheranism as it is with Romanism. The principle of liberty ran wild in the heads of fanatics even in the days of the Reformation. The flesh could easily learn to assert its freedom from all human yokes of bondage, and human nature in its sin needed little encouragement to glory in its emancipation from all powers that bound it. Satan led great numbers to declare their independence of all authority in matters of faith, and free-thinking became a popular vagary; and many who cared little about thinking, but were all the more interested in carnal indulgences, under the same guidance and, if ever a thought suggested by conscience should rise, in the same principle, felt free to pursue the gratification of their lusts. The history of free thought and free love is a

pitiful record of human corruption and degradation under the pretense of human liberty.

There is no good thing on earth that the devil does not pervert and make subservient in the sinful brains of fallen mortals to his nefarious purpose. His ways are easy to learn, for our sinful nature is in league with him from the start. The rise and progress of liberalism and libertinism therefore present no difficult problems. The fruit of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste brought death into the world and all our woe, explains it all. But the liberty of the Gospel, for which they were ready to lay down their very lives, is an entirely different matter. It implies, first of all, deliverance from the bondage of sin, and consequent liberation from the chains of the world and the flesh and the devil. The liberty thus imparted is liberty under the Gospel by faith in our Redeemer. That is not so easily learned. Indeed an unbeliever can never learn it at all. It is a gift of grace, and they who without that grace presume to meddle with it, always make bad work. The promise of our Lord is to those who hear His voice: they shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free. His Word is truth, and those who boast of liberty in spiritual matters, without embracing that truth, cannot fail to fall into carnal licentiousness. The Lutherans taught and practiced the glorious liberty of the children of God, who are free because the truth of the Gospel has made them free from the bondage of sin, whether it exerts its power from within or from without. A Protestantism that sets itself against Romanism only to serve Satan with greater freedom for the gratification of carnal impulses in some other form, has nothing in common with the Protestant faith of the Church of the Augsburg Confession. This Protestant faith was the evangelical faith of the Christian Church in all the ages of its history. and our fathers never grew weary of impressing this upon all who would grant them hearing. The so-called ecumenical creeds are confessions of the same Lutheran faith which was declared by the reformers at Augsburg, and the Lutheran Church has never ceased to publish them as her confessions.

To some minds it appears inconsistent with our contention to designate the Church of the Reformation as the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It is not the name which the Christians who confessed the Gospel in opposition to the abominations of popery in the sixteenth century would have chosen. It is not the name which those who now stand with them in the unity of the Christian faith would prefer. But the conditions are such that our references

cannot rightfully be the decisive factor. There are other circumstances of which account must be made. The faith of the Gospel is of such paramount importance that all possible care must be taken that its confession be not misunderstood. And the name too is a confession. Language is largely under the control of those who employ it. To a great degree it is conventional. Words mean what people understand them to mean, and in the course of time that usage changes. Satan and the sin that is in the people exert their influence. Therefore the tendency in the use of language is usually to the bad sense of words. Words which were originally generic become, under special conditions, predominantly specific in their application, and ordinarily in the direction of the bad sense, because the evil predominates in all the social intercourse of a world that lieth in wickedness. What we mean has been illustrated above in the use of the word Protestant, although the course of its varied application and change of meaning is not the most common. In its case the generic sense became specific in its application to the Lutherans, and subsequently ran to the bad by again becoming relatively generic in its confinement to the sphere of religion, though without retaining its original meaning in that domain. It originally designated the Lutherans in their contention for the truth of the Gospel against the corruptions of the papal dominion in the Church; now it has come to mean a religionist of any sort that refuses subjection to the pope. Manifestly the word Protestant would not thus indicate the faith and character of the Lutheran Church. We are Protestants, but that term in its modern usage includes religious sects with which we have no affinity and no church fellowship, because they do not accept the truth of the Gospel, which is the scriptural condition of Christian fellowship. If we adopted the name of Protestant Church, thousands of ignorant people, and some who are not so ignorant of the glorious fact which gave that name to the protesting believers of Reformation times, would be likely to confound our Christian Church in its absolute allegiance to the Word of God with sects that call themselves Protestant because they protest against all sovereignty over them, though it be the sovereignty of our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is King of Zion. We want no part or lot in the libertinism of organizations which call themselves Protestant churches, though they lack all that is essential to constitute a Christian Church.

Substantially the same difficulty presents itself when it is suggested that the Lutheran Church should be content to drop the Lutheran name and adopt that which was accepted in the times of the Reformation, when it was

called the Evangelical Church. By this name it was then known in distinction from the Roman apostasy and the fanatical aberrations from the Gospel in their antipathy to Rome. It is a beautiful name, and it expresses what the Church is and contends for and confesses. But that name too has been abused, and ceases to carry with it its original and proper meaning as an appellation of the Church. In its present usage it no longer identifies the Christian Church of the Reformation, then called Protestant and Evangelical, in its terrific conflicts with the corruptions and usurpations of Rome and its tremendous power. There are churches nowadays that condemn the Lutheran Church as semi-papistical, and that manifest no profound interest in maintaining the truth of the Gospel, even treating its central doctrine of justification by faith in Christ without the deeds of the law as doubtful, if not entirely false, and that still, because professing to receive the Scriptures as the Word of God, call themselves Evangelical. No one could in our day know that the Church of the Augsburg Confession is meant when mention is made of an Evangelical Church, unless a special indication were given that the term is used in the historic sense.

Best of all would be the name Christian, but least of all would this in our times be a designation clearly distinguishing the great Church of the Reformation from all sects, Romish and Reformed, that also assume the precious name. Some organizations which claim to be Christian Churches have indeed no right to bear it, because they deny the Triune God and reject the whole plan of salvation through faith in the Incarnate Son of God and the redemption effected through His blood, which is the essence of Christianity. As against them the Church of the Augsburg Confession could rightfully call itself the Christian Church, because they are not Christian. But this does not apply to all sects. Some of them are Christian Churches, notwithstanding their refusal to accept the Augsburg Confession, which sets forth the Christian faith in its pristine purity. The Church of Christ is one and ever remains one, notwithstanding all the dissensions and external disruptions which sin has brought among us. But in the outward organizations of Christians differences have led to divisions, and thus different Churches were formed. This is in violation of the divine command, "that there be no divisions among you," (1 Cor. 1:10), and those who cause them will have to answer for the sin. But one does not necessarily cease to be a Christian when he sins, damnable as every sin is and dangerous as it is to every sinner. Penitent sinners are pardoned by God's grace through faith in Christ,

and sincere penitence and faith include, in the pardon embraced, sins of ignorance as well as sins that trouble the conscience. And in an association of Christians to form a visible church distinct from that of the Augsburg Confession there are usually some who join without much regard to the doctrinal differences, on the ground of which the organization is formed as a separate church. They adhere to that which is Christian truth and have no intention to adopt the error, which is the ultimate ground of forming a separate church and which constitutes the separate organization of a sect. In this world of sin, and of consequent disorder in human intellect and action, such deplorable conditions are unavoidable.

“There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest.” 1 Cor. 2:9.

There were Christians even among the Papists in the time of the Reformation, and no doubt are still, notwithstanding that the testimony of the Reformers, and of the Church of the Reformation since, has apparently rendered them without all semblance of excuse for submitting still to the great papal Antichrist. There are poor, oppressed people under the dominion of the great Roman apostasy, who have never been permitted to hear that testimony and who, while they sigh under their burdens and for lack of better knowledge loyally bear them, still flee for refuge to the hope set before them in Christ, scant as their opportunities of knowing Him as the Savior of their souls has been, and great as the danger is that, amid the rubbish piled upon it by human tradition and priestly arrogance, the multitude under the papal yoke will never find the pearl of great price. The Church of the Augsburg Confession therefore even acknowledges the Romish sect to be a Christian Church. She does not forget the persecution which she suffered at the hands of the pope and the slavish adherents of the Antichrist in the great struggle of the Reformation, and the continuance of that persecution even to this day wherever the Antichrist had power to oppress and kill the confessors of the Gospel of Christ, but she just as little forgets what is due, according to that Gospel of grace and mercy, to poor sinners who, while they profess to be Romanists and are kept in ignorant slavery under the despotic heel of popish tyranny, still trust in Christ as their Savior, not in the virgin and the saints, who cannot help them. And so in her broad evangelical liberality, which the unwise liberalism of nature is incapable of appreciating, she

recognizes the divinely guaranteed rights of Christian believers in all the sects, deeply as she deplors their sinful institution to the great detriment of the Evangelical Church with its pure confession of the truth revealed in the Gospel, and acknowledges their organizations, if they only accept the Bible and the plan of salvation through Christ as the Savior of the world, to be Christian Churches. She cannot recognize their right to organize churches in opposition to the Evangelical Church of the Reformation; she cannot fellowship these churches and thus acknowledge what she knows to be false, and imply that her Confession is not the truth of the Gospel on which all Christians can present a united front against all the hosts of Christ's enemies; but neither can she deny that Christians may err, and that whatever may be the case with the leaders of sects, Christians may be found among them, and because of these the organization must be recognized as a Christian Church. There is therefore a number of visible churches in the world that are rightfully called Christian. On his account the Lutheran Church could not, as one among them, be entitled alone to that name.

The Christians were first called Lutherans by their enemies, and it was not meant as a title of honor, as the disciples of Christ were not meant to be honored when they were first called Christians at Antioch. In both cases it was meant as a reproach. Notwithstanding the great difference in appropriateness of application, there was in both cases good reason for accepting the name. The accusation designed to be implied by their enemies, when the believers in Christ were called Christians, was true. They owned Christ to be their Master; they accepted His Word as supreme authority; they trusted in Him for salvation; they submitted their hearts and consciences to His guidance. All that the appellation Christian could properly express was not only admitted, but joyfully and emphatically confessed. Whatever shame might attach to the confession, they were glad to bear. The case was different when the effort was made to bring reproach on the confessors of the Gospel in the times of the Reformation by calling them Lutherans. The accusation designed to be implied by their enemies was not true. All that could properly be applied to the Christians at Antioch could be properly applied to the Christians who confessed their Evangelical faith at Augsburg. That they believed in Luther as their Lord and Master and submitted their consciences to his authority, as was insinuated by giving them a name which was thought opprobrious, as a vile slander. Our fathers did not shrink from bearing shame for Christ's sake. They were ready even to sacrifice

their lives, if that were necessary, to bear unflinching testimony to the Gospel truth which they confessed. But they resisted unjust reproach and were unwilling to support the efforts of their enemies to fasten it upon them to the injury of the Evangelical cause. Hence Luther objected to the name, and the advocates of the Gospel hesitated to accept it. They called themselves Evangelical Christians and their organization the Evangelical Church, and had little cause to complain when they were called Protestants. This was sufficient to distinguish them from the Romanists, against whose abuses they protested and in opposition to whose errors they maintained the pure truth of the Gospel of Christ and His grace unto salvation. But when individuals and parties arose, who indeed protested against Romish tyranny and superstition, and thus could claim to be Protestants, and who accepted some doctrines of the Gospel as they had been brought to light by the Reformation, and could thus show some title to the Evangelical name, while all of them refused to submit entirely to the Word of God and therefore declined to accept the Augsburg Confession, which sets forth in its purity the faith founded on that Word, the whole subject presented itself in a different aspect. There were other considerations to reckon with besides the reproach that the name Lutheran, according to the design and desire of our foes, might carry with it. All the names given to our Church, except that of the Church of the Augsburg Confession, are, because of the abuse to which language is always exposed, liable to be misunderstood, and the rule which experience has established as that the misunderstandings, like the abuses, all operating under the same power of human sin, lean to the side of evil. The Church of the Augsburg Confession could preserve its identity in the minds of the people, when it spoke of itself as the Protestant or the Evangelical Church, only by referring to the historical meaning of these terms. But these could still be misunderstood by multitudes who cared too little about the matter to give history much attention. The word Lutheran came to be less liable to misapprehension than the others, because it marked the distinction between the doctrines for which Luther contended and which were confessed at Augsburg, and the errors of the fanatics and of the Zwinglian and Calvinistic parties, who were not in accord with the Augsburg Confession. The name Lutheran came to be a clearer designation for the pure Gospel which Luther taught and Christians believed in the days of the Reformation, and the great Church of the Augsburg Confession has accepted the name. It need not be said that this is not done in the sense in which the Papists en-

deavored to fix upon Evangelical Christians a name indicating their slavishly following Luther instead of abiding by the papal institutions and ordinances, but in the sense of adhering to the pure Gospel which Luther was the divinely chosen instrument of restoring to the Christian Church. Sincere believers of the truth revealed in Christ for man's salvation have no reason to be ashamed of Luther, whom God sent to bring again to His people the precious truth in Jesus and whose heroic contention for the faith once delivered to the saints led to the establishment of the Church of the Augsburg Confession, now generally called the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

History has many complications and introduces many an intricacy into questions which in themselves are not difficult. There is but one Christian Church, as there is but one Christ. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Eph. 4:4-6. The one body is the company of believers in the Savior of the world, who form the one holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. This Christian Church becomes visible by the confession of these believers for the glory of their Lord, and by their association for worship and by the administration of the means of grace, that thus they may edify themselves and lead others to the inheritance of the saints in light.

This external association is the Church, which is a kingdom not of this world, a spiritual kingdom under the one King who reigns in the hearts of His subjects by faith, but the Church by the necessity of the earthly conditions taking its place and performing its functions in the world. Every congregation of believers that is gathered is thus the Church in that place. The doctrine of the Church would thus be simple, if sin and its disordering consequences had not to be reckoned with. All the thousands of congregations collected in the world, being composed of believers, would, though with reference to them we must speak of churches in the plural number, be one body in virtue of the one Lord with whom they are united and the one faith which unites them. The unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace, which is the ideal condition of the Christian Church, would be preserved in the visible organization as it is in the invisible essence. But the disturbing element of sin has asserted itself in these associations of believers, as it has in everything human, and rendered the subject complex.

When the one holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, is described as the aggregate of all the congregations on earth that profess to be

Christians, doubts and difficulties arise in reflecting minds. There is some truth underlying the description, but there are conditions that have been overlooked, but which are important both for the understanding of the subject and for the right conduct of the Church's work. Confusion has thus been introduced.

It is true that when Christian believers, according to the Lord's will as revealed in the Scriptures, confess Him before men and unite for the preservation and propagation of His kingdom among them by a regular use of the means of grace committed to them, they are the Church in that locality, with all the rights and powers of the Church secured to them by the promise of the great King in Zion, that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Matt. 18:20. As a congregation of believers they have all the rights and powers of the Church, and the Lord Jesus, to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth, is with them.

But even believers may in some instances be unmindful of their Lord's great commission to teach all nations "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," and to overlook the promise which assures them of the success of their work if they are faithful to Him, and of their dreadful responsibility if they depart from His Word, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Matt. 28:20.

And more than this must enter our thoughts. There are some who join these congregations without even being believers. Of course they could not rightfully be admitted without confessing the faith which makes the association a Christian Church; but some men who have not faith, from other than Christian motives, will make the requisite confession, though their hearts are not in accord with it; and though to many souls the fact is too appalling to be believed, some sects have sunk so far below all Christian rectitude as to admit applicants without such a confession. Not only is it possible, but experience shows it to be a fact, that organizations have been formed under the name of Christian churches which no believer who trusts in the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to cleanse him from all sin, could intelligently join, or even recognize as in any proper sense Christian. And some churches have so much of dangerous human error mixed with their acceptance of revealed truths that doubt must be excited in seriously disposed lovers of the great Gospel of salvation revealed from heaven, whether they could render God service by confessing and working together with them.

There always were and always will be consciences rendered tender by the grace of God in Christ, in view of their own sin and of their rescue as brands from the burning by the unspeakable mercy of their almighty Savior, that will shrink from doctrines so conflicting with His Word, so obscuring of His glory, so dangerous to souls, and so damaging to the cause of His kingdom, as those advocated by some sects of ancient and modern times. Their profound concern for their own salvation and their loving solicitude for the salvation of their fellow-sinners whom Christ has purchased with His blood, coupled with their persistent study of the Holy Scriptures and fervent prayer, must perforce lead many to distinguish between the different organizations of professed believers in Christ and decline to consider them all equally acceptable to God and worthy of the approbation of Christian believers.

The Lord accepts no unbeliever, and a sincere believer will approve no departure from the Lord's Word, through which He gives us the knowledge of the saving truth, works the faith in us that embraces the truth, and exercises his sovereignty as King in the kingdom of truth. Eventually it must become evident that the Church of our Lord, which is the communion of saints, while it certainly remains one body, notwithstanding all aberrations and heresies which history shows us in its external organization, is not the sum of all associations and sects claiming to be Christians, the aggregation of all denominations, but is simply the congregation of believers in all the world, irrespective of particular names and denominational boundaries.

The evangelical Christians of the times of the Reformation heartily accepted the ancient creeds as their confession, and thus declared that they were faithful to the Christian Church of all the centuries since the apostles. There were numerous Christians who regarded such a declaration inconsistent with the undeniable act that they were waging war against the papal hierarchy by which the visible Christian Church was ruled at the time of the Reformation; and there are many Christians now who evidently concur in that opinion. Such thoughts would not be entertained by true believers if the matter were rightly understood. We have endeavored to point out where the difficulty lies.

In the Church as it existed under the pope sin had gained the ascendancy and exercised its dominion. The Christians were in the visible organization under the pope and thus constituted a Christian Church, but the papal usurpations and innovations and superstitions, supported by human tradi-

tions and ordinances in conflict with Holy Scripture, were not Christian. They were the fruit of the evil seed sown and grown while the Christians slept. Christians thus came under the tyranny of the pope and suffered for their neglect of vigilance; but while the miserable situation and the forces at work tended to dethrone the King, to set aside His Word, to deprive the souls of peace through faith in the forgiveness of sins, and to undermine all Christianity, they did not on that account cease to be a congregation of believers, though in many local organizations there should be but two or three left who had not bowed their knees to Baal, but were the salt that preserved the body from putrefaction and rendered a continuance of its life possible, though sick and sore and ready to die. Christendom had not reverted to heathendom, strongly as popery tended in that direction, and heathenish as many of its tenets and practices and people had become. There were Christian people yet, who truly constituted the Church, and the gates of hell had not prevailed against them.

The papal hierarchy with its dire defection from the dominion of Christ exerted through Holy Scripture, its proud usurpation of autocratic power, its antichristian decretals, and its truculent oppression of Christian people, was not the Church. This was then as always composed of the Christian believers in the congregations, and these were suffering under the Antichrist who had usurped dominion over them. There were therefore still thousands, though quiet in the land, who panted after refreshing grace as the hart panteth after the water brooks, though they knew no way of escape from the trouble that was upon them and the waves that came in on their souls. Luther was one of these.

Both by His providence and His grace, God had prepared him to be the spokesman and leader of His people in their pitiful estate. When he nailed his famous theses on the church door at Wittenberg, inviting all whose souls were moved by the sad situation of the Church to discuss the subjects proposed, he did not know that God designed to establish on earth a pure Christian Church of the Augsburg Confession which should be free from papal usurpations and papal corruptions, and in which the Lord Jesus alone should reign and therefore His Word alone should exercise authority over the hearts and consciences of Christians. But he did know, and others who soon associated themselves with him knew, that there were grievous burdens upon the hearts of believers that should be lifted and crying evils in the Church that should be abolished. They desired a reformation, of a new

church. To this their labors and their prayers were directed. In pursuance of this purpose they fought bravely against the pope and all popish corruptions and superstitions that had crept into the Church, but they did this in behalf of the Christians who suffered under papal oppressions and of the truth which all Christians confessed from the beginning.

It was the faith of the Christian Church as expressed in the ancient creeds, for which they contended, and it was this same faith which they set forth in the Augsburg Confession, when the Romanists persisted in their unscriptural doctrines and practices.

So stubbornly did the leaders of the Romish Church cling to their errors and abuses and resist all evangelical efforts to effect a reform, that in their blindness they refused even to tolerate the old faith of the Christian Church and the pure worship which it inspired. The adherents of the Gospel of Christ confessed that faith with revived Christian zeal and earnestness in the ancient creeds, and set it forth again in an explicated form in the Augsburg Confession. but the papal party, having fallen away from the truth revealed in Holy Scripture and believed by the true Christians of all time, obstinately refused to accept the Confession. On the contrary, they condemned it as heretical and persecuted the Christian Church that confessed it. As papal power and prestige carried with them multitudes who in their ignorance preferred their slavery under the tyrannical pope, to the proffered evangelical liberty under the gracious reign of Christ, the adherents of the Antichrist that sat in the temple of God at Rome, hardening themselves against the Gospel, became a Romish sect in open hostility to the Christian Church of the Augsburg Confession.

In the conclusion of the first part of that Confession which embraces the doctrinal articles, the second part referring to papistic abuses, our fathers declare:

“This is about the sum of doctrine among us, in which can be seen that there is nothing which is discrepant with the Scriptures, or with the Church Catholic, or even with the Roman Church, so far as that Church is known from the writings of the fathers. This being the case, they judge us harshly who insist that we shall be regarded as heretics.”

It is a declaration that is of fundamental import for the understanding of the Reformation and the Church of the Reformation, usually called the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Those who, in those times of fierce conflict with the powers of darkness, with Luther believed the Gospel of grace and salva-

tion through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, had no thought of establishing a separate Church. The spirit of sect, which in our day makes such a project so reasonable and its execution so easy, never entered their hearts of humble faith in the Word which God had given them. They knew themselves to be members, by the faith which God had wrought in their souls, of the one body of our blessed Savior which is the holy Christian Church. From that body, the grace of our Lord helping them, they would never part. They knew indeed that the one Church of Christ, the one holy communion of saints as believers in the one only Savior from sin and death, is not an external kingdom of this world, and that when it organizes in any given locality as the Church in that place, it is subject to the ravages of sin, from which no locality is exempt, even though the organization is formed by Christians, who are delivered from the bondage of sin and set their faces against it in every form. But they knew also that the kingdom of God has come to us, and that though it is not of this world, it has a place on earth for the salvation of men sojourning here, notwithstanding all that sin and Satan can do against it and its saving work.

Imperfections attach to the associations of believers, because they too have sinful natures, and people who are not believers find ways of admission into their Christian society, which is called the Christian Church, but they do not doubt the Lord's promise:

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”
Matt. 18:20.

Were it not that so any professed Christians still remain dull of understanding, it would be needless to mention, that coming together in His name means following Him as He makes Himself known through His Word and assembling to confess Him as their Savior and to worship Him in the beauty of holiness.

If two or three score of merely pretended believers should gather together with the two or three who truly believe in His name and rejoice in His great salvation, that would not render His promise void and deprive the assembly of the rights and titles, the power and blessings, of the Christian Church. Nor could the evil influences of sin exerted in such a company destroy the validity of its title to be the Church in that place, so long as it remained a company of true believers in the Gospel who confess the truth re-

vealed in Holy Scripture and come together to worship Christ, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and to preach His Word and administer the Sacraments according to His institution; for where this is the case Christ is present to dispense His blessings and perform His saving work.

The reformers therefore did not doubt that, notwithstanding all the corruptions of the Roman Church in doctrine and life, it was still, because of the believers yet found in it and of the Word and Sacraments yet administered among them, the Christian Church in its appearance on earth, impure as that appearance presented it. Nay, even when the abominations of Romanism, with its rejection of the Gospel and its persecution of the Christians who confessed it in its purity, were so obstinately persisted in, in spite of all evangelical teaching and entreaty and warning, as to convince our fathers that the pope is the very Antichrist, they still saw the visible marks of the Church in the Roman communion and therefore strenuously labored to reform, not to destroy it. If any have thought that their unceasing warfare against the pope, the papal party, and the entire abomination of popery, proves the contrary, they should give renewed attention to the faith and the history of the Reformation, and think again.

Our fathers never recognized the apal hierarchy, which had usurped all power and abused it for the suppression of the truth in Jesus and the oppression of Christian people who believed that truth. Against that high handed usurpation and the trampling on all rights of Christian believers which followed the flagrant wrong, they battled with all the heroic energy of souls intent on rescuing downtrodden brethren from the dreadful tyranny which had its relentless heel upon them and was crushing the life out of them. It was a fierce contest for the faith of Christendom and the Church of Christ against the Antichristian pope and his whole popish system of despotic rule and luxurious living.

The Lutheran Reformation was a work of faith and a labor of love in behalf of all Christians; for it had no private interests of individuals and parties in view, but the glory of God and the salvation of souls, which concerned every believer and therefore the whole Christian Church, as well as the faithful men who bore the heat and burden of the sultry day and wielded the word in the grim war for truth and righteousness. If the poor people of God under the papacy had known in the time of their visitation the things which belong to their peace, they would not, as willing slaves of their oppressors, have joined in the persecution of those who came to deliver them

through the truth that makes us free: and if those in our day who dream of peace without a conflict with sin and Satan knew the Scriptures and the grace of God better, they would cease to charge on the Church of the Reformation a lack of love when she girded on the whole armor of God and struck sturdy blows at popery and the pope, that Christians might be rescued from the darkness and bondage in which they were held.

Believing the truth revealed in Holy Scripture with the primitive Christians and the Christians of all time, the Church of the Reformation declared her faith in the words of the ancient creeds, which she accepted most cordially as her confession and which, because the corruption of the Roman Church under the unhappy dominion of the pope rendered this necessary for the preservation of the Christian faith and the protection of the Christian people, she amplified in the Augsburg Confession.

In view of the declaration of the evangelical Christians who fought the battles of the Reformation and of the facts as history presents them, it is a grievous wrong done to those heroes of the Christian faith, as well as to us, when the Church of the Augsburg Confession is spoken of as a religious sect, though admitted to be Christian. This would imply that our evangelical fathers advocated a peculiar doctrine which differentiated them from the Church with its complete and unadulterated Christian Creed, and that our Augsburg Confession accordingly adds something to or subtracts something from the revealed truth which all Christians are bound, in loyalty to their King and His Word, to believe and confess, thus making it the symbol of a party whose claim to be Christians may be conceded indeed, but which has peculiarities unsanctioned by the Lord and the Scriptures, and which causes an unnecessary and therefore sinful division among God's people; and by insisting on such peculiarity, and on the ground of it causing a separation from the Christian Church in its loyalty to the Lord and His laws as laid down in the Scriptures, constitutes a church of its own. Such things have been done by erring Christians, but it is an outrage to charge such things upon Luther and his associates in the days of the Reformation, or to charge them, without even attempting to furnish any proof, upon the Lutheran Church now. If it were true, the Evangelical Lutheran Church would, in fidelity to its own faith and confession, concede that it has no divine right to exist. It makes no such concession, and indignantly resents the imputation that it is a sect among other sects, which are so abundant in these days of re-

ligious indifference and superficial thought about the Church of Christ and its meaning and purpose in this world that lieth in wickedness.

The Augsburg Confession declared in amplified form the faith of the Christian Church as it had been held by the followers of Christ since the days of His visible sojourn on earth and of the preaching of the apostles, and the faith of Luther and his associates on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and in accord with Christians in all time who believed the truth of the great Gospel of grace in our mighty Savior. It was a confession of the old faith on the basis of the old Gospel, in harmony with the old confessions grounded in the same old Bible. It never entered the hearts of the brave men who labored and fought and suffered for the truth of the Gospel and the faith once delivered to the saints, to establish a Lutheran sect in opposition to the papal apostasy. Their object was to reform the Church by purging out the putrid matter which popery had injected into the visible body of the Church and which threatened blood poisoning. The purpose was to purify it and save it from the threatening ruin. Only because Rome obstinately resisted the Reformation and refused to be healed did a separation take place.

The Roman Church under the pope rejected the Gospel which true Christians always believed and which the Lutherans set forth again with new power and beauty in their Augsburg Confession, and thus sundered its connection with the Church that continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and, condemning the pure doctrine of the Gospel which Lutherans confessed, became the Romish sect under the papal Antichrist.

Romanists often boast of the antiquity of their Church and adduce this as an argument against the Church of the Reformation. Christians are guided by the Word of God, and the question of age has little to do with their faith. We say this because the revelation of heavenly truth and the Scriptures in which it is written for our learning are old, and the novelty of an alleged article of faith, professedly based on a recent revelation from God, constitutes an antecedent judgment against its claims. When Rome in 1870 proclaimed the infallibility of the pope as a dogma necessary to be believed unto salvation, the Papists themselves confessing that until that time it was not an article of the Christian faith, the very fact that it is an innovation of recent date decides against its acceptance, not because age is regarded as a criterion of truth, but because its introduction long after the Scriptures were written proves that it cannot be Scriptural; and this, in the minds of all who accept

the Scriptures as the only rule of faith, decides against it. But even when misguided men attach great weight to antiquity as evidence of truth and right, the Roman Church has no advantage over the Church of the Reformation.

When Papists sneeringly ask us, “Where was your Church before Luther came?” they imagine that any answer which we could give would concede to them the palm of victory. A sufficient retort would be the question, “Where was your Church before the Council of Trent?” The Augsburg Confession is older than the Roman Creed based on the Tridentine decrees which fixed the papal errors as the confession of an obstinate papal party that rejected the Gospel and constituted itself the Romish sect in opposition to the Evangelical Church of the Reformation. Our Church introduced nothing into its Confession that was not as old as the Gospel. Its faith is that which Christians confessed in the ancient creeds, and these it continues to accept as its confession. The Roman Church accepted them also, and on that account Luther and his associates hoped that the evils which disgraced the Church under the dominion of the popes and that were in consistent with the truth confessed in the old creeds, which the Church of Rome still outwardly accepted, would be abolished, and the Christian Church, freed from popish corruption and tyranny, would become more worthy of its name. But they were disappointed.

The pope and the cardinals, and all the rest of the dignitaries who loved the luxurious living which their office afforded more than the Gospel which they little appreciated, could not be converted to the truth revealed from heaven for the salvation of their souls; and the people, kept in ignorance and superstition and shamefully oppressed, could not all be brought to the light and the assertion of their freedom through faith in the Redeemer. The Christians were divided; some accepted the Gospel and rejoiced in the great salvation, some refused to accept it and join the evangelical Christians in their contention for the truth of the Gospel. A reconciliation of the two parties was impossible, because true believers could under no conditions surrender their faith, on which all their peace on earth and hopes of salvation after this earthly life depended, and the followers of the pope, so far as they felt any interest at all in the momentous matter involved concerning the glory of God and the salvation of their souls, in their ignorance thought it best to adhere to what they had been taught to regard as the Church, outside of which there could be no salvation.

For this reason it should not be denied that some sincere Christians, who, notwithstanding all the abominable errors of popery, still believed in Christ as their Savior, remained under the papal yoke and helped to swell the Romish sect under the Anti-Christian pope in opposition to the Christian Church of the Augsburg Confession. Hence it comes that we can still speak of a Roman Church, because of the Christians in the visible organization, although that Church, because of its departures from the truth of the Gospel and its insistence on human errors as conditions of church membership, has become one of the least excusable and most dangerous of Christian sects.

Of all the visible organizations of the Church on earth the great Church of the Augsburg Confession is the oldest. But that is not wherein we glory. What constitutes her greatness and her glory is her pure Christian faith and confession, in which she presents herself before the world as the true visible Church of Christ on earth, while other organizations of Christians, like that of the Romanists, because there are no doubt true believers among them, must be recognized as Christian Churches, but because of the unscriptural doctrines for which they stand, must just as surely be recognized as impure churches, and because of the divisions effected by their insistence on their errors, as Christian sects.

The relation of our Augsburg Confession to the earlier Christian confessions is of such fundamental significance that a more extended exposition seemed necessary for a correct understanding of the position and contention of the Church of the Reformation. In regard to its relation to the other Confessions in our Book of Concord we can be more brief. They were all called forth by the attacks made upon the Christian faith confessed at Augsburg, and are simply a repetition and defense of that evangelical faith of the Christian Church. This is apparent from the name given to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. It would be a strange thing if any Christian sincerely accepted a creed, but rejected the whole biblical ground on which it is based or the whole biblical light which renders it glorious. The Apology contains the exposition and scriptural ground of the faith confessed at Augsburg. When this Confession was read before the magnificent Imperial Diet there assembled, a stir was caused in the great assembly which may justly be called a consternation among the Papists and a jubilation among the Lutheran Protestants.

The truth of God was declared among many opponents, and while it only increased the bitterness of men who cared little about the truth, but much

for their life of luxury and ease under papal protection, it awakened the consciences of many who loved this world, but did not deny the account to be rendered in the world to come. It was the very truth of the Gospel that was set forth in the Lutheran Confession, and many who had been groping in darkness saw the light and trembled, while some, more resolute, joined the Protestants.

The papacy was shaken as it had not been shaken since the royal defense of Luther at Worms and the valiant protest of the Lutheran princes at Spire. Into what a perplexing situation the papistic party was placed by the meek and mild profession of the Christian faith! Those who were sincere Christians could only rejoice at such a confession in the midst of an untoward generation. But there were those who had other interests than those of Christian truth at stake and these, unfortunately for them were paramount, as they had forgotten, or perhaps never learned, that the followers of Christ must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

The Emperor vacillated, but the Papists were determined to resist the Reformation, and their influence over the emperor was decisive. He would have been a better man and would have rendered more righteous judgment if he could have emancipated himself from this baleful influence. But he could not, and therefore it was determined that a Confutation of the Augsburg Confession should be prepared. The work was accordingly presented to the Diet, and thus in the providence of God the occasion was offered for the precious Apology of the Augsburg Confession, which the Church accepted as a true exposition of the faith that it confessed. It is a lucid, logical and learned defense of that faith, and those who believe the truth set forth in the Augsburg Confession can read it only with delight, rejoicing both in the truth which is defended and the power with which it is maintained. Let people read it more, that they may grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and become the more rooted and grounded in the truth presented in the Augsburg Confession. Of that truth it is such a clear and convincing exposition and defense that one must wonder how any Christian can accept the Augsburg Confession as the exponent of his faith without accepting this Apology, whose power and beauty appeals to all men, but whose evangelical truth wins the hearts of all Lutherans, whose faith the Augsburg Confession declares to all the world.

Circumstances led to another confession of the same truth in the Smalcald Articles. The Lutherans had repeatedly appealed to a free General

Council of the Church, but the pope was averse to granting such a favor for fear of damaging his authority. At Augsburg the emperor had promised such a Council to be held within six months after the adjournment of the Diet, but the pope managed to frustrate his design by requiring conditions which the Protestants could not accept. But in June, 1536, the Pope issued a bull convoking a General Council to be held at Mantua in May of the following year. Although the time was now past when the Lutherans felt much concern for such an assembly, the Elector of Saxony deemed it well to be prepared, in case the Protestant princes and theologians should conclude to attend. He therefore instructed Luther to put the articles of faith in proper shape for consideration at such a Council.

Whilst the judgment of many might be, that the Augsburg Confession, which was universally accepted as the symbol of the Lutheran Churches, would be sufficient for the purpose, the elector assumed that under the changed conditions it might be desirable to make a new statement of the old faith, so that prominence might be given to the points which it would be desirable to have the Council consider.

This was the opinion also of Luther, who desired no revision of the grand and noble Confession of Augsburg, but thought that the faith there set forth should be cast into a different form to meet the exigency. He accordingly drew up the document which is known as the Smalcald Articles, submitted them to his colleagues at Wittenberg and a few other prominent theologians invited thither for conference, and upon their approval sent them to the elector. He read them over carefully once and again, and declared that they were in complete agreement with the Augsburg Confession and that he would confess them before the Council and the whole world.

The evangelical princes and theologians met on February, 1537, to deliberate about accepting the invitation to the Council, and although it was decided not to attend, the articles prepared by Luther were approved and subscribed, and the dissertation on the supremacy of the pope and the power of the bishops, written by Melancthon, was added at Smalcald. The language of this additional confession is not so meek and mild as that of the Augsburg Confession, as now the hope formerly entertained that a reformation of the Roman Church might be possible, was dispelled, and nothing remained but to fight the battles of the Evangelical Church against the papal party that had hardened into a Romish sect.

The Smalcald Articles are the final declaration of independence of Rome on the part of the Church of the Reformation, declaring the same evangelical faith witnessed so gently and beautifully in the Augsburg Confession, but now in a tone of strenuousness and defiance befitting the occasion, and giving reasons why the Papists must abandon all hopes of ever subjugating the Christian people who had learned to know and prize the glorious Gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Even prior to the Diet of Augsburg and the grand Confession witnessed there, Luther had published his two Catechisms, the large one designed mainly for the education and guidance of pastors and teachers, the small one for the instruction of the common people and especially of the children. Never had the great truths of the Scriptures been presented in a manner more plain and simple, more childlike and beautiful, than in these Catechisms, and especially in the small one, explaining the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Scripture doctrine of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, "as the head of the family should teach them in all simplicity to his household."

Not only the Lutheran Church, but all the civilized world has admired the Small Catechism as a masterpiece of Christian instruction, so brief and yet so full, so simple and yet so profound. But evangelical Christians loved it not so much for its literary beauty and finish as for its clear and cogent presentation of the principal teachings of the Bible, making plain in a marvelously short compass all that is essential to our salvation, so that from it the unlearned by a little diligence could obtain an insight into the revealed plan of salvation which even most of the learned among the Romanists lacked.

There was no necessity for a formal recognition of these Catechisms to give them symbolical authority. The people received them spontaneously as the expression of their faith, and even as early as the Diet of Augsburg inquirers as to what was taught in the evangelical churches could be referred to these Catechisms as containing a sufficient answer. But they were later also officially assigned a place among the Lutheran Confessions. The Formula of Concord says:

“Because these highly important matters belong also to the common man and laity, who for their salvation must distinguish between pure and false doctrines, we accept as confessional, also, the Large and the Small Catechisms of Dr. Luther, as they were written by him and incorporated into his works, because they have been unanimously approved and received by all churches adhering to the Augsburg Confession, and publicly used in churches, schools and families, and because also in them the Christian doctrine from God’s Word is comprised in the most correct and simply way, and in like manner is sufficiently explained for simple laymen.”

Of all our Confessions the Formula of Concord is the latest, having been completed in 1577 and published with the other confessions in 1580, fifty years after the Augsburg Confession. Unfortunately it is also the most controverted. In view of the conditions which called it into being and rendered its preparation a labor of love as well as a work of faith, this is not surprising. Not all men have the Christian strength, born of enlightened faith and experience of its saving power, which characterized the evangelical confessors at Augsburg. Some Christians are weak and vacillating, though they know the truth sufficiently well and are sufficiently impressed by it to join the ranks of those who confess allegiance to the Gospel. We see this but too often in the Church of our own day. And human hearts were not different in the days of the Reformation.

There were professed followers of Luther who became wild fanatics, and caused the reformers more heartaches than did the murderous machinations of the Papists. There were some even who, supposing that they saw the light of the Gospel more clearly than Luther and his associates, thought it right and good to stand aloof from the Augsburg Confessors and offer to the emperor confessions of their own. There were among the Lutherans some who trembled when the papal lions roared and who needed the constant help of stronger men to keep them steady and prevent their flight. And the time of storm and distress was not over when the Diet of Augsburg closed. The decision was adverse to the Reformation, and the Lutherans were in daily danger. God permitted the severe trial of their faith to be continued amid oppressions and wars. Rome was dominant in physical force, though it was conquered in its conflict with spiritual truth. It could accomplish nothing in the kingdom of God against the Gospel of its Lord, but it still had the support of the kingdoms of this world, and it had not abandoned the fond hope of crushing the Reformation and regaining its former power and prestige in the Church. It threatened and persecuted, and endeavored by terror to drive back the escaped sheep into its den of wolves. But it also enticed and al-

lured. It appealed to the love of quiet and peace and harmony which are such powerful motives in human hearts, and often succeeded by such appeals to loosen men's hold on heavenly truth, where its resort to fear and terror failed.

There were men in those days, as there are now and always have been, who are easily frightened or easily allured, and who are not so established in the faith that the grace of God has made them proof against the temptations which error presents in its sophistical arguments or a spurious love and a peace where there is no peace. But there were also men like Melancthon, who loved the Gospel and could not by menaces or blandishments be driven or enticed away from what he regarded as the essentials of evangelical truth, but who so loved a quiet, peaceful life and prized harmony among Christian people so highly, that he could seek peace at an unwarrantable sacrifice of truth in what his peaceable disposition and kindly sentiment led him to regard as minor matters, or even things indifferent. He wavered sometimes when the whole cause of the Reformation might have been endangered, had not Luther lived to prompt him and support him with the admonitions and encouragements of the Word of God, to which he was always willing to give a ready and reverent hearing; but after Luther died, he felt less restraint and yielded more to the temptations which beset him in times that still vexed his troubled soul. And Melancthon was not the only one who lacked the firmness which the Gospel cause requires for its maintenance against the wiles of the devil and the weakness of the flesh.

A party arose in the Lutheran Church which regarded him a better leader than Luther, and which was willing to make concessions on various points of doctrine and practice to conciliate opponents. The Leipzig Interim illustrates the situation which resulted. In explanation we quote the following from the historical introduction to the Formula of Concord given in Dr. Jacobs' translation of our Symbolical Books:

“The Interim originated in the efforts of the Emperor Charles V. to restore peace in the Church by a compromise between the Protestants and the Romanists. The term is applied to three documents prepared for this end. The first of these as the Regensburg Interim of 1541, a document of uncertain origin, presented before a conference of theologians at Regensburg, which proved dissatisfactory to both sides and soon passed from notice. The second was the Augsburg Interim of 1548, drawn up by a commission of three appointed by the emperor, consisting of Julius von Pflug and Michael Helding (Romanists) and John Agricola (Protestant), which, while conceding many evangelical truths, not only reaffirmed many of the most erroneous doctrines of the papacy, but also required many of its most superstitious and oppressive ceremonies. Although condemned by the pope and rejected generally by the Papists, it was forced by violence upon many portions of Protestant Germany: and, in the persecution which attended its introduction, many were the faithful confessors who preferred imprisonment and banishment to accepting it. The Elector Maurice of Saxony from the very beginning was averse to it, and his theologians at Wittenberg, headed by Melancthon, were outspoken in their condemnation of the attempt which was thus made to suppress the Gospel. But at length they were overpowered by their fears and after long deliberation agreed upon a decision with respect to the Interim which received in December, 1548, the approval of the elector and was adopted as the standard for the regulation of divine worship in Saxony. Because of the concessions which his document made to the Augsburg Interim it received the name of ‘The Leipzig Interim’. Its great errors were two first, with respect to the propriety of yielding to the Papists in adiaphora, or matters of indifference, and then including under the adiaphora matters that were closely connected with the articles of faith; and secondly, in clothing the articles of faith on which there was a difference in language so ambiguous that those who did not hold the evangelical faith, while putting upon it their own interpretation, could be induced to subscribe them.”

This puts the unhappy affair very mildly. An unprejudiced examination of the Leipzig Interim reveals the fact that the entire fruit of the Reformation was in danger of being blasted by these ill — advised concessions, which even affected the very heart of the Gospel. It was virtually a consent to return to the abominations of popery where a glorious evangelical victory had been won. Melancthon’s attempted apology for the unjustifiable proceeding availed nothing. There were still men of strong faith who would rather die than surrender the blessed truth which they had confessed. When, in 1549, the attempt was made to introduce the Liturgy, which applied the principles adopted in the Leipzig Interim, the Church was aroused and the controversies became violent. What was designed as an act of prudent diplomacy to patch up a peace with an implacable enemy of the truth unto salvation, became the cause of alienation among its friends. The Evangelical Church became the scene of strife and suffering. In this confusion men of faith and love were unwearied in their efforts to restore peace on the of that truth which basis had been confessed at the Diet of Augsburg, and

which was universally recognized as the Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

By the blessing of God, after years of labor and prayer, the Formula of Concord was prepared and generally accepted. It set forth the points of dispute so clearly and decided the controversies according to the Word of God and the Evangelical Confessions so convincingly, that the Church again had peace within its borders.

The Formula of Concord was not a new confession in any such sense that additions or subtractions or modifications were made of the old faith presented in the Augsburg Confession. It is precisely the same doctrine, delivered anew in its application to controversies that had arisen among the confessors and designed to restore the harmony which had been disturbed. Therefore it expressly says:

“Because within thirty years, on account of the Interim and otherwise, some divisions arose among some theologians of the Augsburg Confession, we have wished plainly, distinctly and clearly to state and declare our faith and confession concerning each and every one of these taken in thesis and antithesis. i. e. the true doctrine and its opposite, for the purpose in all articles of rendering the foundation of divine truth manifest, and censuring all unlawful, doubtful, suspicious and condemned doctrines, wherever and in whatever books they may be found, and whoever may have written them, or even now may be disposed to defend them; so that every one may be faithfully warned to avoid the errors, diffused on all sides, in the writings of some theologians. and no one be misled herein by the reputation of any man. If the Christian reader will carefully examine this declaration in every emergency, and compare it with the writings enumerated above ‘(the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Church),’ he will find that what was in the beginning confessed concerning every article in the comprehensive summary of our religion and faith, and what was afterwards restated at various times, and is repeated by us in this document, is no way contradictory, but the simple, immutable, permanent truth, and that we therefore do not change from one doctrine to another, as our adversaries falsely assert, but earnestly desire to retain the once delivered Augsburg Confession and its unanimously received Christian sense, and through God’s grace to abide thereby firmly and constantly, in opposition to all corruptions which have entered.” Müller 573, 19, 20.

History has shown the correctness of the statement that a careful examination of the Formula will convince Christian minds of its complete agreement with the evangelical faith expressed in the Augsburg Confession, and the great multitude of princes, pastors and teachers who carefully examined and cordially signed it in 1580 have been sustained by the general approval of the Church of the Reformation down to our own times. Some have raised objections, but it is generally found that those who are not satisfied with its

clear and precise presentation of the Lutheran faith are usually men who, though they see the need of accepting the Augsburg Confession in order to warrant their claim to be Lutherans, are not in hearty accord with some of its articles and therefore speak of the Confession as being substantially correct, or correct in the fundamentals.

We cannot but think that those who find in the Augsburg Confession an exact expression of the very faith of their hearts cannot otherwise than rejoice in the clear repetition of that faith in the Formula of Concord as well as in its profound discussion of controverted questions and its restoration of peace in troublous times.

While the unlearned members of the Church need nothing more than the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession to declare their Lutheran faith and their accord with the confessors of the Gospel in the days of the Reformation, pastors and professors and teachers of every grade in the Church may justly be required to make manifest their harmony with the doctrines which she confesses and teaches by subscribing the Formula of Concord as well as her other Confessions as published in the Book of Concord, or Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The relation of our Augsburg Confession to the other symbols of the Church is thus apparent. They all confess the one Christian faith, which was not originated, but simply restored by the reformers, and which had been confessed by the Church from the beginning of its history. The Augsburg Confession unfolded and gave distinct expression, as the exigencies of the times required, to what was contained in the ecumenical creeds, and the other Confessions developed, as circumstances demanded it, what the Augsburg Confession implied. The Book of Concord in all its parts sets forth the one evangelical faith of the Church of the Reformation, the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

6. The Condemnations

OUR CONFESSIO*N* closes a number of its articles with an explicit rejection of the opposite doctrine. In the very first article the Lutheran Churches declare that “they condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article,” and mention some of them by name. Perhaps nothing in our Confession is more distasteful to our opponents than these condemnations, and even some Lutherans do not like them. They seem a needless appendage to the positive statement, and because offense is taken at them, objectionable on grounds of charity. For that reason they demand some notice and elucidation.

As our Lutheran forefathers spoke because they believed and confessed what they believed, as the glory of God and the welfare of man as well as the express divine commandment require, their purpose was not to conceal any part of the truth which is written in the Scriptures and which the Holy Spirit had opened their hearts to receive, but to declare and publish it with all the plainness and clearness at their command, that others too might share the peace and joy which it imparted to them. They knew that some did not accept the Gospel which they taught and confessed. They had a great controversy with Rome, otherwise there would have been no Reformation; and because they were set for the defense of the Gospel, not to gratify a grudge against any church or any man, or an ambition to win the applause of any parties or persons, they had a controversy with all who erred from the Gospel and taught otherwise than God’s Word teaches, whether they called themselves Romanists or Protestants, Jews or Greeks, otherwise there would have been no Church of the Augsburg Confession. As sincere believers whose only hope was in Christ and whose only guide in spiritual things was the Bible, they spoke the truth in love and desired to be fully understood. Therefore they stated the doctrines of their faith as distinctly and plainly as they could, and instead of trying to hide its opposition to errors that were current, lest errorists should take offense, they expressly rejected the contrary doctrine, that there might be no room for misunderstandings or

misinterpretation of the truth which they believed and confessed. They neither desired to give offense to those who believed otherwise and therefore could not sincerely confess with them, nor endeavored to conciliate them by using ambiguous language that might be construed in their favor; but sought only the glory of God by proclaiming the truth to which He bore witness, that it might triumph and make men free. Therefore they bore unequivocal testimony to that truth and in faith and love clinched their testimony by pointing out and rejecting the errors which are inconsistent with it. That is the position which the Evangelical Lutheran Church has in loyalty to her Confession occupied until this day.

In the preface to the Christian Book of Concord, wherein our Confessions were published together, reference is made to this subject. Our confessors there say:

“As to the condemnations, censures and rejections of godless doctrines, and especially of that which has arisen concerning the Lord’s Supper in this our declaration and thorough explanation and decision of controverted articles, these indeed should have been expressly set forth, not only that all should guard against these condemned doctrines, but also for certain other reasons, could in no way have been passed by. Thus as it is in no way our design and purpose to condemn those men who err from a certain simplicity of mind, and nevertheless are not blasphemers against the truth of the heavenly doctrine, much less indeed entire churches, which are either under the Roman Empire of the German nation, or elsewhere; nay, rather it has been our intention and disposition, in this manner, to openly censure and condemn only the fanatical opinions and their obstinate and blasphemous teachers, which we judge should in no way be tolerated in our dominions, churches and schools, because these errors conflict with the express Word of God, and that too in such a way that they can not be reconciled with it. We have also undertaken this for this reason, that all godly persons might be warned concerning diligently avoiding them. For we have no doubt whatever that even in those churches which have hitherto not agreed with us in all things, many godly and by no means wicked men are found, who follow their own simplicity, and do not understand aright the matter itself, but in no way approve the blasphemies which are cast forth against the Holy Supper, as it is administered in our churches according to Christ’s institution, and with the unanimous approval of all good men is taught in accordance with the words of the testament itself. We are also in great hope, that if they should be taught aright concerning all these things, the Spirit of the Lord aiding them, they would agree with us, and with our churches and schools, to the infallible truth of God’s Word. And assuredly the duty is specially incumbent upon all the theologians and ministers of the Church, that with such moderation as is becoming, they teach also from the Word of God those who either from a certain simplicity or ignorance have erred from the truth, that they may be duly reminded and warned of the danger to their salvation, lest perhaps, while the blind are leaders of the blind, all may perish.”

The purpose and spirit of these negative are the same as those which are manifest in the positive declarations, and all the objections raised against

the condemnations lie against the entire Confession, indeed against any clear and sincere confession of Christ as our only Savior, and God's Word as our only spiritual authority. There can be no honest confession of the truth without clearly rejecting the falsehood which denies it; and there can be no adequate appreciation of saving truth, and no sincere love of souls for whose salvation it was revealed, without warning against the falsities by which the enemy of souls and father of lies seeks to overthrow it or render it ineffective.

The reformers were deeply impressed with this, and took pains to teach the Gospel of God's grace unto man's salvation with great clearness and power, and to confess it with great purity and perspicuity, that all men who were willing to hear them might know the truth. That meant gathering round the banner of the Augsburg Confession which the Lutheran Church carried, but separating from those who decided not to accept that Confession.

They were not without feeling when some rejected the truth which they joyfully and patiently proclaimed, and refused to walk with them and work with them in building up the Church of the Reformation and join in its warfare against Satan and sin on the basis of the pure Gospel confessed at Augsburg; but that feeling was not one of malice toward these people, but rather of pity that they still remained in comparative darkness, though the light was shining all around. The refusal of some to join them neither changed their faith nor their love. They had spoken because they believed, and they could entertain no thought of swerving from their Confession because some declined to join them. They were prepared for that. There was a powerful party of Papists opposing them, and they knew that, notwithstanding the abounding grace of God, some of that party would not submit to the truth of the Gospel. That did not hinder them from making their noble confession before the powers and principalities at Augsburg.

And if the opposition of Rome with all its prestige and power and persecution could not shake their faith nor intimidate them in their purpose to confess it and stand by their Confession, though it should cost them their lives, much less could the opposition of some who had joined the protest against papal usurpation and tyranny induce them to grow weary in contending for the faith of the Gospel which was delivered to the saints and sustained them until that hour. They believed and therefore they continued

to speak, whoever might oppose. But the opposition could as little destroy their love as it could destroy their faith. Faith worketh by love.

The opponents were people for whom Christ died as well as for those who believed and declared their faith in the Augsburg Confession. By nature they were alike condemned in sin, and by grace they were all alike contemplated in the glorious plan of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, the good tidings of which should be unto all people. The reformers proclaimed these tidings to all. These are the Gospel which they preached and which is to be preached to all nations and to every creature. Those who by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit enforcing the truth in Jesus, were of one heart and one mind, declared their unity by their common confession. Those who denied or doubted or demurred, could of course not bear witness to the truth set forth in the Augsburg Confession, and could not be received even if inconsistently they had desired such reception. All who taught otherwise than God's Word teaches were of necessity rejected because they declined to accept the truth of the Gospel which alone binds together the believers whose faith is declared in the Augsburg Confession. But those who did not accept the evangelical bond of union which underlies the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession, were not all declared enemies of the truth in Jesus. So far as they were that, their condemnation as pronounced in the Scriptures, and Lutherans could not hesitate to repeat, without any qualification or extenuation, what the supreme authority has decided. The need which they felt for explanation arose from a different source.

Some were, comparatively speaking, innocent in their refusal to subscribe the Lutheran Confession, having in their simplicity and ignorance been misled by false teachers. Deceivers and deceived do not belong to the same class. Externally they come to the same result, but internally they are not the same. Circumstances have led and retained some in the Romish Church who have never rejected the way of salvation which the Lutheran Church teaches and confesses, and some are in the Reformed Churches who never denied the evangelical truth as it is set forth in our Confession, except so far as this was unwittingly done by their connection with a denomination that teaches a different doctrine and is therefore not affiliated with the Church of the Augsburg Confession. Upon such persons the negative sentences in our articles pronounce no condemnation. Indeed, it is not with persons at all that they are primarily concerned, but with the doctrine of the

Gospel, which is confessed in its purity and the opposite of which is rejected. That persons are thus involved is manifest, and this complicates the subject and renders it difficult.

When the Romanists or Anabaptists are condemned it might seem as if the meaning were that no member of the Romish or Baptist Church could be saved. Our confessors entertained no such thought. To pass judgment on the hearts of men is the prerogative of God alone, and their humble faith was a sure protection against such arrogance. What the Lord in His Word condemns they never hesitated to condemn, and what that Word pronounces indispensable to salvation they unwaveringly pronounced indispensable. However loud and indignant the cry that might be raised against it. And they expressly declare that, when they reject the unscriptural doctrines of a church, they do not mean to condemn all who are associated with such an erring church.

They were glad to think that where what is indispensable to salvation is still retained in a denomination whose errors are rejected, some of the members may be sincere believers in Christ, notwithstanding the errors of their Church. When a religious society denied the Savior of the world, without whom salvation is impossible, so that there could be no believers among them, such as the Unitarians, they refused to call them Christian Churches, or recognize their claim to Christian rights or the possession of Christian powers.

Of course in the gathering and government of visible congregations the Church must deal with persons as well as with doctrines. This is unavoidable, because the Church is the congregation of believers, not simply the faith and confession and doctrine which gives this congregation its distinctive Christian character as a communion of saints. It would therefore be a mere evasion of the difficulty to say that the condemnations of our Confession pertain only to false doctrines which the Scriptures condemn, and have no reference to the persons whose doctrine and confession is false. Neither would it accord with the facts. Our Confession condemns "all heresies which have sprung up against this article," but also the Arians, Pelagians, Anabaptists, and many others who teach contrary to articles of our faith. Heresies would make little trouble if there were no heretics to promulgate and defend them, and no one would be likely to take offense at the condemnation of heresies that are long since dead for lack of adherents to maintain them. The Lutheran Church could therefore not reject errors which are cur-

rent in the world without rejecting those who taught them. No Church can do that. The choice is therefore between not condemning the errors at all and condemning the errorists as well as the errors. Lutherans prize the saving truth of the Gospel too highly to yield to any temptation to say nothing when that truth is assailed, especially when the assault is made by people who claim to be Christians, and who insist that they and their false teaching should be accorded equal rights in the Church of Christ with His truth and His people who confess it, and who know of no Savior but the Son of God who was delivered for our offenses, and of no authority in His kingdom but His Word.

As sincere Christian men they could no more avoid the offense which false teachers and their followers would take at their clear confession of evangelical truth, than they could avoid the offense which the natural man has always taken at their preaching of Christ as the way and the truth and the life, and especially at the appended declaration which is especially offensive to the flesh with its proud reason, that no one cometh to the Father but by Him. They endured much hardness in the world on account of their faithful adherence to the Gospel: they could endure this also, that their labor of love was misconstrued and represented as a manifestation of self-conceit and stubbornness and hatred of those who would not submit to their contention.

The grace of God preserved our Lutheran confessors from resorting to weapons of carnal warfare to ward off carnal assaults. No doubt the temptations were great, even in the days of the mighty struggle of the Reformation, when there were parties who sympathized with the Lutheran Protestants in their contention against Rome, but fell into errors of a different sort by substituting for the authority of Rome the authority of their own reason, which was now supposed to be absolutely emancipated. Our fathers had reason to expect that these parties would abide by the fundamental principle of the Reformation and, acknowledging the Holy Scriptures to be the only authority in matters of faith and morals, would submit to the decisions of God's Word. It was a surprise to them that these parties argued against some of the articles of faith set forth in the Augsburg Confession as if the Reformation — inaugurated, advanced, and completed in absolute subjection to the Holy Scriptures and for the maintenance of Christ's truth and authority in His kingdom as our only Savior and Lord — meant emancipation not only from all human authority in divine things, but emancipation from all

authority inclusive of God's Word. The opponents did not say this; probably they were not conscious that their argumentation implied this: but their reasoning could have little force, even in their own minds, without supplying the unexpressed premises assuming this.

When a man or a party argues against a plain word of the Lord on account of its unreasonableness, or its uncharitableness, or its impracticableness, those who have minds accustomed to thinking know at sight what such persons presume to be the rule by which these matters are to be judged. The Lutherans continued to maintain and apply the principle that the truth unto salvation is revealed from heaven and written in the Scriptures, that that alone is authoritative in questions of faith, and that in this domain reason, because of its ignorance and carnal wisdom growing out of ignorant self-conceit, has no voice. This carnal wisdom took special offense at the condemnations of our Confession. If those who were guided by its influence had duly recognized the fact that it was the faith of the Lutherans which was set forth in the Confession, they would no doubt have seen that the reasons urged against its negative apply equally well, or rather equally ill, to its positive statements. But from the standpoint which ignores the divine revelation written in the Scriptures for our learning, and substitutes human reason as the criterion of truth and right, there is a difference.

The positive declarations may be regarded as one form or phase of the truth, while opponents of any article may claim that they maintain a different form or phase, which must be regarded as of equal worth. They may accordingly be thought to stand side by side in the Church, without excluding each other. The case is not an imaginary one, absurd as the thought is from the point of view which faith occupies. It has indeed been urged as a reasonable and practicable theory for an amicable subsumption of all the churches under one head.

The Romish and Greek, the Lutheran and Reformed Churches have been regarded as representatives of partial truths, each being complementary of the others, and all together holding the complete body of truth, of which each has a share and of which each lacks what the other possesses. Thus none could claim to be a true church in the scriptural sense of an organization of Christian believers in which God's Word has exclusive authority and which is a ground and pillar of the truth, and none be a faithful witness of the revelation given through Christ and recorded in the Bible. But such a human speculation is inapplicable when a Confession condemns all oppos-

ing doctrines. Hence the condemnations give special offense to those who teach otherwise than the Word of God teaches. They leave no room for falsehoods under the guise of truth.

The Lutheran Church was patient under the vituperations to which the advocates of the rejected errors subjected our Confession. Bitter assaults were made not only on doctrines confessed, but on the Christian character of those who confessed them, and this was done by men whose principal charge against the Lutherans was that in their rejection of false teachers and teachings they revealed the lack of Christian charity. The Augsburg Confessors were a patient people, and conscious of their upright intentions and of the love of souls which prompted what opponents pronounced a manifestation of malice, they endeavored to convince the erring instead of turning away from them. They included persons in the negative portion of their Confession. That was unavoidable, as they had people, not abstractions to deal with. But they were careful to make the distinctions necessary to prevent misunderstanding.

There were some deceivers who misled unsuspecting people. Our confessors had no apology to make when such errorists felt themselves hurt by the rebuke administered in the condemnations; or the Scriptures direct us what to do in such cases.

“There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped.”

And this is of course to be done for the purpose of wreaking wrath on the evildoers, which is foreign to the thought of true Christians, but in love both to those doing the wrong and those suffering under it; for the apostle goes on to say of the deceivers whose mouths must be stopped, that “they subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not”, and to give the command to “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith”. Tit. 1:10-13.

But there were also some who followed erring parties without designing to controvert the pure evangelical faith confessed at Augsburg, and who only needed instruction to set them right. These were not meant to be placed in the same category with those who consciously denied some of the articles of our faith and spread their errors among the people, causing “divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned”. Rom.

16:17. The harmless people who are misled by wily deceivers that trouble Israel and persist in doing mischief, are not equally guilty and cannot be treated as equals in condemnation.

But the Lutheran Church does not mean, by making such a distinction, to shirk the responsibility for her declarations or recede in even the smallest degree from her well — considered position. She desires to be “first pure, then peaceable.” If her explanations seem to any a recantation or even modification of her principles, they soon find that they were mistaken; and if they then charge her with inconsistency and even treachery, they soon find that her adherence to the Word of God is always the same, though her conduct, measured by the wisdom of this world, is often open to criticism. We write this because our opponents have often charged the Lutheran Church, much as they have censured her for making little or no account of the changes in the world’s science and the consequent currents of popular opinion, with trimming her sails to the wind, when it blows adversely, and yielding to the clamors of the flesh when the world crowded her and menaced her prosperity or her very existence.

It is true, she has suffered from such pressure. She has had weak brethren in her congregations, and men in her ministry, who were ready to veer with the wind rather than face a threatening storm. But these are simply cases of carnal timorousness leading to the unfaithfulness of individuals, which sometimes ate as doth a canker and infected whole congregations and synods. The history of the visible Church is a history not only of God’s Spirit working in men, but also of the working of the flesh that lusteth against the Spirit in the congregations of believers. But never did the Lutheran Church abandon her principles, which always enabled her to overcome the evils which temporarily afflicted members of her communion.

The Augsburg Confession with its simple statement of her evangelical faith, and with its condemnation of all that opposes it, still stands as the banner around which the true children of the Reformation rally. She has never changed an article of her Confession or abated one jot or tittle of the condemnation pronounced against those who rejected her pure faith. Let it be kept in mind that her condemnation of parties and persons never meant to pass judgment on the spiritual condition of those concerned, except so far as that was indicated in their own utterances. All accusations lodged against the Lutheran Church in this regard are absolutely false, and, because there is no ground whatever or making them, are viciously false.

In the organization and discipline of congregations the confession and conduct decides; the condition of the heart, which is known only to God and into which it is as vain as it is presumptuous for man to seek to penetrate, is unavailable for the purpose. Whilst the unity of the Christian Church is unity of all believers who are by their faith joined to Christ, the unity of the Church as it appears on earth is a unity of the confession of that faith. We can hear the profession of faith, but we can not discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Christian love accepts the confession as sincere, unless the actions of the person concerned cast doubts upon it or disprove it. We have no right to suspect a brother's uprightness. The arrogant fanaticism of some individuals and even of some whole sects, who pretend to know who is truly converted and who is not, and who therefore profess to read the hearts of men and pass their judgments on that presumption, was never for a moment favored by the Church that is guided and governed by the Word of God. Therefore the confession of the revealed truth is the criterion of the true Church. She confesses her faith, and desires that her confession should be tested by the Word of Holy Scripture. She fellowships those who with her confess the truth there plainly revealed; she rejects those who refuse to accept that truth and who accordingly reject her Confession. How could she in fidelity to the Scriptures do otherwise, seeing that she has no means of knowing and testing agreement in the faith but by its expression?

She has no doubt that some who do not confess with her are believers, who would confess with her if they had sufficient means of knowing her and the pure truth of the Gospel which she preaches. Some of these may be in churches of a different confession. When these opposition churches, forming denominations not in harmony with our Confession, are rejected, no exceptions could be made in their favor, because they could fairly be judged only by their confession. If their faith does not accord with that confession, the remedy is in their own hands, and the fault is theirs if they continue in that false position.

In our own times it is no less difficult for members of other denominations to appreciate the practice of the Lutheran Church than it was at the time of the Reformation. Still the same unjust charges are made against her. Underlying these charges is usually the essentially Romish conception of the Church as a visible kingdom, according to which the individual's relation to Christ is determined by his relation to the external organization

called the Church, membership in which and possession of salvation being regarded as identical. Hence when the Lutheran Church rejects those who teach otherwise than God's Word teaches, beware of false prophets and avoiding all parties that cause offenses and divisions contrary to the evangelical faith which she confesses, it is at once concluded that she regards them all, individuals and churches, to be unbelievers and therefore lost. Such a conclusion could not fail to be detected as a palpable error at least by some of those who are offended at the exclusive clauses of our Confession, if they did not argue from the false premise that exclusion from the external congregation and its communion implies the judgment that the excluded cannot be believers in Christ and be saved, but must belong to those that do not believe and are damned. The gross injustice is thus done us of imputing to us inferences from a doctrine which we not only do not hold, but which is itself included in the condemnations of our Confession.

As long as our accusers refuse to purge out the old leaven of Romanism that obscures their vision in regard to the whole spirit and work of the Reformation and the pure evangelical faith of the Lutheran Church and her corresponding life and activity, they will not understand us.

All the more does the Church of the Augsburg Confession realize the necessity which is laid upon her to continue her work of patient instruction, that those who are not willfully blind may come to see her evangelical beauty and learn to love her, instead of ignorantly vilifying her.

Not that the Lutheran Church would suggest any intention to dissolve the manifest connection between faith and confession when she emphasizes the latter as the only available criterion of church membership and fellowship. It is only another exhibition of the errors underlying the prejudices and consequent wrongs against us, that charges us with resorting to mere subterfuge in our efforts to explain our position and intent. We tell them that our great concern is the Gospel of Christ and the salvation by faith which it proclaims; that the Reformation was set for the defense of this Gospel against the abominations of Rome, by which Christ's redeemed people were deprived of its comfort and peace: that the Lutherans were of one heart and one mind, through the Holy Spirit's power, in the reception of that Gospel by faith, and that their highest interest was to keep that treasure and transmit it pure and unadulterated to all future generations; that therefore they declared to the world their precious faith in the Augsburg Confession; that

they made this declaration with one mouth, because they believed it with one heart, according to the Scriptures:

“The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; or with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”
(Rom. 10:8-10);

and that our Confession therefore forms a bond of union between those who have the same Gospel faith, and separates us from those who are not of one heart with us in this pure faith and therefore cannot honestly be of one mouth with us in its confession.

They reply that they do not deny us the right to confess what we believe, but what else do the condemnations of your Confession mean than that we, who do not agree with your Confession, are not believers and are therefore excluded from the kingdom of Christ and its eternal salvation?

The subject is thus complicated by questions and considerations that arise from a view of the nature of the Church that is not ours, and confusion is introduced into the doctrine, and animosities are aroused, without the least necessity.

It is worth our while to endeavor to understand each other. We can understand how our adversaries come to accuse us of denying that a person who rejects the Augsburg Confession can possibly be a believer and therefore of pronouncing damnation upon all who are not in the Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Evangelical Lutheran Church. We can understand it because we know something of the strong forts which were stormed by the Reformation, among which the figment of the Church as a kingdom of this world, built by Roman arrogance and buttressed by civil powers, was not the least. No wonder that some who were not fully subject to the truth revealed in the Gospel, still supposed that the visible Church was the arbiter of salvation, and that those excluded were regarded as sentenced to eternal perdition: and no wonder that Lutherans, when they refused fellowship to those who refused to accept their Confession, were accused of denying them to be believers and therefore heirs of salvation; and no wonder that we were charged with evasions and inconsistencies when we averred that we had no such thoughts, that searching the hearts was not our province nor right, and that, while there might be believers among those who did not

agree with us — among the Romanists and the dissenting Protestants — — we had only to deal with their confession, rejecting what is false and leaving the judgment of the hearts to God, who alone can prove them.

Our opponents could not understand us. They understand the evangelical faith and its Confession even less now. Since the days of the Reformation great progress has been made in all the field of learning. Unfortunately this learning was not always laid at the feet of Jesus and consecrated to His glory and the advancement of His glorious cause of salvation to our lost race. It was rather of the earth, earthy; and so far as it was applied to the interests of revealed truth and the Christian Church which confesses and disseminates it, the application as unsympathetic and damaging. In reference to the subject here under discussion its tendency to eliminate the supernatural and reduce everything in doctrine and practice to the level of nature and reason, as against revelation and faith, could encourage no assurance of faith and confession, much less any condemnation of heresy and heretics.

Looked at by Christians guided by science rather than Scripture, the Lutheran Church must appear narrow and bigoted. And it is the Christians who refuse to accept the Augsburg Confession, rather than those who openly reject the heavenly authority of the Bible, that raise indignant protest against our Confession's condemnation of false doctrine and false prophets. The latter recognize the great gulf between us and find it reasonable that, as long as we cling to what seems to them the unreasonable doctrines of the Bible and stand upon what seems to them a platform of spiritual enslavement under a foreign authority that puts shackles on free souls, we should condemn their scheme of a universal religion on the basis of humanity, which would sweep Christianity with its Bible and its Savior from the earth.

They think us narrow minded and bigoted indeed for advocating a religion which excludes the majority of our race from the kingdom of heaven by insisting that Christ's is the only name by which salvation is possible: but it is our Christian faith, not our consistency in practicing what we profess, that is pronounced unreasonable and uncharitable.

But the case is different with those who assail our Confession and think it necessary to establish churches not in harmony with the Lutheran Church and therefore in interference with her faith and work. If their conscience required this, and still requires the maintenance of such churches in opposition to what they consider the errors and wrongs of the Lutheran Church against which they are constrained to protest, Lutherans never disputed their

right to do what their conscience requires, unable as they were and are to admit that such errors or wrongs have ever been proved against their Confession, and strenuously as they must insist that the plea put forth is that of an erring conscience. But whilst this is the only ground on which, in accordance with the Protestant principles of the exclusive authority of the Scriptures, any justification of separate church organizations can be offered, these churches are guilty of the strange inconsistency of asking us to accept their plea and at the same time recognize them as sister churches. The proposal is so absurd that it would not be worthy of further notice, were it not that there is reason to think that views are entertained by our opponents which do not fully appear, and that errors which have not been expressed are assumed as premises which hide the absurdity. It certainly is singular logic that would claim rights of conscience for dissenters from the Confession of the Lutheran Church which are denied to her, and the denial of which would call into question the validity of the whole Reformation; and no less singular would be the assumption that the Lutheran Church, after she had set forth the Confession of her faith as a bond of union, including all in her organization who were in agreement with her and excluding all who would not confess with her the evangelical faith therein declared and taught, would recede from her Scriptural position, now that those of a different mind had formed churches of their own and set up their confession and their altars in opposition to hers, and would grant them the rights and privileges from which they had debarred themselves by declining to accept her bond of union.

The subject is of such moment not only for the Church of the Augsburg Confession, but for all Christendom, that we are constrained to devote a few more pages to its discussion, especially as it involves points whose elucidation may lead to a better understanding of Lutheran faith and practice and serve to dispel some false notions from the minds of opponents and guard those among them who are sincere in their Christian profession against some dangers that beset them, and that are a menace to the cause of Christianity.

We have pointed out on a previous page that the faith which held the truth set forth in the Augsburg Confession to be the very truth of God as written by inspiration in the Holy Scriptures could not connive at its opposite falsity, but required its rejection. The same assurance of truth and sincerity in its positive confession prompts to the condemnation of any pre-

sumptuous opinions that would usurp its place. But the objection to the condemnations expressed in our Confession is aimed in fact at the positive as well as the negative statements, and its meaning evidently is that agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments is not necessary to the unity of the Church in its visible organization, and that the rejection of contrary doctrines by our Church is therefore a manifestation of uncharitableness. We gather this from a number of utterances by men who professed to be Protestants but declined to accept the Augsburg Confession. It was argued by them in the days of the Reformation, and the argument has been repeated with little variation ever since, that the nature of the human mind precludes the possibility of forming churches on the basis of complete agreement on all articles of the Christian faith; that the divine law of peace forbids any attempt to enforce such agreement or confession as a bond of unity; and that the command which lays on us the duty of bearing with the weak necessarily implies the impracticability of the Lutheran principle of unity.

To all this the reply of Luther was that the Bible plainly teaches his principle, and that all argumentation against its teaching must be false, even though it pretend to rest on other texts of Scripture, which could seem to be against us only when worldly wisdom has wrested them to its own purpose. So the Lutheran Church has continued to reply, and has hoped and still hopes that all who sincerely accept the Scriptures as their rule and guide will appreciate her position.

The limitations which the Creator has placed upon the human mind do make it impossible for us to apply as a criterion in forming our visible associations of Christians the only essential mark of the Church, which is revealed in Holy Scripture as union with Christ by faith.

“As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God. even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12.

“As the body is One, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ; for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” 1 Cor. 12:12-13.

If in our fellowship with other members of that one body and our consequent organization of visible churches for edification and work we could

avail ourselves of this divinely revealed and only essential mark of membership in Christ's body, all difficulty in this regard would be removed, and the whole intricate subject of church fellowship and communion would be very simple. In that case the present state of the Church on earth would be different, as the whole stream of ecclesiastical history must of necessity have taken a different course, but this one essential mark of the Church is hidden from our view, not because it is not distinctly revealed as such mark of identification, but because it is a spiritual gift existing only in the invisible recesses of the soul, into which no eye but that of each believer's own consciousness can penetrate. No one can see the faith of another. God can see it, and He only. Therefore our human imitations are of no material import so far as the Church in the strict sense, as the one Body of Christ, is concerned. He knoweth them that are His, and He adds to the Church daily such as believe in His name, without making those mistakes to which we are liable, because in our inability to see the faith which is the one thing needful, we often draw erroneous inferences. Nor is there, in the absence of infallible external signs to indicate the internal requisite, any unfailing remedy for this. Let no one impeach the wisdom and goodness of God on this account. He has not failed in His love either in creating man as He did, or building the Church as He does. If much is a mystery in His creation and providence, in our redemption and sanctification, it is the mystery of His glorious majesty and infinite love. Our human wisdom, in its narrow confines and blind presumption, criticizes in its vain conceit, but our heavenly Father knows, pities, and doeth all things well. God builds the Church, not men, not even Christian men, though He honors us and gladdens us by making us workers together with Him by calling us to administer the means of grace through which He does His saving work. When we in our ignorance and weakness do the best we can in forming our visible associations for the purpose of performing this service, that we and others may enjoy the benefit of these means of grace, we may err in our inferences respecting the spiritual condition of our associates, even err to the extent of including the unworthy and excluding the worthy. Only let it not be overlooked that the saving efficacy of God's means is not dependent upon the right judgment or the right conduct of His servants. It would save us many a pang in our experiences and reflections upon the Church as it appears and labors on earth, if we would rid ourselves of the foolish notion that the gates of hell will surely prevail against the Church and compass her destruction, if ministers

blunder. Even should any prove unfaithful, God is faithful still, and His Church shall not perish, though bitter enemies and unfaithful friends do their worst.

“There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved. God shall help her, and that right early.” Ps. 46:4-5.

We have no intention to minimize the evil effects of human misjudgment and misconduct in building the Church. Our purpose is to magnify the grace and truth of her Lord, which are so often distrusted even by good men when they see the human infirmity that attaches to the work of the holy ministry. The Church of Christ suffers less from man’s frailty and erring judgment than is usually supposed, and probably the erring individuals suffer more. An uncharitable judgment may without warrant exclude a person from a congregation with which he would delight to worship and hold communion, but we must not indulge the vain thought that the Savior in whom he believes will find no way to refresh him with His grace. Such a person is recognized as a member of the one holy Christian Church by its Head, on whom all depends in time and in eternity, and all the world’s uncharitableness cannot deprive the believer of the believer’s blessings. It is those who are guilty of the grave sin of presuming to judge the hearts of men and, in opposition to the law and the Gospel, judging unrighteous judgment, that suffer most, not those against whom the wrong is done.

The sincere believer has in his faith a protection against such violations of the law of love in his church work. He not only has the Word of God to guide him, which ever keeps before him the duty of love to God and man, but also the Holy Spirit in his heart, who never ceases to strive against all motions of uncharitableness arising from the flesh. But that is not all that is required to set forth the point under consideration. We cannot look into the heart and thus at once ascertain who is a believer with whom we may fellowship in the congregation of Christians, and who is not. No believer is likely to contend that there should be no qualification demanded at all for admission to the Christian Church. Even reason with all its carnal wisdom could not consent to such a scheme, unscrupulous as it might be in the choice of means to attain its ends. It is too manifest that such an association could not, even in the loosest application of terms, be called a church. It

would not even be a religious society. Something must mark it as Christian, if it is to bear the Christian name. Even men of the most lax and free-thinking type of religionists admit that, if an organization is to be recognized as a Christian Church, there must be something to distinguish it as Christian. All the labor that reason has expended on the subject without consulting the Word of God or making account of the demands made by the faith which the Holy Spirit works through that Word, has never produced a more plausible plan than that of accepting every person's willingness to be classed among Christians as sufficient, without rejecting anybody or condemning anything. Obviously that would do away with all condemnations in Christian Confessions, because it would do away with all Confessions. And that is what the so-called Liberals really want, as it is evident to those among them who do any clear thinking, that any positive statement of a proposition is an article of faith of necessity involves the rejection of its opposite, so that a close examination shows the condemnations to be disliked because the Confession is disliked, whether it be that the articles of faith set forth are not believed, or that they are thought to be unnecessary as a bond of union. The arguments advanced in behalf of such a wide gate of entrance to the visible Church is, that it secures the practical acknowledgment of every one entering that he desires to be regarded and treated as a Christian, thus securing larger numbers and wider influence for the Church, and that it gives full scope to individual liberty without any interference with private conscience or opinion.

From the biblical point of view this latitudinarian scheme has the one virtue of conceding, that to be admitted to membership in the Christian Church the profession of Christianity is a requisite qualification. But that concession goes far towards undermining the foundation on which the scheme is built. What right has a society calling itself Christian to demand of others who may, for reasons satisfactory to themselves, desire to join it, that they must acknowledge themselves to be Christians, which they are not, and do not desire to be, and do not want to pretend to be? Is that not trespassing on the rights of individual conscience and private judgment as much as any other qualification for membership set down in the Augsburg Confession? If it be replied that no one is compelled to join the Christian society, if he is unwilling to do this with the understanding that he thus professes to be Christian, and that therefore here is of the least interference with his free choice, our answer is obvious; that is true, but it is precisely

the truth which the Lutheran Church has maintained from the beginning, that her Confession of faith as her bond of union in the Church is an infringement of no man's liberty. If he has not our faith, we have no desire that he should join us in confessing it, much less would we think of using any coercive measure to effect such action against his own will. The concession shows that the ground on which our opponents' contention is based, is confessedly untenable, and that the right of every man to do as he pleases and thus to set aside all rights of the Church to safeguard her interests by requiring the acceptance of her Confession as a condition of membership, is surely imaginary. There are no liberties and rights of man that exclude other men from their possession and use, and especially and emphatically are there no human rights as the rights of a creature independent of the Creator.

But that is not all that needs to be said. The scheme under consideration has no merit beyond the involuntary tribute to the principle which it is designed to supplant. In practice it is a signal failure for all the legitimate purposes of the Church, as in its nature it must be. How could the Church fulfill its mission of preaching the Gospel in all the world and being a witness in all lands of the great salvation in Christ, if her membership were a promiscuous aggregation of men who did not even profess to acknowledge Christ as God over all, who became man to offer His life for the rescue of our lost race from eternal death; nor own allegiance to Him and His Word as the King in His own kingdom? It is vain to argue that the acceptance of the Christian name is a guarantee against such a condition, because no one would be likely to join the Christian society if he were not what the Christian name implies. For, in the first place, there could on such a plan be no agreement as to what is implied in the name. Some, enlightened by The Word of God, would no doubt rightly understand it and be humble believers who would help their brethren to understand it, although without a confession to that effect there would be little warrant for assuming that the number of these would be large. Others would no doubt presume that the name lays on them the obligation to lead a reputable life, and nothing more. The name would indicate to them that they have joined a company that regards Christ as a great and good man, whose example they have agreed to follow, and that their ideal is attained in the deeds of the law, or civil righteousness.

Assuming that the members who really had the intention of being Christians, as they understand it, the Church would be composed of people of various shades and grades of belief and unbelief, from infidelity that re-

spects morality to orthodoxy that is indifferent to faith. But, in the second place, it is an unfounded assumption that every one joining the Church would seriously mean to be what the Christian name implies.

The experience and history of the Church, under much better conditions than those contemplated by the broad-minded and free-thinking scheme, and safe-guarded by explicit confessions of revealed truth and pledges required of applicants for admission, have abundantly taught us, that not all who enter the Christian Church are devoted to the Christian faith and life. There are always some who desire to associate with Christians from other motives than those of salvation in Christ and the extension of His kingdom. Sometimes these motives are sordid, but they are not always so. Some would join the Church, if the doors were widely thrown open to them, because they regard her benevolent work with admiration and have a sincere desire to help her along on all humanitarian lines, although they have no interest in the truth unto salvation. To build up the Church of Christ which is the pillar and ground of the truth as the faithful witness of the salvation in Christ for all people, is impossible on such a latitudinarian plan.

The essential mark of the Christian Church is faith in the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. Believers constitute the Church, and they only. If some are gathered into Christian congregations who are not believers, God does not recognize them as members of the Church. That they are in the congregation at all is owing to the fact that men, being unable to see into the heart, do the best they can in the recognition and reception of believers, who alone constitute the Church, and when they do their utmost to include only believers in their organization, some who are not members by faith of the one communion of saints, are unwittingly admitted and accorded all the rights in the visible body which belong to believers. If congregations lay no regard to the will of the Lord and the indispensable condition of membership in His Church, they have no right to the Christian name. Every one who reads the Bible and believes what he reads is assured of this.

But when we say that believers in organizing their external, visible congregations or local churches do the best that they can to exclude all who are not believers, the admission is implied that they have nothing to guarantee an unerring judgment. He who alone knows what is in man has not been pleased to reveal to His people who is a believer and who is not. Faith bears its appropriate fruits, but, in our earthly condition of sin, even these fruits

are not infallible signs. Faith worketh by love, but the wisdom of this world also prescribes a love of righteousness and mercy, whose work is easily mistaken for a fruit of the Spirit, as the labor of Christian faith is often mistaken for the work of the flesh.

We are not absolutely sure that, when a man desires to be a member of the Christian congregation and outwardly does all that is required by the Church, he is a believer in Christ unto the saving of his soul. He may be a hypocrite. How then shall we proceed in the organization of churches?

Intelligent Christians will see that there is no sure and safe way but to abandon all suggestions and argumentations of natural reason and fleshly wisdom, and submit ourselves to the guidance of the Lord Himself as He shows us the mind of the Spirit in Holy Scripture. The first and most reliable fruit and manifestation of the faith wrought in the soul is its confession before the world. This is the primal motion of the Spirit, the dominant impulse of gratitude for the blessings received, and the first fruit of reflection on the changed condition of the soul and its attendant duties, as well as the chief requirement made by the Word of God.

The soul that is saved must by an inward necessity tell of the Savior; its gratitude or the unspeakable gift cannot refrain from its utterance of praise to the gracious Giver; its contemplation of its own saved condition and the misery of others who have no peace in their sin, but who are embraced in the great salvation wrought by the Savior, constrains it to tell to all the truth in Jesus that sets us free from sin and death; and the Scriptures, as if to spur souls on that are sluggish and tardy, requires this of them.

“Whoever therefore shall confess me before men,” saith the Lord, “him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Matt. 10:32, 33.

When the Word of God is received by faith and the heart finds peace in believing, the necessary result is the confession of Christ and the truth of which He came to bear witness for the establishment of His kingdom, which is not of this world. Therefore

“...the Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is, the Word of faith which we reach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Rom. 10:8-10.

So much stress is laid upon the confession of Christ as the first and chief utterance of the faith which embraces Him as the Savior, because it is the external test of Christian discipleship. The real criterion lies back of this in the faith of the heart, which is expressed in the confession with the mouth. But men are incapable of looking into the heart and must therefore rely upon the confession. This is the best criterion of faith that is available for the organization of Christian congregations, because it is first and foremost among the signs of faith. Its preeminence rests, in the first place, upon the fact that it is the most spontaneous and natural expression of the believing heart's life in Jesus. Good works and ways must needs follow faith as its inevitable result; for faith without works is dead. The heart purified by faith cannot rest without giving utterance to its life in corresponding action. Hands and feet as well as thought and feeling will be consecrated to the service of the Savior, and the believer's work and walk will therefore be directed by the purified will according to the Master's will. But the simplest form of utterance is in words. Gratitude manifests itself in acknowledgment of the benefits received and praise to the bountiful Giver of the gracious blessings. That is confessing Christ, without which there is no true worship of the Savior. And such confession, in the second place, is the clearest and purest utterance of the Christian's faith.

The believer's infirmities in his state of imperfect sanctification by the Spirit, the reluctance of his flesh, the obstacles placed in his way by the world, the wicked wiles and assaults of Satan, all tend to hinder a satisfactory expression of his high resolves to glorify his Lord and Savior by works meet for repentance. But he can at least put into words what he cannot succeed in making manifest by his walk and work, which always come far short not only of what the Lord's will requires, but of what his own will desires. And what he believes and thinks and feels and wills is set forth more intelligibly in his humble and grateful and adoring confession in words than it can be in deeds which, even if they are not dubious or ambiguous, are liable to be misconstrued.

We do not assert that the Christian's confession in words is of necessity exempt from all the frailties and faults which cling to human action as the exponent of the soul's life; but no one who gives due attention to the subject can fail to perceive that words are more capable of uttering clearly the Christian's faith than are his works. It may be superfluous to mention, that good works are not thus disparaged. They too are a confession and are designed to show forth the praises of Him who has called us from darkness to His marvelous light. But the clearer confession is through the medium of speech, and therefore it is written that "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." This confession must needs embrace more than the indefinite statement that one is a Christian, or believes the Bible, or believes what the Church believes. The reason is obvious. Believers could not know and recognize each other as brethren in Christ by such a confession, and the organization of churches on such a basis would be an avowal that they are not designed to be specifically Christian and therefore could not be recognized as such by churches designed to present the congregation of believers.

Saying that one believes the Bible to be true, or accepts what Christians or the Church teach, may mean much or mean little. Definitely it means nothing, for it is so vague that we cannot even be sure that those using such a form believe that there is such a thing as forgiveness of sin, life and salvation, much less that Christ's is the only name by which such treasure is attainable. Such free-thinking projects or building the Church on a so-called liberal foundation, with doors thrown wide open to multitudes who regard the evangelical faith as a yoke of bondage, devout Christians, who heed the divine injunction to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," can only regard as another illustration of the truth, that when men decline from the ways of God "professing themselves to be wise, they become fools." Rom. 1:22. In their horror of the Church's condemnation of heresy and their zeal for free thought and free speech they subvert the foundation of all liberty in their contention against the will of the Lord, whom at least some of them think they are rendering service. For whilst they suppose themselves to be building the Christian Church on a broader and more liberal foundation than that on which Christians have been building ever since the days of the apostles, and the Lutheran Church, returning to the old paths of the Bible from which Romanism had departed, has continued to build until our own troublous times of "science falsely so called," they in their carnal wisdom are trying to build a church which is not "the congregation of

believers, the communion of saints,” and thus endeavoring to build a human society that shall take the place of the holy Christian Church, which is

“...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.” Eph. 2:20-22.

When visible churches are gathered on the broad principle that is supposed to be more liberal than that of the Christian Church in the days of the apostles and of the Reformation, the result is that a different foundation is laid and an opposition church is constructed. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 3:11. The Church that is built on that foundation and is therefore the only Christian Church, cannot in fidelity to her Lord recognize other associations that claim to be churches because in some fashion they respect the Christian name, and desire therefore to be reckoned among Christians.

Thus a church founded on considerations of human expediency is built in the vain hope of being esteemed an improvement upon the old structure, and, if not his, at least as a sister church with the same aims and purposes as those of the holy Christian Church, at least as far as the religious interests which are common to humanity and the humanitarian appeals of all men for help in their distress are concerned. The reply to all this wisdom of the world, and all this sentimental plea of the flesh, is the commission which the Head of the Church has given to His disciples:

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Matt. 28:19-20.

By that the believers who have not closed their eyes to the light of the Gospel which the Reformation restored must abide; and they do it gladly because that light led them through faith to peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The broad road of natural thought and sentiment is renounced by those who by the grace of God are led through the straight gate of repentance and faith into the narrow way of salvation through Christ alone. And those who denounce us because of our condemnation of all other ways are guilty of the

double sin of condemning the children of God for hearing the voice of the Son of God rather than of the imaginary wisdom of men, and of basing their condemnations on their own carnal wisdom and feeling as against the wisdom and love of God. Those who are truly believers in Christ among the adversaries of the Church of the Reformation have abundant reason to stop and think, whether in their professed liberalism they are not fighting against God and helping the enemy of all righteousness and all salvation of lost souls to overthrow the Church of Christ with its proclamation of the grace of God and its deliverance from the slavery of sin and Satan into the glorious liberty of the Gospel. Our Lord said to those who believed on Him,

“If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31-32.

The truth they are to learn from His Word, and knowing this truth and being made free by it, they are to confess it and make it known to others, “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” That is their commission. On this foundation of His truth He builds His Church, and on this foundation of His Word confessed, those who would be His true servants must work together with Him in building it, that it may be an enduring witness of His truth unto the salvation of all who are willing to hear it and by His grace believe it.

The congregations thus gathered are a unit in their confession of the truth, and although some may not be sincere in that confession, Christian love harbors no suspicions and all are regarded as one in the faith confessed. That unites them with each other as congregation of believers, and separates them from all who will not join them in their confession and worship and work with them on that foundation. Knowing by the Master’s own teaching the heavenly truth unto salvation, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them, it would be a strange thing if they did not continue in the Word which enriched them in all utterance and all knowledge, when they gathered churches, to the end that their Savior might be praised and others might share the blessedness which they enjoyed. And the Word which unites them requires them to stand together and bear united testimony to the truth which makes them free.

“Now I beseech you, brethren,” writes St. Paul, “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” 1 Cor. 1:10.

Having in common their faith of the Gospel, which inwardly unites them with Christ and each other as members of one body, which is the Christian Church, and having declared the same faith in their common confession of the Gospel truth, they are exhorted to guard with vigilance their unity as a precious possession which Satan would delight to destroy. Therefore all dissensions and divisions among them must be avoided as dangerous to their life and injurious to their work. What is meant is more specifically expressed in another place:

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord,” writes the same apostle, “beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation where with ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Eph. 4:1-6.

The unity of the Spirit is of such high import that nothing must be allowed to disturb it. It is the unity which the Holy Spirit has effected by uniting all by one faith to the one Lord through the one baptism, which is the washing of regeneration and by which we are all planted into Christ,

“buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Rom. 6:4.

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal. 3:26-27.

This unity of the Spirit in the one Lord by the one faith through the one baptism we must strenuously endeavor to keep in the bond of peace, if we would walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. What lies in our power must be done to prevent dissensions. The devil and the flesh are enemies of our unity in Christ and take pleasure in breaking the bond of peace which we have in our faith. Hence the need for lowliness and meekness, that we may forbear one another in love, lest there should be strifes and divisions among us, and the unity which the Holy Spirit has graciously

wrought among us should be broken. The evil of sects and schisms must be earnestly contended against as a satanic scheme to cripple the Church. Christians must be willing to deny themselves and make sacrifices to this end.

Nothing could be further from the thought of the apostle than the suggestion that they should sacrifice their faith in order to conciliate men who reject it, or any part of it, and thus preserve harmony. The unity of the Spirit is that which is to be preserved — the one Lord, one faith, one baptism, is the treasure which we are to keep and in behalf of which we must make sacrifices of individual tastes and opinions, cheerfully yielding in matters subject to human reason for the sake of retaining the divine grace and truth. Hence the apostle in the same connection shows the provision which the Lord has made

“...for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love may grow up into Him in all things which is the Head, even Christ.”
Eph. 4:12-15.

Nowhere in Scripture is there any intimation given that it could be pleasing to God, or even excusable in His sight, to yield any portion of the revealed truth to satisfy the desires of men who object to it. On the contrary the Scriptural requirement is first and chief that Christian people stand fast in the Christian faith, and beware of false prophets, who would lead them away from the truth and ultimately from the Savior, who is the way and the truth and he life.

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” Jude 3.

And not only is the Bible explicit in requiring believers to preserve the unity which the Holy Spirit has wrought by working faith in their hearts and joining them together into one body in Christ, but it is equally explicit in requiring them to maintain the separateness of that body from the world and

all persons and bodies that will not accept the one faith which is the essential mark of the Christian.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,” writes St. Paul, “for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

In order that the disciples of Christ may be found faithful to the Lord and their high calling to make the unsearchable richness of His grace known in all lands, they must “keep His sayings” and let His Word “dwell in them richly in all wisdom,” avoiding them that “stumble at the Word, being disobedient,” teaching all to “observe all things whatsoever” Christ has commanded them. For

“ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Pet. 2:9.

The pastors must preach the Word, and the people must beware of false prophets; for only “the entrance of God’s Word giveth light” and life and salvation.

“The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my Word like as a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” Jer. 3:28-29.

That is God’s way to build the Church, and He alone builds it or can build it, whatever human reason may think or say, and whatever arguments from appearance its notions of expediency may urge against it.

“Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not from Him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded; but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.” Gal. 5:7-10.

The trouble referred to was the false doctrine which Judaizing teachers were spreading concerning justification. It no doubt seems to carnal wisdom but a small matter which these false prophets were contending for in their insistence upon circumcision. But the apostle warns them of the danger that attends the introduction of a little leaven, which, if not purged out, will continue to work until the whole lump is leavened.

“For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.” Gal. 5:3-6.

Hence the frequent instructions and admonitions given to ministers, that they may be faithful to the Lord and to the truth which He has called them to preach.

“Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.” 1 Tim 4:16.

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Tim, 6:12-14.

“Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Tim. 3:13-15.

A bishop must be blameless as the steward of God, holding fast the faithful Word, as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake."

“Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men that turn from the truth.” Tit. 1:9-14.

“Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine... These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” Tit. 2:1-15.

Every devout reader must see how different is all this from the liberalism and sentimentalism which have obtained currency in the world, and done so much damage in the Church by encouraging indifference to sound doctrine and opposition to unity of the Spirit on the foundation of the saving truth revealed in the Gospel.

The question ultimately is, whether the Word of God or the pretended wisdom of men shall rule in the Church. Our fathers believed the Word of God, and therefore could not hesitate in their choice. They boldly and cheerfully confessed the truth revealed from heaven and rejected the contrary doctrines. The Lutheran Church does so still, and if she must suffer reproach and contumely and persecution on that account, the grace of God will be sufficient for her. She will continue to abide by her Lord’s instruction:

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.” 2 Tim. 13-14.

“A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition reject.” Tit. 3:10.

For she will not for a moment admit that men in their blindness see better than the Lord what is good or the Church and the world. His people know that they are engaged in a labor of love, though there are so many who see only a violation of love in the condemnation of heresies and of all departures from the truth of the Gospel.

“Only let your conversation be as cometh the Gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries.” Phil. 1:27-28.

The refusal to beware of false prophets and to reject false doctrine is only the result of a refusal to uphold the grace and truth of the Gospel of Christ, though it should be on the plea of a broader faith and love than that which the Holy Spirit has wrought in the Christian Church and which the Holy Scriptures inculcate.

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are His; and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” 2 Tim. 2:15-19.

They are His who have faith in Christ and keep His sayings, and the departure from iniquity is first and chiefly turning away from Satan and the lies by which he would lead souls away from the truth in Jesus declared in the Gospel. Therefore:

“the servant of the Lord must not strive: but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance unto the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil.” 2 Tim. 2:24-26.

The requirements of holiness, which some uncharitably assume to be ignored by the earnest Christians whose chief treasure is the truth unto salvation, are so far from being disparaged when the admonition is obeyed to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints that they are reminded of them repeatedly in their practice of Christian duties, by no means excluding the duty of patience and meekness in their contention for the faith. They are commanded to speak the truth, but to do this in love, and of course none the less in love when they must maintain it against adversaries than when they speak it for edification among friends. Only it must not be overlooked that they are commanded to contend for the faith, not to surrender it, or bury it in compromises, or conceal it to conciliate those that oppose themselves, but to speak the truth in love for their instruction, even rebuking sharply when occasion requires, “if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” Should they refuse any longer to hear the instruction, resisting the truth and persisting in opposing

themselves, they of course cannot be received into fellowship in the Church that is set for the defense of the Gospel;

“for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” 2 Cor 6:14.

If they will not walk with us in the way of truth, we must walk that way without them. The apostolic declaration seems hard and harsh to the flesh, but it expresses the mind of the Spirit and is uttered in true love when the apostle writes to the Galatians whom false teachers were trying to mislead:

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel; which is not another; but there be some which trouble you and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” Gal. 1:6-8.

The condemnations are a necessary part of true allegiance to the Lord and Savior, who alone reigns in His kingdom and will not give His glory to another.

The Church can be built only with the Word of God, because the Lord alone can build it. All human thoughts and policies are only to many hindrances to the glorious work, because they have no power to save, and serve only to divert the mind from that which can save. When such human opinions and projects are set against the plain Word of the Lord, the believing soul can have peace only when it clings to what is written in the infallible Scriptures, and therefore condemns all such interference with God’s work.

Inquiry into the motive for promulgating error is not necessary as a preliminary condition of rejecting doctrines contrary to God’s Word, important as that is for determining the treatment of gainsayers. Some of these are open unbelievers, who deny the truth of the Gospel without any regard to the Scriptures; some have fallen into error while they profess to believe the Bible, and part of them are probably sincere when they profess that belief; some are so indifferent about the heavenly truth unto salvation that they concern themselves little about what the Bible says, one way or the other, and therefore dislike contention, whether it be for or against the faith once delivered to the saints.

The Church prizes the truth revealed through the Scriptures and declared in her Confession, and fights the good fight of faith against all who attack her citadel or seek to deprive her of her treasure of truth, whether their professed intentions be good or evil. Her duty and her joy is to hold fast that which she has, that no man take her crown and prevent her from imparting her heavenly treasures to others. "I charge thee, therefore," writes St. Paul to his son Timothy,

"before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." 2 Tim. 4:1-5.

In our days there is nothing that could change the Church's duty in this regard.

"There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." 2 Pet. 1:1-2.

So it has come to pass. Science has made rapid strides and men have grown in the vain conceit of their own wisdom and the proud presumption that there is no longer darkness on earth and no need for light from heaven. All the more need is there that those who know the truth and its eternal worth should be earnest and persevering in presenting it and repudiating the false doctrines and theories that would banish it from the earth.

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." Isa. 8:20.

When Peter preached the Gospel to the multitudes assembled in Jerusalem,

"they that gladly received his Word ere baptized, and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." Acts 2:41-42.

So the Church began, and so it as continued. Her faithful preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments has continued to win victories for the truth in Jesus, and she has grown and flourished through all the persecutions to which she has been subjected. She has continued in the faith of the Gospel and in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and God has blessed her above all that we were able to ask or think. The Church was victorious in the struggles of the Reformation against the mighty power of Rome, which had usurped the place of and professed to be the communion of saints, and the Church of the Reformation has retained the pure Word and Sacraments and contended earnestly for the faith of the Gospel according to the precepts of our Lord and the practice of the apostles.

Against the authority of the King in Zion as He rules by the Scriptures no argument can be of any force in the minds of true believers.

His Word decides whether or not it is the duty of the Church to confess her faith before the world and reject all from her fellowship who teach otherwise than God's Word teaches. It is therefore but wasted labor when appeals are made to believers of the truth which was revealed and written for their learning, that they should desist from urging the necessity of unity of faith as the prime condition of the unity of the Church, and from condemning all doctrines that conflict with the faith. They can be faithful only if they abide by the Master's instruction given through the apostle:

"I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." Rom. 16:17.

The appeals nevertheless are often productive of trouble, and when faith is weak are well calculated to produce wavering and dissension. For they are usually directed to the humility and love of peace which are characteristic of true Christians, and only by strict vigilance can the confusion underlying the argument be detected and the force of the sophistry be resisted. Unquestionably it seems Christian reasoning when a Lutheran is told that his profession of certainty about the faith set forth in the Augsburg Confession, while so many who profess to be Christians reject it, is not modest.

We know that some of them are learned, and we have no right to think them insincere, unless their actions show it. How then can we reconcile it with humility to persist in declaring the doctrine which we confess to be the very truth of the Gospel and in rejecting those who reject it? And the appeal

is fortified by referring to the limitations and infirmities of the human mind, which all concede. It is not possible, the argument proceeds, that the truth can be known with certainty, or that all minds with their great diversity of gifts should think the same thing and agree in any matter of sufficient importance to enlist their interest and elicit their judgment. Add to this, what all concerned readily admit, that the Scriptures contain mysteries which the human mind cannot fathom. Hence it is thought a manifestation of self-conceit when any Church presumes to know the truth with such assurance as to reject those who disagree with it. The argumentation appears plausible, and many are misled by it. Our answer may all be summed up in the apostolic exhortation:

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” 1 Cor. 16:13.

We know what we believe and in whom we believe. The mind of man, as he is a finite creature, is naturally limited: he cannot know everything. That mind is darkened by sin, so that of spiritual things he knows nothing. We concede what opponents of the Augsburg Confession ask in this respect, and even more than they ask. Sin scatters thought and divides men. On the basis of nature there is no hope that all men will ever be of one mind and speak the same thing. The thought is so foreign to Lutherans that the dream of our adversaries about the formation of universal brotherhood of man dwelling in harmony under the alleged fatherhood of God, is preposterous. We harbor no such illusions. But into this darkness of earth the light has come, and by the grace of God the eyes of some have been enlightened. They are the Christian people.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.” Heb. 1:1-2.

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even _to them that believe on His name.” John 1:4, 12.

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation; in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.” Eph. 1:13-14.

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things what soever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Matt. 28:19-20.

And of these things which our Lord has spoken and which were written for our learning, are we modestly to pretend to know nothing? They were made known to us that through them we might have the light of salvation, and with peace and joy in our hearts, notwithstanding the tribulations which we have in the world, confess the Lord and His Word before men to the glory of His name and for a testimony among men, that all the world may know of the world’s mighty and merciful Savior, and shall we now heed the absurd suggestion that we must not presume to be certain about the truth made known? That is surely a modesty and humility of which believers have no knowledge and can have one so long as they have faith.

“We have known and believed he love that God hath to us.” 1 John 4:16.

Therefore the exhortation is given:

“Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

It is true humility and meekness to sit at Jesus’ feet and learn of Him, whether those who hear our confession of the things which He has taught us and commanded us to confess like or dislike these things. They may be more learned than we in many respects, but we know and are sure of those things which His Word declares, and declares so that the unlearned may know them and be made wise unto salvation. The reference to the holy mysteries, to the height and depth of which our understanding cannot attain, is but of place when made with the object of undermining the assurance of faith. It is not creditable to men who profess to be believers themselves to be engaged in such deplorable work. Even of such mysteries as that of the Holy Trinity and the Divinity of our Savior, true man as He was and is, the true believer is sure. What is revealed about them in Scripture is perfectly clear and assuredly known, though there is much involved that our reason cannot comprehend.

We can only pity those who try to lead unwary souls into the comfortless fancy that the heavenly truth cannot be certainly known and that faith stumbles around in the darkness without any sure ground upon which to stand and find rest.

Are those persons who find fault with the Church of the Augsburg Confession for her unflinching firmness in contending for the faith once delivered to the saints, sure that they have a Savior from sin and death? If they are, they should know why the Lutheran Church is so sure of the doctrines which she believes and confesses, and honor her for her fidelity to the Scriptures that make her people wise unto salvation. It is sorry work to inculcate theories which tend to shake the faith of Christians in order to attain an unscriptural end.

The argument against us, based on the preciousness of peace, is of the same nature. An appeal made to the Christian's love of peace is always legitimate and cannot be made in vain. But whilst it receives a respectful hearing, it must not be expected that the contents of the appeal will be sanctioned and the purpose approved without examination. Our Lord gave us directions also in this regard, and Christian fidelity guards against sophistical efforts to deceive and mislead.

“Peace I leave with you,” says our Savior, “my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, either let it be afraid.” John 14:27.

“Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Rom. 5:1, 2.

Grace and peace are therefore the import of the usual Christian salutation:

“Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 1:3.

Nor is this meant to be limited to the heart of each believer as an individual. The believers form one body in Christ and are to have peace with each other.

“Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Ps. 133:1.

“The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul.” Acts 4:32.

Therefore peace among the brethren is a frequent subject of exhortation.

“Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” Cor. 13:11.

And not only are believers to enjoy this peace of God in their hearts and live in peace with their brethren, but they are admonished to strive for it and maintain it in the Church, refraining from all selfishness and disposition to quarrel, and “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Eph. 4:3.

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Rom. 12:18.

It is therefore perfectly in accord with Scripture to regard peace as a precious treasure, for the maintenance of which many a personal taste should be sacrificed. But does this prove that the Church of the Augsburg Confession is wrong in abiding by its declaration of Gospel truth and condemnation of all that conflicts with it, because there are some who will not have peace on this basis? Surely that would be a rash conclusion, for which the premises furnish no warrant, and those who draw it are duped by the sophistry.

The passage last quoted suggests a caution. “If it be possible” indicates that there may be conditions in which Christians find it impossible, and “as much as lieth in you” suggests that there are circumstances in which it lieth in others, not in us.

“My soul,” says the psalmist, “hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.” Ps. 120:6-7.

Even in regard to earthly goods, which are of so little value compared with our heavenly treasures, the most peaceable man will resist if covetous men persist in robbery, and will have peace with him only if he abandon his rights and yield his property. And our Lord’s words are a warning against the perfidy of sacrificing the Gospel for the sake of peace:

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.”
Matt. 10:34.

He brought us the Gospel of grace and peace, and those who believe that Gospel by His grace have His peace, and they endeavor to keep their unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. But there be some that trouble us. They refuse to accept the truth, then raise an outcry against us when we refuse to abandon it, and clamor for peace. In such a situation the Christian sees how needful is

“the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” Eph. 6:17.

Manifestly peace is not the greatest of our treasures, highly as Christians are taught to prize it. To have the peace which Christ gives we must be Christ’s disciples, and He has told us:

“If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31, 32.

Men deceive themselves when they imagine that the peace which the Holy Spirit gives through faith in the revealed truth is the outward harmony purchased by the sacrifice of that truth. That is surrendering all the divine conditions of Christian peace in the vain effort to maintain its human appearance.

Our fathers diligently searched the Scriptures and fervently prayed that God would keep them in the truth into which His Word led them. They believed and therefore they spake, as the Lord commanded them. The Word that enlightened them and gladdened their hearts would enlighten and gladden others. Of course some refused to accept their testimony: from the start they were waging a war against Rome. They did what they could to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; but they could not abandon the unity of the Spirit. They knew the truth and the truth made them free; free, too, from the power of the lying insinuation that God had not spoken, or that if He did we could not know what He says. And the Church of the Reformation still maintains the truth which they spake in the Augsburg Confession, and for the sake of her faith and her love cannot desist from urging her pure doctrine of the Gospel as the true bond of Christian union in the

Church, and upholding her condemnation of all that opposes and seeks to undermine her pure Gospel.

"Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Eph. 6:10, 11.

7. The Banner Of The Church

DENYING that the Roman organization under the pope was the Church of Christ on earth, so that all who were not within its pale were outside of the Church wherein alone there is salvation, and that union with the Church meant submission to papal authority, the evangelical Christians, having by the goodness of God through the study of the Scriptures attained in this respect also a better knowledge of divine truth, organized their congregations on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner-stone. They knew from the Word of God and confessed in the Apostles' Creed that the Church is the congregation of believers, the communion of saints. Instead of making allegiance to the pope and subjection to the human ordinances which he imposed the condition of membership in the Church, they gathered believers who would live under Christ and His Word into their congregations. These would be known, so far as it was possible to know them at all, by their confession of the Gospel. They accepted the confession adopted by the Christians of old, and in due time they published a more complete summary of their faith in the Augsburg Confession. It was the banner around which the evangelical believers, the Church of the Reformation, rallied.

Two purposes were subserved by such Confession.

It fulfilled a duty enjoined upon all Christians, and it marked the unity of the body of believers adopting it.

Our Lord desired that His followers, to the praise of God's boundless love in sending a Savior to our lost race, and to the salvation of all who by the grace of the Holy Spirit should be brought to believe, should acknowledge Him to be the Redeemer of the world and should declare His good tidings of salvation to all people.

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” Matt. 10:32, 33.

“Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” Mark 8:38.

These are solemn and weighty words of our Lord, which can not be disregarded with impunity. For:

“the Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on, Him shall not be ashamed.” Rom. 10:8-11.

The ground of the requirement is evident. It is not that any merit attaches or can attach to our confession as a human deed; for we are saved alone through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, by faith in His name, without the deeds of the law. But when the Holy Spirit works such faith, this carries with it the impulse to declare the mercy of the Lord for the praise of His name and for a testimony to others, that they too may come and find rest unto their souls.

“Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Pet. 2:9

When true faith exists in the soul the believer is constrained, not simply by commandment of his Lord urging him from without, but by a motion of the Spirit within his breast, to confess Christ and the precious truth of which He came to bear witness.

“We, having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed and therefore have I spoken, we also believe and therefore speak.” 2 Cor. 4:13.

Sincere Christians can not otherwise than be witnesses of the truth which makes them free and gives them peace.

As there is an inward necessity in the nature of faith to declare it to the world, so there is an outward necessity for confession in the nature of the Church as a congregation of believers. Otherwise Christians could not know

each other as such, and therefore would not unite to perform the duties which are laid upon them jointly and to exercise the privileges which are involved in the assembly of Christians. A visible church organization of any permanence and efficiency is impossible without a confession that unites the members and separates them from others not in harmony with its purposes and aims. To His disciples the Lord has committed the means of grace and entrusted their administration or the edification of His body. The execution of this commission is necessary for the preservation of their own spiritual life as well as for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. Their hearts' desire and delight is to come together and do His gracious will and worship Him in the beauty of holiness, assured that where two or three are gathered together in His name there He will be in the midst of them. Hence we read that the early Christians:

“continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers,”

and that

“they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.” Acts 2:42, 46, 47.

Hence too the injunction is given:

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.” Heb. 10:23-24.

Manifestly the organization of Christians for work and worship according to the Master's will, everywhere and always presupposes their profession of their faith as the condition of mutual recognition as fellow believers. They can not work together and worship together with those who will not acknowledge Christ to be their Lord and will not submit themselves to His Word, who alone is King and has authority in His kingdom. To determine

both who shall be received and who shall not be received as brethren in Christ, the Church must have a confession of faith.

Some maintain that the Bible is their creed and that is enough for any and all Christians. No intelligent believer doubts that the acceptance by faith of the truth given by inspiration and written in the Holy Scriptures is amply sufficient for the unity of the Church. The Lord Himself forbids any attempts to add anything to His Word or take anything from it. Only sinful human arrogance and presumption could think of such a thing. The thought grates harshly on the devout soul which stands in awe of God's Word. And it is as stupid as it is profane; for how could man, with the limitations necessarily imposed upon him by his finite nature, and blinded besides by the sin that is in him, by any possibility improve the revelation of God's wisdom and love given us in the Bible? Only the extreme of human folly could indulge such a notion. The Holy Scriptures are perfect; they lack nothing and contain nothing superfluous.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.

Unquestionably they are right who maintain that the truth recorded in the Bible is sufficient for life and death, for time and eternity. That is exactly our position. But to the question respecting the necessity of a creed to guarantee the purity and unity of the visible Church all this is irrelevant. When the perfection and sufficiency of the Bible is urged to sustain the outcry against creeds, the supposed reasoning borders on the ridiculous. The Bible is not a confession of faith. It is the source whence our faith is derived and the rule by which the purity of our faith is judged. Without it we could have no faith, and all questions about faith would be futile. It furnishes the truth, and the power to believe it. But do you believe it? That is a different matter, and that is the question about your creed. When a church is organized we want to know with whom we are agreed, so that we can walk together and worship together and work together. Not whether the Bible is true, or whether it contains everything for Christian faith and fellowship, is then the question; that is unquestionable and long ago settled. But do you believe it, and what is your faith? That remains to be determined before people can unite in a Christian congregation and continue steadfastly in the apostles'

doctrine and fellowship. That is what makes a confession necessary. Not every gathering of people, nor every organization of people into a society, is church. This is a congregation of believers and therefore requires a confession of the Christian faith to identify it.

If the opponent of all creeds should maintain that we misrepresent his contention, alleging that he does not mean to confound the truth of the Bible with the faith which believes it and he confession setting forth the content of that faith, but that his idea is to regard the declaration of belief in the Bible to be a sufficient basis of church unity, there are several important matters to be considered in reply.

The first of these is that, like all other opponents of church confessions, he abandons his ground as soon as he is required to give an intelligent account of his opposition and his reason for it. His objection is not to creed, but to any definite statement of what he believes. This makes his case worse, if possible, but as the advantage of making him understood. What he means is that the brief statement, "I believe the Bible," is a sufficient creed, because it pledges him to everything contained in Holy Scriptures. He thus stands in agreement with professed opponents of creeds generally, none of whom really renounce all professions of faith, but all of whom confine that profession to one article, such as:

- I believe the Bible,
- I believe the Protestant religion,
- I believe in baptism by immersion,
- I believe in private judgment,
- I believe in Christian liberty, or
- I believe what the Church teaches.

In every case it is a creed, showing, in the first place, that no sect could hold together without some sort of bond of union, and that none could have its claim to be regarded as a Christian sect admitted without some kind of confession indicating its general purpose of adhering to Christianity in what to its members may seem essential; and showing, in the second place, that the expression of any definite faith in the precious truth revealed in Holy Scripture, as a basis of church union, as scrupulously shunned, as though that would render their cohesion impossible.

The second consideration in respect to such opponents is, that their creed is of such a character as to be useless for any legitimate purpose of a confession. Perhaps it is the instinctive feeling of this that renders them inclined to wage war against all creeds, notwithstanding the necessity of adopting some flag around which their party may rally. This may for a time subserve their purpose of gathering a sect and keeping it together, but for the purposes of the Church of Christ, which is the congregation of believers, it is impotent and vain. For when a person declares that he believes the Bible, a true Christian believer who desires fellowship with other Christian believers in a Christian congregation can not refrain from asking, "Well, what do you believe?" The question might seem needless, seeing that the Bible contains the whole truth of God unto salvation. But the grossest heretics will say that: some who do not believe in the Triune God of the Bible or the plan of salvation which it reveals, say that; and some who do not care what it reveals and are as indifferent to one form of doctrine as the other, say that.

Virtually it means nothing, all-inclusive as the creed seems to be.

The number of unbelievers who declare their belief in the Bible is legion; they believe many things, but that which is the essential thing they do not believe. At any rate as long as Romanists and Rationalists, Socinians and Anabaptists, Mormons and Spiritists, alike declare agreement in the little creed which formally embraces everything and explicitly confesses nothing, no one can know what the profession really means. It is a creed that in form accepts the whole Christian faith, but in fact evades every article, and leaves as much in doubt what a person does believe as if he simply declared himself a Christian, which should say much, but often says nothing of any value in establishing a Christian congregation.

And when creeds are so narrow as that of renouncing all of them, but reserving the one article of immersion or the Sabbath, one can not refrain from asking if that is all that he believes. A banner such as that is assuredly too beggarly to be set up in the name of the Lord.

The Augsburg Confession gave explicit and distinct expression to the faith which lived in the hearts of evangelical Christians in the days of the Reformation. The ecumenical creeds were cordially accepted, as they had been by generations of Christians before. But the truth which they set forth had been obscured by papal ordinances and manifold corruptions, and these brief declarations of Christian faith were insufficient to serve as a banner

around which the evangelical Christians, in their distinction from the adherents of Rome who resisted the reformatory work, could rally and present a united front as the Church of the Reformation. This was accomplished by the Augsburg Confession. It united the Lutherans and separated them from the Romanists.

Not as thoughtful as they should be, some look with an air of triumph on this latter statement as an admission which confirms their judgment against creeds, and presume that it is made in an unguarded moment. But it is the truth considerably spoken, and all that we ask is that they should weigh it well. A little serious reflection will lead to a better understanding of the import and purpose of the Christians' confession of their faith. It is this faith, not primarily its manifestation to the world in the confession, that unites and divides – unites those who believe and separates them from those who do not believe. The faith which embraces the Gospel unites to Him who is presented in that Gospel as the Savior of sinners, and in Him binds together in one body all those who by the same faith flee for refuge to the same Savior, who alone is their hope and their strength.

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together or a habitation of God through the Spirit.” Eph. 2:19-22.

“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” Rom. 12:4, 5.

Hence Christians are not required to create the unity of the communion of saints, which is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, but are exhorted not to permit sin to break or disturb that unity in their congregational life and work,

“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: there is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.” Eph. 4:3-6.

When a visible church is organized due account must be made of this unity in Christ by one faith. God requires it and His Spirit moves the believing heart to desire it. The faith is confessed, and those who are agreed in the confession join together outwardly as the Holy Spirit has joined them together inwardly. Only those who are one in their allegiance to the one Lord as He has made known His will by His Word in Holy Scripture, and who embrace Him and the truth to which He bears witness by the one faith which inspires them with one hope of their calling, can recognize each other as persons with whom they can walk and work in harmony as loyal subjects of the one Lord; and as they were made one by the Holy Spirit through faith, so now they manifest that oneness by their confession of that faith and their agreement in the articles which it embraces and which are confessed. Their confession is the standard which they set up and around which they gather as one body.

The other side of the matter, which is inevitable when the unity of faith is once accepted as a condition of fellowship in the church organization, is what causes so many to stumble. But as not all men have faith, the alternative is presented of excluding from the organization those who will not accept the confession on the basis of which the congregation of believers is formed, or of abandoning the one faith as the condition of fellowship and thus forfeiting all claim of constituting one body in Christ, and thus confessedly establishing a merely human society, or at best a new religious sect, which makes no account of the one faith and endangers allegiance to the one Lord. Gathering believers into one fold implies their separation from the unbelievers, who are not wanted as unbelievers in the congregation, because they refuse to be subject to the one Lord and His holy Word, and therefore would only be a disturbing element in the Church and serve to defeat the purposes of its organization. Such unbelievers would be as welcome as any other sinners, if they would repent and believe the Gospel; for Christ died also for them and calls them also to come to Him and find peace in believing; but as long as they resist the Spirit and refuse to have Christ reign over them they can have no place in His kingdom.

We can hardly conceive that any Christian of sufficient intelligence to be a communicant member of the Church can fail to see, that if a visible Church is to exist at all, the membership must be recognized by the confession of their faith, and that if such a congregation of believers is formed, those who are not believers will of necessity have no part in it. And what is

so evident in the nature of the case is expressly commanded in Holy Scripture.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk with them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among hem, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.” 2 Cor. 6:14-17.

Christians form churches by gathering together in the name of their Savior, uniting as Christians and separating from those who are not Christians, and identifying and testifying their unity as Christians by their confession of the Christian faith. The Church of the Reformation restored the old evangelical faith, which had been largely set aside, to the old Christian Church, which had been greatly corrupted under the papal dominion, and presented itself to the world as the purified Christian Church under the banner of the Augsburg Confession, on which was inscribed the everlasting Gospel.

The maintenance of such a Church with its confession of the pure Christian faith should never have been thought an offense by any soul claiming to have faith in the Redeemer. It is as remarkable as it is deplorable that such offense has been taken. That the enemies of the truth in Jesus make war upon the Christian Church is not strange. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and the Gospel cannot be otherwise than a stumbling block to men whose pride is the wisdom of this world and whose reliance is on their own righteousness. The proclamation of salvation only through Jesus' blood, shed for the remission of our sins, is intolerable to the vain conceit of blinded humanity, and no one need wonder that it takes up arms to resent the supposed insult.

But it is surprising that professed Christians should contend against Christians for earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints, setting forth anew that faith in the Augsburg Confession and organizing its congregations under that gospel banner. It should never have been so and should not be so now. The Christian faith which all professed followers of Christ are presumed to profess, bears no such fruit. It is true, a fact that appears on the surface offers some explanation of the strange attitude which some assume to the great Church of the Reformation and her persistence in

building the Church on the foundation presented in Holy Scripture and declared in the Augsburg Confession. The organization of the Church with that Confession as its symbol not only separates Christians from all people who are unwilling to declare themselves as such, but gathers into its fold only those who believe the pure Gospel which God restored to His people through the Reformation and thus separates them from many who, though they still claim to be Christians, are not ready to put away the errors and reform the abuses which the Church of the Reformation condemns, and to adopt the one pure faith of the Gospel. That which arouses their hostility is the alleged narrowness of the Augsburg Confession, which not only excludes Jews and Gentiles from the renewed Christian Church, but even puts up barriers against some who are willing to declare themselves Christians, but are not willing to profess the pure Gospel which our Confession sets forth, nor to reject the errors which our Confession condemns. While this makes plain what is regarded as the head and front of the Lutheran Church's offending, and thus accounts to some extent for the opposition to her Scriptural contention and her faithful work in the past and present, it also shows how void of thorough examination of the subject in the light both of Scripture and history such opposition has been and to this day still remains.

Moved by that charity which all Christians owe to each other and of which all have great need, we cannot accept as correct, what a cursory view of such opposition would on the face of it suggest, that it is consciously designed as a crusade not only against the Augsburg Confession and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, whose banner that Confession is acknowledged to be, but against the whole work of the Reformation. Our opponents are not all of the Romanizing kind, who, especially in the Episcopal Church of England and America, not appreciating the central doctrine of the Gospel for which our fathers so earnestly contended, and overestimating the value of forms and ceremonies, could have little love for the Lutheran Church and see little need for the Reformation. There are some who mean to favor it and profess to prize its great blessings to the Church and to the world. They want to be reckoned among evangelical believers and their societies to be reckoned among the Evangelical Churches. It is imperative, if these people would have a conscience void of offense, that they give the subject more earnest attention and devote to it more thought in the light which God offers them, lest they be found fighting against what they themselves must recognize as the cause of God.

Those who are opposed to the evangelical truth for which the reformers contended are not expected to be our friends; but those who profess to embrace the Gospel for which the Church of the Reformation stands, cannot righteously and reasonably be our enemies. Can men who profess to believe the Christian truth as it was proclaimed by Luther and his associates, and was formulated in the Augsburg Confession as the faith of the Protestants, really mean that the Evangelical Church should have uttered nothing in the declaration of its faith that could distinguish it from Romanism and popery?

We are loathe to believe it.

The battle of the Reformation was not directly against Jews and Islamics and heathens of the various then existing types. It was a contest for the truth of the Gospel within the organized Church, and its primary meaning and purpose was the reformation of the Church, which had become sadly corrupted. The victory which the Reformation won was the victory of the pure Word of God over every form of error and abuse that had found its way into the Church. The Augsburg Confession declares the faith by which that victory was won, and the Church of the Augsburg Confession reaps the fruit of that victory and carries that Confession as the banner of the purified Church. Could that Church avoid declaring what inwardly separated the evangelical Christians from the Papists, and must therefore be a bar to their external fellowship in the purified Church? It would be preposterous to suppose that any Christian sincerely professing to be an evangelical Protestant, whatever may be the denomination to which he belongs, would seriously maintain a proposition so inconsistent and so absurd. What could our fathers have meant by their labors and sufferings in the glorious cause of the Reformation if, when the victory had been won, they had established a pretended Church of the Reformation with all doors thrown open for the admission of popery and all its abominations, and of fanaticism with all its horrors? Think of their setting up a banner with such a device, which would blazon to the world their insincerity and treachery! By such conduct the Reformation would be branded as a scheme of base hypocrisy and the reformers as very fools who had not even the cunning to secure earthly rewards for their knavery. To us it seems impossible that sincere Protestants of any Church could think the evangelical Christians of the stormy Reformation days to be capable of perpetrating such a monstrosity as that of drawing up a confession "broad and liberal" enough to include all the errors and abuses and wrongs of the corrupt parties against whom they had been

waging for years a victorious warfare in the name of the Lord. That these corrupt papistic parties claimed to be Christians also, could no more deter the Lutherans from declaring the pure faith of the Gospel in the Augsburg Confession, to the exclusion of all unscriptural tenets and ordinances and of all who claimed for them divine authority, than could the plea that there are many “good people” among the Jews and Islamics induce them to make the Lutheran platform wide enough for them all to stand upon.

The Lutherans believed the Gospel, and what they confessed was their Gospel faith. On that foundation the Church of the Reformation was gathered and the Augsburg Confession as lifted up as its banner. Whoever accepted this faith was included; whoever rejected this faith was excluded: there was no respect of persons, and no consideration of conditions or consequences to divert attention from the one aim of organizing a congregation of believers on the basis of the pure Gospel.

The Reformation originated in the effort of Dr. Luther to displace some errors that had found their way into the Roman Church and that were working harm to the souls of men. When he began his work he did not know what a mass of corruption that Church, of which he was a loyal member, had become. It deserves to be repeated again and again, that he was no self-constituted reformer, who had drawn up a plan for the betterment of the Church and the world. Least of all had he a thought of achieving greatness by doing wonderful things for the amelioration of human conditions. He was a modest preacher and professor who was sincere in his devotion to duty, and who therefore was determined to perform it under all circumstances and at whatever cost. He was meek and humble, and not at all quarrelsome or disposed to create disturbances, but of great courage in the performance of every obligation laid upon him by his calling. He could not be driven from his post of duty by fear, as he could not be enticed from it by favor. It was in the discharge of his duties that Tetzl crossed his path.

This man of luxurious living offered indulgences to some whom Luther had admonished to penitence. Luther did not immediately turn against Tetzl, who was commissioned by the proper authorities to carry on his trade, indignant as he was at the interference with his office, but quietly nailed up his theses, inviting thoughtful Christians to discuss the subject, ascertain the truth and right, and thus in an orderly way abate the evil. It was not his fault that proud and haughty dignitaries of the Church made the challenge to a peaceful discussion of the points involved the occasion of a violent public

controversy. He was not the man to flee when an enemy obstructed his path, as he was not the man to raise a needless quarrel. He stood his ground when attacks came. Having in the providence of God had the opportunity to study the Scriptures and having progressed far enough in these studies to see the error of his assailants, he resisted their attacks. Thus the Reformation began.

Others by the grace of God saw the Gospel light which began to shine throughout Germany, and Luther and his coadjutors were driven still farther into the Scriptures as the assaults increased, until the central truth of the Gospel, with all that belonged to it, became plain as the sunlight. So the truth continued to spread until the days of Augsburg came, when the evangelical Christians had long ceased to be recognized as true Christians and Christian fellowship between them and the Papists had become impossible. The Lutherans were condemned as heretics who could not be admitted to communion, and they could not abandon their evangelical faith and thus make possible their relief from the papal ban. They desired peace, but they could not recant, and thus prove unfaithful to their Lord and Savior and sacrifice their joyful hope of salvation. Instead of such cowardly weakness they boldly, in the name of the Lord, declared their pure Christian faith in the Augsburg Confession and set up their evangelical banner.

To this the Romanists did not agree. It was not expected that they should. What they desired was that the Protestants should relinquish their protest, that the evangelical Christians should abandon their insistence on the Gospel and return to popery. This was well enough understood. So far as history shows and the character of the controversy indicates, there was not a thought entertained that the Lutherans would establish a Church with confession latitudinarian enough to embrace all parties professing to be Christians, and thus cause a needless division in the Church and render themselves guilty of the sin of schism. It was their Christian faith and their conscience bound by the Word of God that rendered it necessary to put forth their evangelical Confession and establish congregations with the pure Word and Sacrament, which all Christians might join, but only on condition that they accepted the pure faith and subscribed the Augsburg Confession. Christians under the papacy were welcome; they all were such before Luther preached the Gospel and restored the light of grace and salvation in Christ; but of course they were welcome to the fellowship of the Evangeli-

cal Church only on the condition of accepting the evangelical faith and joining them in its confession.

There were some who called themselves Protestants and Evangelical Christians, but who objected to some articles of the Augsburg Confession. They could of be accommodated in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which could as little surrender any portion of its faith to favor them as it could do this to favor the Romanists. Dissenters accordingly drew up confessions of their own, two such, the Reckoning of Zwingli and the Tetrapolitan Confession, even having been presented at the Diet where our glorious Augsburg Confession was read. It is deplorable that thus even in the days of the Reformation divisions occurred among the Protestants. But the same fidelity to the truth revealed in Holy Scripture which necessitated the separation from Rome constrained the Lutherans to reject the errors of the Zwinglians and Anabaptists, and all others who denied any article of the evangelical faith. But as sin has come into the world and brought its curse, such deplorable things are inevitable.

“For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.” 1 Cor. 2:19.

Sects and schisms belong to the works of the flesh, and where they occur there is always sin. But the sin always lies with those who depart from the Word of God. never with those who continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship. If possible, the indifference which treats such sin lightly is worse than the sin ignored and often even defended.

“I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.” Rom. 16:17.

“It must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.” Matt. 18:7.

Our fathers did not overlook the solemn words of the apostle: “I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” 1 Cor. 1:10. They knew the far reaching import of the words, and they earnestly

endeavored to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. But the unity and harmony of Christians must be unity in the one Lord by the one Spirit through the one faith which clings unwaveringly to the Lord's Word. The same mind must be in Christ's disciples which was also in Christ, and they can be of one mind only when they all accept the same revealed truth to which Christ testified as the everlasting truth of God.

"Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." John 18:37.

"If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31, 32.

Knowing the truth and liberated from every human yoke of bondage, the Evangelical Christians, who fought the battles and endured the trials and enjoyed the blessings of the Reformation, gathered those who were of one mind in accepting the Lord's testimony into the Evangelical Church under the Augsburg Confession. They could not admit into that Confession the Romish errors which they were earnestly striving to eradicate, and the Romanists therefore could not unite with them in their glorious Confession of the truth revealed from heaven. Whose fault was it, then, that a division resulted? The question was a simple one. Should the Lutherans abandon the Gospel, and losing this be lost, or should the Romanists abandon the papal usurpations, and losing this be saved?

The confessors at Augsburg could not do otherwise than they did, and the Romanists, refusing to accept the truth in Jesus, became the Romish sect, which it continues to be until his day, by hardening itself against the truth and later setting up its papal banner, in its decrees and confession of Trent, in opposition to the Church of the Reformation with its Augsburg Confession of the pure faith. And if Zwingli and the four cities had delivered separate confessions thought it right to cause a further division by declining to subscribe the Augsburg Confession and endeavoring to rally disaffected Protestants around a different flag, that was their concern and theirs was the responsibility.

The Lutherans, faithful to the truth which God gave them grace to believe, could do no more than patiently teach and solemnly confess that

truth, and if on that account Papists and rationalistic or fanatical Protestants were determined to cause divisions and offenses contrary to the evangelical doctrine which they had learned from the Scriptures, the Lutherans could not help the deplorable action. According to the apostolic admonition there was nothing left for them to do but to mark those who caused such divisions and avoid them.

Since the days of the Reformation the Zwinglian and Calvinist opposition to some articles of the Augsburg Confession has given birth to a long series of sects, which are a grief to many Christians and a trouble especially to the great Church of the Reformation. This trouble is not caused by any profounder study of the Holy Scriptures on their part or deeper insight into the truth which our Savior came to witness. Such study and insight never could rightfully give rise to new sects and schisms. All results of reverent searching of the Scriptures have a proper place in the evangelical faith set forth in the Augsburg Confession. Our Formula of Concord shows how beautifully the deepest theological thinking, when it is done in humble submission to the truth given in Holy Scripture, accords with the simplest utterance of faith as given in the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. No new sect is necessary to set forth and maintain the truth in Jesus by a new confession. It is all contained in the faith set forth in the evangelical Confession of the Church of the Reformation, which never objected to more explicit statements of what is implied in the articles of its creed, but always rejoices in her members' growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Nor is she perplexed by new objections to any articles of her faith. All the arguments of any apparent force were urged and weighed in the days of Luther and his co-laborers, and those who have made a study of those sturdy times are usually surprised to find how little of any worth is now adduced which was not brought forward then against the evangelical faith and thoroughly refuted.

Strange as, in view of modern progress in science, it may seem, there is rarely an objection presented against any point in the Lutheran Confession that has not been fully and triumphantly, answered in the writings of our reformatory fathers. What makes the trouble is a matter of an entirely different sort.

The Church of the Augsburg Confession has continued to live and labor in the world since the great Reformation in various countries besides its native home in the land of Luther, and is still the great Church of the Refor-

mation with a membership larger than all other Protestant Churches combined, and she still carries the same old evangelical banner and gathers Christians around it, as she did centuries ago. The conditions of Christian fellowship are still the same, unchanged and unchangeable because founded on Holy Scripture, which is the only authority she recognizes in matters of faith and conscience. But numerous other churches present themselves in the same territory where she erects her altars. They are independent of her, and she is not responsible for their faith and life. But they exist, and she can not ignore the fact. Their existence and their activity presents a difficulty, specially in this country where the liberty of conscience secured by the Lutheran Reformation is so fully guaranteed and sects have so greatly multiplied, which is often embarrassing and always a hindrance to the proper and effectual prosecution of the Church's legitimate work. The root of the evil is of course the sin which antagonizes the kingdom of God, and which has found one of its most effectual agencies in the sect system, whose sinfulness so many fail to recognize and some even extol as a blessing to Christendom, notwithstanding the clear light which the Scriptures shed upon it and the frequent warnings which they give against it as a work of the flesh.

To say that heresies and divisions should not exist, does not exempt us from the trouble which they cause. Sin ought not to exist in any form. It has no right in the world. Its wages are death, and ruin and misery follows in its wake through all the world and through all the ages. But it exists, and must be reckoned with. Sects and schisms are evils that trouble the Church, and as we can not abolish the sin we must be solicitous to pursue the path of righteousness in dealing with them. This the Evangelical Lutheran Church has always done, sparing no pains to learn from the Word of her Lord what His will is, and suffering persecution in faithfully performing it.

If the whole subject were as simple as errorists are prone to regard it, the Church of the Reformation would have as little difficulty with it and would suffer as little from it as do most of the sects. When we seek to establish congregations on the old Christian foundation, setting up our banner of the Augsburg Confession and laboring earnestly to lead souls to the faith there declared and to root them and ground them in it, we meet with opposition. If this were confined to the enemies of the Church, it would be perfectly natural and could excite no surprise. But it comes also from the churches, and that not only from the Romish, but from the Protestant as well. The

conditions, in our country at least, usually become the same as they were in the times of the Reformation. Those who gathered around the Augsburg Confession came out from the world and from the professed Christians who were wedded to prevalent corruptions and refused to accept the pure Gospel, and Papists and erring Protestants opposed them in their separation. So it is now.

The Romanists have no more love for us now than they had then. How could they, seeing that they condemned the Reformation and have gone on in their condemnation to this day, still maintaining the usurpations and abominations against which the Reformation was directed? They simply condemn us as heretics, and have nothing further to do with us. But the Protestants, though often they have as strong a partisan feeling for their own sect as the Romanists, profess to welcome us as sister sect, but soon, when they see that we mean what we have inscribed on our banner and that our Christian faith is not a mere pretense, turn against us, and often turn more actively against us than do the adherents of the papal Antichrist. The latter hate us as an evangelical sect which refuses to bend to the will of the pope, the former fight us and decry us as a bigoted foreign importation endeavoring to domineer over our free American people by their loyalty to the old flag of the Reformation, which is the flag around which Christians rallied since the founding of the Church, but which later sects pronounce antiquated.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church encounters difficulties of which other denominations have little experience, and that difficulty is increased by the disloyalty of some who bear her name, but refuse to bear the cross which fidelity to her faith and her principles would lay upon them. Pastors who are driven to and fro by every wind of doctrine have no reason to hope for success in building up Evangelical Lutheran congregations in this or in any other land. But what shall we do when sects swarm around us professing the kindest feeling toward us as Protestants and welcoming us to the fraternity of Protestant sects, inviting to common fellowship in the churches and cooperation in every good work?

That we are building churches of the Augsburg Confession they ought to know by the very name we bear and by the Catechism which we teach; but unfortunately they are ignorant of many things that Christians ought to know; and when we tell them that our purpose is to perpetuate the blessed fruits of the Reformation and therefore to maintain the faith of the Augs-

burg Confession as the standard of church fellowship, with all the inclusiveness and all the exclusiveness which this involves, and when they come to see the import of our labor and prayers, and pronounce us a narrow-minded and uncharitable sect, against which war must be waged in the name of love and liberty, what then?

It has come to this by the honest confession of our faith, and the situation seems perplexing, Had we not the sad history of the Lutheran Church in this land of the free staring us in the face, we might say, in reply to such a question, that when other denominations think it right and good to declare war upon us on account of our work of faith and labor of love, there is nothing for Lutheran Christians to do but to stand to their guns. But some have done otherwise and we have no authority to say that they were not Christians. They were weak brethren, who desired to have peace with all who named the dear name of Christ, and therefore would rather sacrifice some portions of the faith which was precious to the men of the Reformation than to suffer the imputation of uncharitableness and to be disdained by sects which also claimed to be Protestant. Thus it came about that Puritanic and Methodistic and latitudinarian opinions came into vogue in churches that were designed to be Lutheran, and the Augsburg Confession was retained only as substantially correct in fundamentals, leaving room for any sect or any sectarian to choose what doctrine or what aspect of any doctrine of the reformatory faith, as set forth in our Confession, should be considered the faith of these churches. Unquestionably if the Gospel trumpet in Luther's day had given such an uncertain sound there would have been no Reformation and no Church of the Augsburg Confession. Lutheran Christians, who heartily believe what our fathers confessed and therefore firmly maintain that noble Confession, can make no such concessions to erring sects, though they call themselves Protestants — holding to the Scriptural rule of "first pure, then peaceable," and seeking peace only under the banner of heavenly truth. But what should we do then, if others, with whom we would gladly be at peace, commence hostilities, speaking evil of us, persecuting us, and hampering us in our holy work?

Reason would suggest that, if we cannot yield to their wishes and thus virtually abandon the cause of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, we should ignore the opponents and labor on as if they did not exist. That might commend itself to the judgment of the natural man and seem to the worldly mind a prudent policy. But Lutherans are evangelical Christians and inquire

first of all, what the Scriptures teach and what accordingly is the will of the Lord. And while this instructs us to avoid those who teach otherwise than God's Word teaches, and not to make ourselves partakers of the sins of those who promulgate false doctrines and make hurtful divisions among the followers of Christ, it does not dispense us from the duties of love and righteousness toward them. Romanists find it easy and think it safe to hurl their anathemas against all who will not have the pope to reign over them, and having put us under condemnation they can treat our churches as if they did not exist. In the main, Protestant sects, although not so settled in their theoretical convictions, practically coincide with Rome in their treatment of us, each regarding the whole world as its field and therefore ignoring all claim of rights guaranteed to others, as is evident not only from the incursions made by sectarians into our congregations and interferences in our divinely appointed offices and labors, but in a wholesale and officially recognized way by sending missionaries to Lutheran lands, as if these were heathen territory. We Lutherans being human, our flesh would rouse us to indignant retaliation by disregarding all sectarian institutions and breaking down their churches to the full extent of our wit and strength. But the Head of the Church, who desires the salvation of others as well as ours, and whose we are and whom we serve, forbids this, and we must therefore crucify the flesh and do His bidding, in which the spirit rejoices. In reason's eyes this puts us at a great disadvantage; for it makes our congregations a favorite field of operations for predatory proselyters, whilst it forbids us to disturb the offices and labors of their organizations so long as these are in faith and charity be called Christian. But we are quite sure that when the Lord's will is done the prosperity of the Church is promoted, whatever reason may say and appearances may indicate, and that in the end truth and righteousness will triumph.

The perversity of sectarian disregard of Scripture and consequent carnal thinking produces few more curious phenomena among the many which it presents than that of its treatment of the pure Evangelical Church of the Reformation. While they profess great love for us as one of the evangelical sects, they steal the sheep which have been gathered into our fold; while we emphasize the Gospel truth of our Confession as needful to establish our evangelical character and its acceptance as necessary to constitute an Evangelical Church, they denounce us as narrow minded bigots who still cling to the rags of popery; while they laud Luther and the Reformation as the

source of all modern Christian life and liberty, they condemn the Church of the Augsburg Confession, into which all the fruits of the Reformation have been gathered and in which they have during all these ages been preserved, as a fossilized creature of the middle ages that still has clinging to it the mark of the beast; while they coddle us, as long as sentimental weaklings or rationalistic boasters unconditionally submit themselves to popular sectarian vagaries, with an effusive affection that is pathetic, they cast out as evil the names of those who dare to lift up the Lutheran banner and seek to collect the Christian host under that standard, pretending that that is equivalent to an effort to lead the disenthralled Protestant host back to the yoke of slavery; while they claim the right to organize independent sects when they please and as they please, they deny the right of the great Church of the Reformation to build on its old foundation and propagate itself, in its proper identity as the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as the Church of the Augsburg Confession, carrying that as its banner, through the lands and the ages, as the basis and test of evangelical church fellowship; and perhaps more inexplicable than all other whims and paradoxes, while they laud the liberty in the professed exercise of which they become freebooters in the visible Church, they denounce as papistical and illiberal the evangelical principle which prevents the Church of the Reformation from retaliating and which, if they would only consider, would lead them to pursue a course worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called as followers of Christ.

We cannot accept the errors which have given birth to the multitudinous sects infesting our land and sapping the life of the Christian Church on earth, and we cannot treat the sects as associations outside of the church organization in this world of sin. That is their advantage and our trouble. But come, let us reason together. Some of our brethren think that we are conceding too much; some hearkening more than they should to the pleas of sectarians, who do not give earnest heed to the things written in Holy Scripture, but all the more to their own hearts, think that we do not concede enough. Come, let us reason together, but meantime not forget that only the Word of God can decide what is right and therefore duty.

At the time of the Reformation it was not maintained by our fathers, and according to the Word of God could not be maintained, that all who were Christians accepted the pure Gospel, declared their acceptance in the Augsburg Confession, and became members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church which gathered under that banner. There were some who remained Papists,

and among those who shook off the chains of popery there were some who refused to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ and therefore would not subscribe the good Confession. Wild fanatics abused the liberty which the Reformation secured, and proved a lamentable hindrance to the progress of the work. The Evangelical Church, in obedience to the Lord's command, could not fraternize with these errorists. But who would say that all these erring parties, whether Romanists or alleged Protestants, were unbelievers, and that there could be no true Christians among them? Such opinions are sometimes imputed to the Church of the Reformation, and her work and her Confession reconstrued accordingly. No wonder that on such a lack of comprehension bad work is made of her whole history and import. If she had retained the false doctrine of the Papists concerning the Church such a judgment might be excusable. But had that been the case the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession would never have come into being; for in that case our honest fathers would have admitted that they are a party outside of the Church, because declining to be under the jurisdiction of the pope. When God had led them by His Word to a knowledge of the truth in Jesus and of the great salvation which it brings, they were done with all the externalism and formalism of Rome, and returned to the old Christian Creed, which declares the Church, as well as the forgiveness of sins and the eternal life, to be an object of faith. Because the Lord has promised to work effectually wherever the means of grace are employed in His name, they believed that where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered, there the Lord is present and there He gathers a congregation of believers, though there should be but a few such among the many persons who externally unite. Notwithstanding the dangerous errors and corruptions which existed among the Papists, the means of grace, many as were the human ordinances which obscured their luster, were still administered in their congregations, and the Lutherans would have denied their faith if they had maintained that there were no believers among them, and that therefore their organization could not be recognized as a Christian Church. The Romanists were a Church of Christ because of the innocent believers who were brought to their Savior by the means of grace still validly administered in their midst, notwithstanding the errors which constituted them a sect and notwithstanding that the papal Antichrist sat in their temple and kept them in subjection as if he were God. And the Zwinglians and Calvinists, although they erred grievously in regard to these

very means of grace which constitute the marks by which faith is assured of the existence of the Church as a congregation of believers, notwithstanding our human inability to see who are believers and who are not, still used these means in all the elements necessary for their effectual working of faith in the souls of men, so that among them also faith could recognize the Church as a congregation of believers, although according to the Word of God they must, on account of their deviation from the pure truth of the Gospel, be regarded and avoided as sects that teach otherwise than God's Word teaches. As regards the portions of the Gospel which they retained, they were recognized as churches; as regards the errors which they embraced, they were rejected as sects, with which our fathers could not have church fellowship without practically sanctioning these errors and becoming partakers of their sin. The Lutherans set forth the pure Christian faith in their Augsburg Confession. On that they united; in the Lord's name they set up that as their banner; and because they spoke what they in their hearts believed as the very truth of God, they firmly declined to assume any responsibility for the doings and dealings of those who taught a different doctrine and established different churches. That is the position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church to this day.

It is this position and the church practice which it implies that seems so objectionable in our times and that subjects us to so much obloquy. While the Romanists condemn us because we can not again bend our necks to the yoke of papal bondage, and their false doctrine therefore impels them to condemn us as rebels against the one holy Church, which they blindly claim to be found only in their papal hierarchy, the other denominations condemn us as virtually in accord with popery, because we can not place truth and error on the same plane and accord to the latter the same right as to the former, but insist that a pure Church requires a pure Gospel, which our fathers restored in the Reformation and which they confessed, and we confess with them, in the Augsburg Confession. The most of them, offended because we will not fellowship those who profess themselves unable to walk with us in our pure Confession, accuse us of uncharitableness and intolerance without even doing us the common justice of hearing us and trying to understand us before they condemn us. Surely those who are really Christians among them would not fling such railing accusations at us and thus seek to defame us and cripple our work, if they took the trouble to inform themselves of our doctrines and practice and the ground upon which they rest, especially as

this is as indispensable for a correct estimate of the Reformation as for a just treatment of the great Church of the Reformation, which has been perpetuated by the children's continuance in the faith of the fathers as set forth in the Augsburg Confession. It may seem a hard saying, but truth and righteousness require it to be said, that in most instances the charges raised against the Lutheran Church are based on ignorance of her faith and life and history, and of the import of such facts as may be alleged against her. We do not say that this is so in all cases. In some it is manifestly worse than ignorance, very bad as this is when it leads to the defamation of a Church rendered illustrious by her noble history and honored by intelligent Christian believers everywhere as the chosen agency of God to restore evangelical light and liberty to the world. In some instances the unwarranted assaults made upon us are as evidently malicious when made by erring Protestants as by embittered Romanists; for their rudeness and violence cannot even in charity be ascribed to the innocent simplicity of ignorance. Only among the more cultured and refined students of the doctrines and history of the Church is it apparent that a better spirit pervades the opposition to our Church and her grand Confession and the practice which fidelity to her requires. We have no desire to conceal the fact that there are some in the Papal as in the Protestant sects who oppose us from conviction and try to treat us fairly. They are honest opponents of our doctrine and therefore of our practice. Doubtless there were some such among the Romanists and among the Sacramentarians in the days of the Reformation, and we have no reason for doubting that there are such among the sects of our turbulent times. Of these we have no complaint to make, much as we deplore their alleged inability to join us in the glorious Confession of Augsburg. But of course this better class of opponents, recognizing the doctrinal differences which necessitate different churches, do not expect us to abandon our faith without proof that it is false, and do not condemn us because we cannot affiliate with them so long as we stand by our faith and reject as error what conflicts with it. Being men of intelligence, they see very well that nothing could be gained by endeavoring to drive us or entice us from our faith by violating our conscience in the interest of a false peace and a supposititious harmony.

The course usually pursued by other churches toward the Church of the Augsburg Confession, when she refuses to profess agreement with them, shows how fundamental is the difference between them and us. What they ask of us is that we should pronounce those articles of our faith which they

dislike, to be indifferent, or mere matters of human opinion, and on the basis of the rest to work together with them in the establishment and edification of congregations and in the accomplishment of the work which the Lord has assigned to His Church. That, in the first place, would make the articles which our fathers derived from the Word of God and based on clear passages of Scripture invalid, because not accordant with the opinions prevalent among the sects opposing these articles, and of course would mean, in the final analysis, that the human judgment is an equal, if not a superior, authority in the kingdom of God. The rationalistic principle which has played such havoc in the Church of Christ on earth, is thus avowed and the effort made to have it sanctioned by the Church of the Reformation. She says nay to it, what ever the consequences may be, because in her faith the exclusive authority of Holy Scripture is preeminently fundamental. In the second place, if the sectarians who demand that we should yield some articles of our faith in the interest of peace and harmony, are sincere in their claim that these are mere opinions based on human reason and therefore indifferent in the domain of faith, why will they not, in this same interest of peace and harmony, disband their sectarian church and cast in their lot with us by joining the mother Church of the Reformation? Either they see no sin in causing divisions contrary to the doctrine learned from Holy Scripture, or they set their own sentiment or judgment against the Scriptures and overrule and override the Word of God by exalting their will above the will of the Lord. The fundamental difference between us is thus again apparent. But if they claim that they cannot yield the points in which they disagree with the Augsburg Confession, because their conscience is bound to their peculiar tenets adverse to the faith of the Reformation, how can they have the effrontery to ask the great Church of the Augsburg Confession whose faith has been tried and approved through all these centuries amid many conflicts and persecutions, to violate her conscience, which is bound by the Word of God, for the benefit of these sects?

Much of the discontent among the weak of those calling themselves Lutherans with the insistence of the Church of the Reformation on carrying forward her banner of the Augsburg Confession and rallying Christians around it, arises from misapprehension, and from fears inspired by the sects which surround her in this land of the free. Moved by the aspersions which are cast upon us by reason of our faith and the confession of it, which excludes all sectarian departures from it, in gathering and conducting congre-

gations, and thus led to misunderstand the import and purpose of such exclusion, they become ashamed of Scriptural doctrines and practices which have unhappily become unpopular among denominations growing large and rich around them, and make concessions which render them more and more like these sects and rendering the Evangelical Lutheran Church, stripped of its distinctive character, useless in the land and depriving it of all divine right to exist, because it has lost its identity and become a mere name, whilst that which the name has abusively come to represent is, if it is thought to be needful in the world at all, amply provided for in the sects which such misguided people mimic. The Lutheran Church, instead of overcoming opposition by the power of the pure Gospel which it proclaims, thus succumbs to the sect system, and instead of gaining the honor sought, is disdained as a servile imitator of Reformed Churches that stands for nothing distinctive and exists only by sufferance. Only fidelity to her principles and her faith gives promise for her future in this or in any other land.

But this fidelity imposes upon us the duty of endeavoring to have her faith and life and purpose clearly understood. There are at least some members of other churches who, while they are not in harmony with our Augsburg Confession and therefore not with our aims and labors under that banner, have no intention of doing wrong in opposing us. For their sake as well as for the sake of our own people who are in danger of being misled by the misrepresentations of adversaries, some explanations seem necessary.

It is true that the Church of the Reformation designed to set forth the pure Gospel in her Augsburg Confession, and thus to organize a pure visible Church instead of the Roman Church which had corrupted its ways before God and refused to turn from its errors at the Lord's call through His messenger, Martin Luther. It is true that this purified Church of the Augsburg Confession would yield no article of her evangelical faith to conciliate Romanists or Zwinglians, but gathered Christian people under the banner of her pure Christian Confession as a congregation of believers with the pure Word and Sacrament as the indispensable condition of fraternal fellowship, assured that while she thus maintained the truth in Jesus under the clear authority of His Word, she was building the true Church in the name of the Lord and with His constant presence, and that if any professed Christians would not or could not join them on these terms, it was not in their power to change the conditions, and the responsibility must rest with those who refused assent to the pure Gospel and its pure Confession in the purified

Church. It is true that the Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, occupies the same position still, knowing that the Gospel has not changed since the Reformation and that the Confession and the conditions of church fellowship under it, therefore had no need to be changed, seeing that the children of the Reformation by the grace of God have the same faith in the same pure Gospel confessed by the purified Church. She still in her proclamation of the everlasting Gospel invites all nations to come to the feast which the mercy of God has prepared in Christ for all people, and gladly welcomes all, including Romanists and Zwinglians, to join her, but on the same condition of accepting her good Confession as that on which they have themselves joined together to inherit the blessings and do the work of a congregation of believers. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is just as exclusive now of those who will not with her confess the pure Gospel as she was in the days of the Reformation, being precisely the same Church still, and now as then she is not disturbed by the deplorable fact that some who profess to be Christians are unwilling to join her on the terms proposed, which, because he believes, she cannot alter. All this is true, and we stand for it all. If others think us wrong, that is of course their concern, and whatever they may do on that account they must answer for; but we believe and therefore speak. If any are in doubt and ask for the ground of our faith, we are always cordially willing to search the Scriptures with them and show the foundation on which our faith rests, but we can make no compromises with error and can concede nothing against the Holy Scriptures, whoever may ask it, whatever may be the reasons for asking it, and whatever may be the threatened consequences of our refusal. The Lord reigns in His Church, and when we walk in the way of His Word we need fear no evil. We march under the banner of the Augsburg Confession in the full assurance of faith, having no doubt that the Captain of our salvation will make all things, no matter how gloomy the ways of fidelity to His Word may sometimes seem, work together for the good of them that love Him.

But whilst it is true that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is thus exclusive of all who refuse to unite on the ground of the pure Word and Sacrament resented in the Augsburg Confession, whether they be professedly Christians or not, it is not true that she is illiberal and intolerant in any legitimate Christian sense of these terms. Indeed, she is within the limits of Holy Scripture, the most liberal of all churches, her conviction and her Confes-

sion being that “unto the true unity of the Church it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments; nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by men should be alike everywhere, as St. Paul says, ‘There is one faith. one baptism, one God and Father of all.’” The Lutheran Church allows a diversity so great in forms of worship and government, that some sectarians wonder how her unity can possibly be preserved at all under such conditions. There are differences enough among us in this respect to furnish material for a dozen sects, if the one faith did not bind us together; and a dozen sects, separated from each other merely by human preferences and tastes, might find a satisfactory home among us if their error in regard to the one faith did not constitute a barrier between us. What the Lord declares, that must stand forever; what man institutes according to his reason or fancy or taste, that may change, and we have no thought of disrupting or in any way disturbing the unity of the Church on such human grounds. The Lutheran Church acknowledges only Christ to be Lord and King of His Church. To His authority, as He speaks to us in His Word, all must bow in His kingdom; beyond that all is free. If any want a liberality beyond that, they want what true believers in Christ as such can never grant, because it would be granting the very principle which makes the papal hierarchy the Antichristian abomination which it is by placing human reason and notion and sentiment and taste on an equality with Holy Scripture. The Word of God must rule, if the Church of Christ is to stand against the gates of hell.

Nor is it true that the Evangelical Lutheran Church ever was or is now intolerant, whether in principle or in practice. There is nothing in her doctrine or constitution, in her spirit or life, that could lead to such a wrong, or to a justification of any charge against her of such a wrong. She never persecuted; she has no motives to persecute; she never sanctioned persecution. Her knowledge of the nature of Christ’s kingdom precludes it. History furnishes no evidence to justify such a charge. Her members are sinners as are all other people, and it is therefore not pretended that they are free from wrong-doing. No doubt some have sinned also by unjust treatment of errorists; but never has personal violence for the punishment of false doctrine or its suppression received her sanction or in any way been fairly attributable to her teaching. She forbids persecution, and if any in her fold is found guilty of it, she admonishes to repentance, as she does in regard to every other sin. But if some of her adversaries are determined to make out a case

against her by abuse of words in order to abuse her, we can not help that. We admit that our Confession, while it sets forth the truth of the Gospel, rejects the opposite errors. It not only does this by implication when it presents the evangelical truth, but it does so expressly and repeatedly and emphatically. The Church can not do otherwise, because she believes what she confesses, and as her faith rests on the Word of God, she must declare the opposite doctrines false, and therefore warns against them and those who promulgate hem, on the simple and easily comprehended ground, that such human substitutes for divine truth dishonor God and endanger souls, and she could not be faithful to her Lord and His Gospel without such rejection and warning.

If this is what our adversaries mean when they call us intolerant, they may make the most of it: we gladly bear the reproach as part of the cross laid upon Christians, and pray for grace that we may not be ashamed of it, and that we may pity instead of hating those who so despitefully use us.

Meantime we owe them the endeavor of love to help them to a better understanding of the sin of intolerance and persecution, of which the Lutheran Church is not guilty. Our Savior, who loved us even unto death while we were yet enemies, hated all unrighteousness and condemned every form of sin, but He was never intolerant; He rebuked the false teachers and the men of ungodly lives in the severest terms, not only denouncing their evil deeds, but pronouncing them a generation of vipers who were of their father, the devil, but He never persecuted.

Prophets and apostles used sharp words in condemnation of wrong and wrongdoers, whether in doctrine or life, and taught the people of God to do the same, but they were not intolerant and did not persecute.

It is plain that such words may be abusively employed to the prejudice of Christianity and the Christian Church and thus become slander, which can never be justified by the plea that the words are capable of being used in a good sense. Our government is tolerant of all religions and never persecuted; some civil governments, confounding and sometimes consolidating Church and State, have been intolerant and have persecuted Christians not in accord with the established religion. The Church, which is a kingdom not of this world, has no right to permit any teaching or any living otherwise than the Holy Scriptures teach, because these are the words of the Lord who alone reigns and has authority in this kingdom. Manifestly it is fundamentally misleading to call the building of the Church on the foundation of the

apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner-stone, an intolerant institution because it admits only Christianity, or to charge it with persecution because in accordance with the King's instructions it exercises discipline in regard to everything that is not Christian and everybody that seeks to introduce or maintain anything that is not Christian. Such things and such persons, not being in harmony with the Scriptures, which are the constitution and the law of the Church and the source and guide of its life, have no business in a kingdom to whose King they will not be absolutely subject, though they may still live and pursue their temporal callings in the world, whose government we hope will be tolerant towards them and not persecute them, though they may still uphold some religion and even call it Christian.

The Roman Church, with its unscriptural confounding of Church and State and its usurpation of civil as well as ecclesiastical authority, has always been intolerant and has always persecuted. The Lutheran Church has taught the world the sinfulness of such commingling of two distinct institutions, the one temporal, looking to people's welfare in this world, the other spiritual, looking to their welfare in the world to come, the commission and the means given to each corresponding to the ends to be attained. Much of the power to persecute has been wrested from Rome by the Reformation, and it is not only uncharitable but grievously unjust now to impute to the Church of the Augsburg Confession the sins from which she did and suffered so much to deliver all Christendom. We tolerate no open hostility to our Lord in the Church; we persecute none who stand aloof from the Church and proclaim their hostility in the world around us. In the Church the Word of God must rule, but it is a kingdom which is not of this world.

Furthermore, a similar injustice is done us when the Evangelical Lutheran Church is charged with unchurching all other denominations of Christians by her persistence in maintaining the great Confession of the Reformation as the condition of fellowship in the purified Evangelical Church. Standing on the Romish platform and viewing the whole subject from that point of observation, such a misjudgment of the case would be natural and logical. But the Church of the Augsburg Confession did not stand on that platform and does not stand on that platform now. The various denominations that call themselves evangelical, but still dispute the right of the Great Evangelical Church of the Reformation to move forward under the glorious banner which was so victorious then over the mightiest foe, should do us the justice to hear us before they condemn us, and do them-

selves the charity to examine the grounds on which they call themselves evangelical, that they may root out the popery which underlies their condemnation of Lutheran principles and consequent practice.

The Roman Church, organized under the papal hierarchy, professed to be the one Church of Christ on earth. It was that arrogant claim which the Lutherans with one heart and voice denied when they declared that the Papists are not the Church, as in the same sense they declare now that the Romans or the Zwinglians, the Calvinists or the Arminians, are not the Church. But they did not then and they do not now substitute one error for another with a mere change of name. In the same sense they repudiate the fancy, if any Protestant should think fit to assert it as divine truth, that the Evangelical Lutheran visible organization is the one holy Christian Church in which we profess to believe. Let the reader have the patience to hear that he may understand a subject of such importance in the whole history and intent of the great Reformation. The Lutherans did repudiate the arrogant claims of the Papists that they were the Church and that all true Christians were joined together as the kingdom of Christ under the pope, the acknowledgment of whose supremacy was alleged to be the condition and sign of their unity as the one body of Christ in which alone there is salvation. So with one accord they do now. They did organize an Evangelical Church without the pope and without the errors and usurpations of popery, and they did seek to win all men for the revealed truth unto salvation in Christ which they proclaimed, and to gather all Christians under their banner of the Gospel in the one pure Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. They occupy the same position still, for the truth revealed from heaven is one and the same forever.

So far it might seem that our adversaries are right when they assert that the Lutherans fell into the same fundamental error which was one of the abominations of popery, from which they had professed to be delivered, and that the difference between them and the Papists eventually came to be that of the alleged one and only saving Church under the pope and the alleged one and only saving Church under the Augsburg Confession. But this whole apprehension of the case, with its entire construction of the Reformation, is an egregious blunder, for which in a matter so grave intelligent Christian men must see the difficulty of finding any reasonable excuse. The Lutherans never put forth such a claim; the Scriptural doctrine which they taught concerning the Church precluded any possibility of putting it forth; their en-

tire practical treatment of the subject gives the lie to the accusation. The evangelical reformers taught and confessed that there is one holy Church, which is the congregation of saints and true believers and which is to continue forever. It is the body of Christ outside of which there can be no salvation, because there is no Savior but Christ. When we are in Him by faith we are of necessity in the Church, which is His body, of which faith makes us members. A true believer under the pope is a member of it, an unbeliever hypocritically professing to be an Evangelical Christian is not a member of it. All true Christians are members of it in virtue of the faith which makes them true Christians, notwithstanding confessional and denominational differences existing among them. It remains one congregation of believers, though by reason of sin divisions and offenses, sects and schisms exist in their external association.

The Body of Christ is not rent into fragments, each of which is to regard itself as a portion of the torn and disrupted body with the high calling to draw the parts together again and heal the body which is bleeding to death. The gates of hell have not thus prevailed against the Church, and as the Lord reigns never shall. In spite of all the malice of the evil one and all the activity of his helpers, human and hellish, it still remains true:

“There s one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.” Eph. 4:4-6.

The members of this one body, by command of the one Lord and operation of the one Spirit in the one baptism by the one faith, assemble for worship and organize for work, and in these local congregations and their larger associations for joint enterprises sin may make disturbances and give rise to divisions, as has been the case throughout the whole history of the visible Church. The Roman Church became corrupt and needed reformation. God sent the reformer, and the Romanists rejected him and refused to accept the Gospel which would have healed its sores and diseases. They thus became a sect which excluded the precious light of the Reformation and made the Church of the Reformation with its Augsburg Confession a necessity. But the Evangelical Christians who constituted this Church never imagined, much as they longed for such a consummation, that they had drawn all sincere Christians into their fold, where indeed they properly belonged, but

where many for lack of the needful light in their souls declined to go. They knew that there were some true believers among those who remained under the papal yoke, and they could not and would not treat these as strayed sheep who were therefore lost, as if the Lord did not know them that were His when they had lost their way and had innocently gotten into the wrong fold. They therefore acknowledged the Roman congregations of professing Christians to be still a Church — not indeed a sister church, as sectarians nowadays would have all sects and schisms recognized and treated — but still a Church, because some believers were among them, whose rights and powers remained intact notwithstanding the untoward conditions surrounding them.

If there are a hundred in a congregation who submit their souls to the papal Antichrist, and on that account might be regarded as lacking the essential criterion of Christians, but two or three who gather around the Word and Sacrament still found in Romish congregations, it is not the majority that decides the character of the association, but the Christian profession and the Christian sincerity of some, though they be but a small minority. Where two or three are gathered together in the Lord's name, there the Lord is present with them and there a Church of Christ is gathered, though two or three hundred or two or three thousand gather with them who are inwardly not subject to the Lord and His Word. The Head of the Church sees to it that His disciples are not deprived of the powers and blessings of the Church by the wickedness of men who, for other purposes than those of the Lord and His people, find their way into the external congregations of Christians. Where there are two or three believers assembled around the Word and Sacrament, there the Church exists, however great may be the multitude of those who join them, though they only profess to believe.

The Church of the Augsburg Confession recognized the Romish and subsequently also the Zwinglian and Calvinian associations as Christian Churches, because there was good ground to trust that there were believers among them; and on that ground alone did they expect their congregations to be recognized as the Evangelical Christian Church. It is a glaring wrong that is done us when we are charged with claiming to be the one only Christian Church and with declaring that all others are not entitled to the name of churches.

But we may be allowed to repeat a few words more in this connection. The Church is an object of faith. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. It is

not meat and drink, and it cometh not with observation. There are no visible marks by which its presence could infallibly be known to all men who have the sense of sight. It is not in its essence an object of sense. And yet it is discernible, though only through faith. It has marks by which the believer may know it, and these marks present themselves to our senses, although that which is its essential constituent is not visible. These marks or signs are the means of grace, the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments, with which are connected the unfailing promises of God. Where the Gospel is preached and Baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered, there we are sure that there is a Christian Church.

But this certainly does not rest on the assumption that the mere ministerial work of dispensing these means infallibly proves that there the kingdom of God is established. No work or operation of man in itself can give such assurance. The mere act of administering the means of grace does not prove unerringly that the minister is a believer or that the persons to whom he ministers are believers. They might be hypocrites. There would thus seemingly be no infallible sign that the Church, which is the congregation of believers, exists anywhere on earth. And so it would be if we had no other evidence than our inference from human actions. As we never can see what is in the heart, any profession of faith may deceive us. And yet we are sure that where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered there is a congregation of believers. But it is not simply because of the fact that certain actions are performed which our Lord has commanded. That would furnish a probability indeed that those performing them are believers, but could not render us certain. What does render us certain is the Lord's promise that He will be present and work effectually where these means of His institution are administered according to His appointment. His Word will not return to Him void, but will accomplish that whereunto it is sent. Except in the case of children, in whom there can be no willful resistance to the Holy Spirit's work when they are baptized, we cannot know indeed in which person faith has been wrought; but by faith in the divine promise we can be sure that in some hearts the saving work has been done. and that there a congregation of believers has come into being, though we are unable to single out the persons who have become true believers and who alone constitute the Church. Therefore our theologians usually speak of the Church as invisible in its essence, and all Christians from the apostles days

until now have professed, not to see, but to believe in the one holy Christian Church.

Because of this faith the Church of the Reformation could not otherwise than acknowledge the congregations of professing Christians who declined to accept the Augsburg Confession, so far as they still retained and administered the divinely appointed means of grace, to be Christian Churches. So the Lutheran Church stands today. She even acknowledged her bitter enemies, the Romanists, notwithstanding their gross errors and the grievous wrongs which she suffered at their hands, to be a Christian Church: and although they still continue to hurl their anathemas at her, she still continues to recognize the kingdom of God, a congregation of believers, under the papacy.

But let not the ground for this be overlooked. There are some professedly Christian associations to whom she cannot accord this title. She has no desire, as she has no right, to deny any Christians the rights which the Holy Scriptures guarantee to them. Her great purpose is to be faithful to the Lord and His Word, whether people like or dislike her course, assured that such fidelity is the way to success in promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls. It is not because she thinks it advantageous to herself to be liberal that she recognizes the Roman congregations to be a Christian Church, but because according to Holy Scripture it is right, whether she derives advantage from it or suffers loss by it. We have on a former page referred to the disadvantage at which we are placed by the fact that we recognize other denominations as churches and therefore respect their offices and rights, while they but too often, sometimes secretly, sometimes openly, disregard our offices and order, as if ours were not a Church to which God has given rights which He has commanded all men to respect, and for the violation of which He will call them to account. But the question here is not one of expediency under the guidance of natural reason, but of obedience to the will of the Lord. Christians may err, and err even to the extent of dissenting from the grand Evangelical Confession of the Church of the Reformation, and preferring Romanism or Episcopalianism or Presbyterianism or Methodism or Anabaptism. When any such professed Christians organize to worship together and to do the work which the Lord has committed to the Church, they must be recognized as churches, provided they agree to employ according to the Lord's institution the means of grace, the Word and Sacraments, through which the Lord does His saving work by creating and

preserving faith in souls otherwise lost. Christians will not forget that we cannot see into each other's hearts and that therefore we cannot unerringly know who are believers and who are not. Even the negative is not as easy as some rash minds presume, for while there are some sins indicated in the Bible as quite incompatible with faith in Christ, it is often difficult to reach certainty that, in given cases, such sins have been committed. The Scriptures repeatedly warn us against uncharitable judgments. But the positive side is of such a nature as to render it impossible on the ground of reason to attain certainty. And yet for the purposes of the Church such certainty is plainly necessary.

The individual Christian must know, before he can with a quiet conscience connect himself with a professedly Christian congregation, that it is a manifestation of the kingdom of God in that locality, otherwise he could have no assurance that the Lord is present there with His benediction of peace and that he is doing the Lord's will when he there labors for the supposed upbuilding of His Church; and the Church must know, before it can labor together with other societies professing to be Christian organizations, that these are churches, otherwise there could not only be no fraternal relations between them, but even their right to claim respect for their ministerial offices and functions must be denied. The Church cannot allow itself to be hampered in its holy work by all sorts of human societies which, although they lack all reliable signs of being churches, presume to do the work which the Lord has committed to His Church. Such necessary knowledge we can have in no other way than by faith in the promises of God, which are yea and amen forever. Professions and works of righteousness may deceive, but the Word of God never can.

Accordingly when professed Christians form a congregation and provide for the regular preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments as the Lord appointed, they are known by all believers to be a Church of Christ, because there, according to the divine promise, the Holy Spirit is constantly doing His saving work by the divinely instituted means of grace and thus maintaining a congregation of believers. These must be acknowledged by all Christians who believe the promises of God, to be a Church, even if upon examination it be found to be an erring Church, as individuals may be recognized as Christians still, though they come short in manifold ways of their high and holy calling. But it is evident that by this test some who profess to be Christian Churches cannot be recognized as such. If they

so pervert the Gospel that Christ is not presented to sinners as their Savior, and so empty the Holy Sacraments of all grace and present them, if they administer them at all, as mere pious ceremonies, how would it be possible for any person to know that there are still Christian believers there, on whose account such a society would still be a Church? In such cases there is no divine promise to make us certain by faith when sense can only suggest doubt or denial. Hence the Lutheran Church pleads guilty to the charge, though for the life of her she can see no guilt in the matter charged, that she cannot recognize such societies as the Unitarians or Socinians [Rationalists], the Swedenborgians or the Mormons, the Spiritists or Eddyists [Seventh Day Adventists], or any party that denies the divinity of our blessed Savior or the authority of His Word as given in Holy Scripture, to be Churches of Christ, but must regard them as outside of the Christian fold and therefore without claim of respect for their organization and official acts, and proper territory for the Church's missionary activity.

The same principle which makes us sure that there are other Churches besides the glorious Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession makes us sure that there are so-called Christian Churches which are neither Christian nor Churches. The liberty which the Reformation brought us is the liberty in Christ, and the liberality which follows is the liberality of His Word. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has no desire for honors beyond this sacred domain of Christian light and salvation, and humbly pleads with Christians of every name not to do her and themselves the great wrong of condemning her for her faithfulness to the Word of their Lord and ours. But the denominations which organized on a different confession from that of Augsburg could not be recognized by the Evangelical Church of the Reformation as sister churches in such sense as the Protestant sects usually desire and demand.

Sister churches, in the terminology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, are churches of the same faith and confession in different localities, which are internally united though they are geographically or territorially separated. The Churches of the Augsburg Confession in different lands are sister churches; the churches declining to accept the Augsburg Confession are not of the same Evangelical Lutheran family. Why this distinction is made, and must be made, will be apparent when the relation existing between the Lutheran Church and the Romish Church is considered. They do not stand on an equal footing.

While our forefathers in Reformation days never hesitated to regard the Romanists as a Christian Church, persistently and emphatically as their claim to be the one and only Church was denied, they just as firmly maintained that as these Romanists ejected the pure Gospel and refused to put away their errors, they constituted a corrupt Church with which the Evangelical Lutherans could not have fraternal fellowship without partaking of their sin. The Lutheran Church could not be induced by any inconsiderate charges of intolerance or uncharitableness, or by carnal arguments of expediency, to disregard the plain word of her Lord,

“Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them,” Rom. 16:17.

That has always been her practice, and must continue to be as long as she is faithful. Believing that she has the truth to which the Son of God came into the world to bear witness, and speaking in her Augsburg Confession because she believes, she does not assume that other organizations of professed Christians can not also be Churches, but she does condemn sin, and refuses to share the responsibility incurred by erring denominations when they teach otherwise than God’s Word teaches. In proportion as they deviate from the evangelical truth witnessed in the Augsburg Confession they are in error, and Christian charity, as we have learned it from Holy Scripture, requires us to rebuke the error and have no fellowship with it, glad as we are to recognize in many of them the retention of sufficient evangelical truth to assure us that there are Christians among them and that therefore they are Churches, notwithstanding the errors that constitute them sects.

When it is argued that between these erring churches and the Evangelical Lutheran Church there are more points of accord than discord, and that therefore we are neither consistent nor wise in declining to fellowship them, we must reply by declaring a simple truth of which intelligent Christians should not need being reminded, that the universality of sin and its prevalence in human hearts always gives that the advantage in all efforts to deliver from its chains. To our corrupt nature the Gospel of Christ is foolishness. However large may be the proportion of supernatural truth accepted by a Christian denomination alongside of its errors accordant with the flesh, the latter will have the start in the race for supremacy, and the danger always is that in most hearts it will be victorious. It “eats as doth a canker,”

threatening the Christian vitality that by the grace of God exists in some and spreading all the while, hindering the work of the Gospel in individuals and forming an impediment to its spread in the community. Lutherans, with their deep conviction of the power of sin, and of the grace of God communicated in Word and Sacrament as man's only deliverance from its curse, cannot regard it a matter of indifference whether, while they rejoice in the possibilities of salvation by grace still afforded by parties dissenting from our Augsburg Confession and deeming it right and proper to organize congregations under a confession so far at variance from ours that they think the divisions justifiable, they sanction or do not sanction such dissent from the evangelical truth and such organization of opposing congregations. It never can be indifferent, whether we stand on the side of revealed truth or of human opinions, because the truth of God can save men and glorify the Savior, the opinions of men cannot, nothing human can. Whatever human logic or human sentiment may say, we are saved alone by the grace of God through faith. The errors of Romanists and Protestant sects can hinder, but they cannot promote the salvation of lost souls.

We concede that a number of Churches which thought it right and continue to think it right to stand aloof from the great Church of the Reformation, the glorious Church of the Augsburg Confession, have more to unite them with us than to separate them from us. We of course cheerfully sanction all that is in agreement with our Confession. But if that is all that is of importance in their estimation, why do they not come over to us and cease making divisions on grounds acknowledged by themselves to be unimportant? If they acknowledged divisions to be a sin, as the Word of God teaches, that would be the thing to be done. But if they cannot do that, there must, after all be something of importance to them that prevents it, and the doctrinal difference is certainly of importance to us, else we would have yielded centuries ago to the Romish demands that we should cease to insist on the pure Gospel presented in our Augustana and return to the Romish fold. We could surrender no part of the truth there confessed and can surrender nothing now. The Word of God binds us, and we can as little surrender any portion of it in this age and country to Romish or Reformed sects as our fathers could to Romish or Reformed sects in an other land in the days of the Reformation. The Lutheran Church was in harmony with the truth which Romanists and Zwinglians and Calvinists then retained and confessed. That never could have separated them from us, or us from them.

And no doubt there was more in all of them to unite us than there was to separate us, and no doubt this is the case still. But it is an unhappy notion that falsehood or sin in any form can be counterbalanced or rendered harmless by any power whatever, as long as sin is not renounced and cast out. One may sin ignorantly and, the soul clinging to the Savior by faith, may be saved notwithstanding, because in such a case the sin is not consciously committed or entertained, but is included in the believer's daily repentance and prayer for pardon; but it is a different matter when error is put in the place of truth, and maintained and defended against those who confess the truth, and these are asked to accord them equal authority and equal rights in the Church. That would be a surrender not only of distinctive articles of our Confession, but of the foundation on which all certainty of faith rests, the supremacy and exclusive authority of the Word of God as recorded in Holy Scripture. And as for all the arguments from human expediency, all Christians should know that God's appointments are the only sure way to accomplish God's purposes, and that following His directions is the divine expediency that ultimately puts all human expedients to shame. Whatever the appearances may be, the way of success in the Lord's kingdom is the way of loyalty to the King and fidelity to His Word.

Analogies moreover make it evident even to reason, how baseless is the assumption, that we may for the sake of peace sanction the errors of a sect by fellowshiping it, seeing that there is more to unite than to divide us. For all reasonable men will reject the argument when applied to the less important affairs of this life. They will not use impure good on the ground that the quantity of good material is larger than the adulterating portion, or accept counterfeit money on the plea that there is more genuine than spurious in the amount offered.

“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Gal. 5:9.

“A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject.” Tit. 3:10.

It is as irreverent as to a Christian mind it is absurd to argue against such injunctions that such a man may hold fast to many things that are not heresies and therefore it would be ungenerous to reject him. It is useless to try to shake the faith of sincere souls that cling to the Word of God as their only hope by appeals to their humility, as is often done. We Lutheran Christians

find our peace in believing and our joy in the Holy Ghost, who bears His testimony through the truth revealed in Scripture. Doubtless it seems to many minds a powerful argument when we are met with the statement of opponents, that our position would be unquestionably right if we could be as sure of our doctrines as our practice presupposes. Even some of the sects concede that if they were as certain as we profess to be of the Scripturalness of our Augsburg Confession, they would not blame us for carrying it boldly before us as we go preaching the Gospel to all the nations. In that case they would certainly join us on our march under the glorious banner of the Reformation. But they are not sure of this, as the fact that they belong to sects preaching otherwise than the Lutheran Church confesses sufficiently indicates, and because of this they assume that we cannot be sure either. They therefore appeal to our modesty, urging that we should not set our judgment against that of the hosts of learned men who are not Lutherans, as if we knew more than all the rest of the world, or even thought ourselves infallible.

Some of our people, whose very faith makes them humble, get confused by such nonsense that looks so much like sense, and seeing that there certainly are men of great learning and ability among those opposing us, and feeling their inability to cope with their arguments, succumb to the sheer sophistry which they know not how to expose and drive from the field. There is enough truth in it to make the reasoning formidable to all minds except those of intelligent believers.

Certainly we are not infallible, and probably the number of those among our common people who could effectually compete in erudition or acumen with Eck or Bellarmine, with Zwingli or Calvin, with Voltaire or Ingersoll, is small. But there are few in our congregations who are not sure that God so loved the world as to send His Son into it for its redemption, and that the blood of His Incarnate Son cleanseth from all sin. They may not be able to meet the arguments which learned men think fit to array against their faith, but they believe the testimony of Holy Scripture and are quite sure about it all the same. They are not infallible, and do not pretend to be, neither do they pretend to be wiser or better than other people, many of whom are not willing to join the Lutheran army under the banner of the Augsburg Confession; but they know their Savior and believe His Word, and the truth makes them free.

If opposing sects are not sure of anything because they are not infallible, they are much to be pitied, for then they are not even sure that they have a mighty Savior who delivers from death; if they are sure of anything it can be only by believing the Word which is sure. On that ground the Evangelical Lutheran Church sent forth its Augsburg Confession, and on that ground it still stands.

If any man or any sect want to censure us for standing firmly on that ground, they may do so; we can not help them, for our only help is in the name of the Lord and the testimony of His Word, which they decline to accept as a sufficient ground of assurance. Their very appeal to the modesty of Lutherans shows that they are sure of nothing, and as they reason against us, ostensibly with a view of securing greater harmony between the churches, on the assumption that the truth in regard to the points of difference cannot be known, they only make the gulf between us wider by alleging that God has not revealed His truth with such clearness that unlearned Christians may read it and know it, and that Lutherans are guilty of proud and overweening self-conceit when they profess to know the truth.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church from the start was sure of its evangelical ground over against the pretensions of Rome, and she was quite sure of the doctrine confessed at Augsburg, not because the reformers were the abler men, but because they believed and confessed what the Holy Scriptures by inspiration of God plainly teach. So the Evangelical Lutheran Church still stands, not imagining herself infallible, not having a vain conceit of her ability; but humbly trusting the truth revealed in Scripture and speaking because she believes. With the grand old Augsburg Confession as her banner, under which she has won such signal victories for the glory of her Lord and the eternal blessedness of souls, she still marches forward, undismayed by the assaults of those who are enemies of the cross of Christ or of those who do not understand her and therefore think they do God service by turning against her. She has suffered, and cannot expect exemption from the trial of her faith in the present or in the future; but she has been greatly blessed in her fidelity to her Lord and His precious Gospel. Trusting in His gracious presence and guidance, she thanks God and takes courage to go forward in her work of faith and labor of love. Carrying the banner of revealed truth to which our Lord came into the world to bear witness, and having by the power of that truth in her heart the faith which is the victory

that overcometh the world, why should she not go forward joyfully, though it be her lot to pass through tribulation?

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled. though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early." Ps. 46:1-5.

May our Lord in His infinite love sustain and increase our faith, for only if that failed could we fail to press forward towards the mark of our high calling.

"We will rejoice in Thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners." Ps. 20:5.

We know how narrow are the thoughts of some, who apply their sectarian measure to the profession and purposes of the great Church of the Reformation. We do not wonder that to them our assurance of faith and our rejection of all that stands in conflict with it seems a lack of humility and a selfish exaltation of our alleged Lutheran sect above other sects equally good and probably equally mistaken. Not all men have faith, and therefore not all can know what it means and how it fortifies the soul. It is not for the glory of a sect and the increase of its power and prestige on earth that the Church of the Augsburg Confession as striven and continues to strive. That would not be worth the struggle and the sacrifice.

How little the heroes of the Reformation are understood when it is assumed that they had the ambition to rival Rome and win some of its laurels, if not all of them, for their own brows! They had faith and wanted to save their souls; they had love and wanted to save the souls of others who were equally under the condemnation of sin. What do drowning men care what name the boat may bear that comes to their rescue, or what the rope may be called that is thrown out to them? Men thoroughly in earnest are never sticklers for pet names or preferred formalities. The very thought is ridiculously incongruous, that our forefathers would have put house and home,

and wife and child, and even earthly life in jeopardy to establish a Lutheran sect in opposition to the dominant Roman sect. They wanted to rid the reigning Church of the errors and abuses that endangered the souls of the people, and, failing in their efforts to effect the needful reform in the Roman communion to organize the Church of Christ in independence of the pope and the papal institution which would not permit Christ and His Gospel to reign.

The Church of the Reformation was designed to be the kingdom of Christ on earth so far as it is possible to realize this in a visible organization in this world of sin. and according to this design they presented and pushed their work. They wanted a pure Church, in which the impurities of earth should not dim or destroy the power of the Gospel, and they knew, as all Christians ought to know, that this could be attained not by absolute purity of life in the believers, but by the pure Word and Sacraments. Thus came into visible being the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession. Let no one do our Lutheran fathers the crying wrong to suppose that they had no loving hearts to rejoice when a soul was saved among the Romanist or Reformed parties. That is precisely what they ardently desired and only to this end did they labor and pray in the Lutheran Church. And that is the spirit of the Lutheran Church still. Her aim is to spread the kingdom of Christ and His great salvation, and only on that account does she insist so strenuously upon her pure Word and Sacraments and her Augsburg Confession.

8. Loyalty To The Banner

A FEW REMARKS more seem necessary to complete our introduction to an appreciative study of the Augsburg Confession. The Church which carries that banner before her and builds her congregations on the basis of that Confession is presumed to be faithful to her banner. This involves the whole Christian life, and implies some things which are of such importance that we deem it necessary to draw special attention to them, lest they should be overlooked and Lutheran Christians should fail in loyalty to their banner.

1. We Must Have Faith

First of all it should be well understood that we cannot be in complete harmony with our Confession so long as what is confessed is not the faith of our hearts. We believe and therefore we speak. That is the prime condition of confessional fidelity. We cannot be faithful if we have not faith. That is so manifest a truism that apparently it is superfluous to express it. And yet it is needful not only to express it, but to emphasize it with an urgency that is born of profound appreciation of its importance.

We do not deny the value of a pure confession of revealed truth and the good influence which that truth is able to exert, even if the confessor's heart is not in harmony with it. The Gospel does not lose its saving power because one who proclaims it does not believe it, and its proclamation is a blessing to the world even when the preacher closes his own heart against it and deprives himself of the blessing. Our faith is not as great as the Gospel which creates it, and one individual life is not as important as the life of the world. But whilst we carefully guard against overestimating the individual's worth by placing him and his powers on an equality with God's glory and His means of salvation, we must just as carefully guard against so depreciating him that his rescue from everlasting death seems of small account. The whole world and all that is in it, aside from immortal man, is of in-

significant value compared with one soul that is lost in sin, but may be forever saved by the grace of God. The individual soul is therefore taken into account in the eternal reckoning and decrees of God. Not only in his own estimation is the individual soul of vast importance — for what would it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? — but even in the sight of God it is of such moment that He regarded each individual in His plan of salvation and knows us all by name.

Accordingly the members of our Church should neither think it sufficient that they have learned the Catechism and assured themselves that the Augsburg Confession sets forth the same doctrine of Holy Scripture, and therefore they join the host confessing it and marching under its banner, nor that they believe the truth there confessed and that is all that concerns them, indifferent about others who make or do not make the confession. In other words, we should not think it enough that the Augsburg Confession is proclaimed to the world, nor that our own souls are in harmony with the proclamation, though we remain silent about it. It is certainly a good work to carry through all lands our glorious Augsburg Confession, and those who sanction and cheer the work are contributing something to a cause of infinite moment for the souls of men. But what would it all avail for you, if it were not your personal concern, and while the host of confessors who speak because they believe are marching through tribulations to victory, you remain at ease in Zion and are left behind and taken captive by the enemy? Do not rest until, on the foundation of the regenerating grace given you and the blessed covenant made with you in Holy Baptism, and the instruction imparted to you in accordance with this from the Word of God as the Catechism so beautifully and so plainly presents it for your learning, you have not only become convinced that the Augsburg Confession sets forth the very truth of the Bible, but by the Spirit of God have become certain in faith that it is the truth of God unto your salvation. This will fortify you against all the assaults which the world and the flesh and the devil will not cease to make upon you. The truth in Jesus will then be more than an intellectual conviction that the Bible record is true, and that the Augsburg Confession rightly reproduces the truth recorded in the Bible. It will in your heart be the experienced power of God unto salvation, and through it the Holy Spirit will bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God.

If then you are confronted with the arguments advanced by those who are not adherents of the Augsburg Confession, that you are not infallible

and are as liable to error as the Romanists or Baptists or Methodists, you will be ready meekly to reply: I know it; O, I know it right well; but “we have known and believed the love that God hath to us” (1 John 4:16), and “I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 8:38, 39.

You who do not recognize our banner, but, while professing to be Christian soldiers also, prefer to march and fight under a different one, may be more learned than I and more holy than I: that is a matter about which I am not called and am not in a mood to have any controversy with my neighbors: but I know in whom I have believed and what He has taught me in Holy Scripture to believe unto my soul’s peace and comfort and joy. And the Augsburg Confession expresses what I believe on the authority of God. If your faith accords with that, come, let us walk together, and go up to the Lord’s house together, and worship and work together for the glory of His great name; but do not ask me to accept another Gospel than that which I have learned from the Holy Scripture and adopt another Confession which does not express what my heart believes.

Above all things let us have and retain the full measure of faith, and cling to our noble Confession because we believe. We will then as sincere believers in Christ be true children of God and true children of the Reformation.

2. Faith Works By Love

The faith which God creates in the heart worketh by love. In its nature it pervades the whole life. It is our Christian calling to glorify God, whose we are and whom we serve — serve not only in our worship, but in all our work, which is to be constant labor of love to Him and to our fellowmen. Thus our whole life becomes a confession, and we do not honor the banner of our Church if our deeds do not correspond to our words. Others will judge us by our actions. and we cannot be faithful to our Confession if it is not our daily purpose, according to the ability graciously given us, to adorn the doctrine which we profess by doing the will of our Lord in a life of humble service; for Christ redeemed us “that henceforth we should not live

unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again,” as the apostle expresses it, or, as we have learned to say it in the words of our Catechism, “that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.”

We cannot but regard it as a result of the indifference which has become prevalent even among nominal Christians in regard to sound doctrine, that this is by multitudes understood to mean so little. For it is manifest that in the thoughts of great numbers it means nothing more than the service which is to be rendered to our fellowmen in the earthly miseries which have come upon us in consequence of sin and the curse which is upon it in accordance with God’s righteous government of the world. Seemingly this is not little; for if relief is brought to the suffering individuals and means are employed to render more tolerable the condition of communities, much is accomplished. And yet compared with the divine plan and purpose of the redemption through the incarnate Son of God and the establishment of a kingdom of grace on this unrighteous earth, it is very little. Suffering appeals to the heart of man, and the Gospel is of essential to teach a sin-cursed soul to lift a crushing weight from another that is screaming for help, or to share his bread with one that is dying of starvation before His eyes. Nature can do that.

Some men, indeed, sink below the ordinary wickedness of humanity and become brutish in the accumulated sin that sears even the natural heart and encrusts it with a satanic venom of evil. And this occurs not only among savages. Civilization always introduces civil righteousness, because humanity in its normal state still has a conscience and will not approve unrighteousness when the intellect has discerned it as such. But even in civilized communities there are always those who march in the rear and those who refuse to march at all. It is a motley crowd, this multitude of sinful souls set in motion for betterment on the lines of human reason with its light of conscience. A difference is discerned between the unthinking life of the savage, who is governed by his instincts, and the life of the more civilized people who seek to govern these instincts and control their operation by the light of reason. And as this naturally is in the service of the lusts of the flesh, some rise to the height indicated by the conscience which belongs to human nature and produce and advocate a righteousness of the law which, because it cannot change the heart, is an external righteousness of life, generally called

civil righteousness. This looks like the righteousness which the Ten Commandments require. And they do require it; for certainly the law which requires that the heart should be right requires also that the conduct which is the expression of its requirement, should be right also.

So the outward righteousness, as it is exemplified in the Pharisees of old, who no doubt were the best products of the Mosaic law, comes to be regarded as the righteousness which God requires. Nature knows no better and of course knows nothing better. The words of our Lord,

“I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven,”

though they are spoken in that sermon on the mount which is so highly lauded as the great guide of men in the paths of salvation under the Gospel, but which is in fact an exposition of the law that is merely a schoolmaster to Christ under the law, are overlooked, or are interpreted from the standpoint of human nature as an admonition of sincerity in the pursuit of holiness. And so it comes that those who are in the lead among the advocates of moral enlightenment and reform, though some are professed Christians and some are not, agree that education is the mighty panacea for human ills. And is that the whole outcome of the Gospel light on the situation in which sin and the curse of God on sin has placed us? Without all controversy it is a little patch on an immeasurable sore. How can our poorw forlorn, condemned race escape the damnation of hell if nothing more effective than that comes to our rescue?

But that is what is nowadays largely offered to the people under the name of the tidings of great joy written in the Scriptures for our learning. Not only is philanthropism and altruism in the light of advanced science and modern improvements preached from the pulpits of our most popular sects as the true Gospel of our Lord and Savior, but this is done by many with a full consciousness of their departure from the old paths marked out in the Bible, and with repeated sneers and flings at the old faith of the Church as an antiquated superstition. When war is declared against Christ and the Church by confessed infidels, no Christian believer is greatly surprised or alarmed. That must be expected. The devil, who is the father of lies and the god of this world that lieth in wickedness, is the enemy of God and all righteousness from the beginning of his rebellion, and those whom

he entraps in his snare must needs do his bidding. That belongs to the fitness of things in the dominion of Satan, and those who walk with God in the realm of light are prepared for the sorrowful spectacle. But it is a different matter when Professors in Christian Universities and Pastors in Christian Churches enlist in such a war of rebellion. We do not say that they have all become infidels. It is not our province to judge their hearts, although we know from their own words how prone they are to judge us as mere orthodoxists and traditionalists and formalists, and similar appellatives which mean, in Scripture phraseology, that we have the form of godliness but deny the power thereof. We are not their judges and they are not ours, so we let that pass, fully content with the assurance that God, who knoweth the hearts of men and judgeth righteous judgment, is the Judge of all. But God has given us His Word and has given us grace to believe it as the everlasting truth. He has given it by inspiration that it might be written in Holy Scripture for our learning. Shall we not subject all our thoughts to it as the judgment of God in all the matters therein contained?

We do not know the hearts of men who are trying to enthrone a theology of reason and science instead of the old theology of the Bible, and a Christianity of the common fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man under the reign of love on the basis of our common humanity, instead of the old doctrine that we can come to the Father only through Christ, the Mediator between God and man and the only Savior from sin and death. Some of them no doubt are deceived, and some of them very probably are deceivers. Let us humbly abide by our principle that the Word of God must be the rule of our judgment. This forbids us to judge the hearts of men, except so far as these hearts are revealed by words and works. According to the teaching of Scripture a person may ignorantly sin in either or both without ceasing to be a Christian. In the conflicts in the human heart between the flesh and the Spirit the result is not always plainly manifested in the external actions. Some are better, some are worse than they seem; some are disposed to put a better, some worse construction on these actions. Let us abide by the Word. That will always lead us to judgments that are truly charitable, though to some minds not guided by that Word they may not seem so, and that are always just.

We do not mean that all concerned will recognize the judgment as accordant with love and righteousness. In the nature of the case this cannot be, as not all men have faith. To some minds even God's judgments are unjust and

lacking in the moderation and mildness which love suggests; or sin has perverted our affections as well as our reason. The Word of God corrects this, and believers gladly accept the correction. They as little desire to judge the hearts of others as they desire in their consciousness of their sin and weakness in their struggles against the flesh, to have their hearts judged by the uncharitableness of others. But that does not stand in the way of the Scripture rule. They know that by that they will be judged on the last day, and for that they desire to be always ready. And in accordance with that they do not, many as are the considerations which the flesh suggests to the contrary, hesitate to say, as the apostle of our loving Lord taught us to say:

“Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” Gal. 1:8.

The alleged gospel which those preach, who would redeem our race by developing and training the powers of our nature and reform communities and regenerate the world by a right education which makes proper account of the moral as well as of the intellectual faculties, is “another gospel.” It is not that which the prophets and apostles preached and which proclaims and communicates the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ unto the salvation of sinners. The new gospel not only ignores, but in many of its leading representatives openly repudiates the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins and of the life everlasting. This is the “pure doctrine” for which they have a special dislike.

They tell us that now, since in the world’s progress new light has come, it is a disgrace to any Church to continue in the old paths of benighted ages, when the miserable condition of the people made the prospect of another and an alleged better world a solace and a delight, but that the advance in civilization and the improvement in social and political conditions now make life worth living and admonish all men of any influence in the community to devote their talents to the needs of this world, that all countries and all classes of people may enjoy in the highest possible degree the temporal blessedness which the new light brings. Preachers especially are exhorted to employ their powers and opportunities for the betterment of man along this line, and to let the other world, assuming that another world exists, take care of itself, while we concern ourselves about the world in

which we are now living and in which there is so much room for removing human ills and enhancing human happiness.

People hear such “another gospel” gladly. It accords with our natural inclinations. And to these, preachers also are subject, because these too are men. Even those who are sincere believers and rejoice in the hope of glory, are not exempt from the weakness of the flesh, which lusts against the Spirit, and have need to watch and pray.

“Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

That other gospel, “which is not an other,” presents a strong temptation. The people like it, the churches that adopt it become popular, the devil with his strong delusions renders the argument in its favor plausible to reason, and many fall into his trap. So it comes that churches gradually depart from the “pure doctrine” of the Gospel, and pure doctrine itself becomes an object of aversion. This is not always with the consciousness that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the glorious vision of blessedness through the redemption which He has wrought is rejected. With many this is not the case. The wiles of the devil and the deceivableness of unrighteousness are not apparent. Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, and some no doubt mean to be Christians still, even while they are taken captive under his strong delusions and working together with him in promoting his kingdom of darkness and death.

God is their Judge, not we. But God’s judgment is revealed as regards the doctrine. If that judgment seems hard, let that be set down to the account of God’s infinite love which continues to warn when our poor love despairs and turns to resentment. These are the words given by inspiration of God through St. Paul:

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you through the grace of Christ unto an other gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” Gal. 1:6-8.

So far as true Christians are concerned, that is decisive and ends all controversy, whether men will hear or forbear.

When men who are not satisfied with such a summary judgment on what seems to them a matter of so great importance for the Church and the world, ask for a reason, it is enough, so far as we who believe and rejoice to be subjects of the King in Zion, who is our Savior and who rules His kingdom of grace and truth by His Word of grace and truth, are concerned, to say that thus the Lord wills. But we may add that He so wills because He came into this world of sin to save that which was lost. He came not to condemn, but to save the world that lieth in wickedness and writhes under the primal curse upon all unrighteousness. He came to save from sin and death, and therefore fulfilled all righteousness in our stead, that we might escape the damnation of hell. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. "He was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." Rom. 4:25. This is preached as the good tidings of great joy that shall be unto all people, and that shall be experienced through faith in His name.

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Rom. 3:23-27.

The main thing needed by man in his lost estate is not philanthropic work, much as this is needed in the misery which has come upon our race by its apostasy from God. The evils that are upon us cry for each other's help. That is plain, and it makes plain how helpfulness comes to be regarded as the one thing needful. But it does not deliver us from this lost estate itself, and it does its utmost when it occasionally affords some temporary relief in the sufferings which are its natural concomitants. Our help is in the name of the Lord, and the help which He graciously provides looks to our deliverance not only from some of the wretched incidents in our ruined condition, but from the perdition itself from which all our wretchedness flows. He laid help upon One who is mighty to save, and it is the great salvation which He effected that is preached, as the good tidings to all people, that a Savior has come and that whosoever believeth in Him shall be saved. It is the great salvation which God, not man, has wrought; which is of God's grace, not

man's merit; which is by faith, not works; which gives all glory to God and excludes all human boasting.

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Rom. 1:16, 17.

That humbles human pride, but it brings deliverance from death and the devil, and reinstates believers as blessed children of God who rejoice in the hope of glory. And as they pursue their pilgrimage to the better land that is promised them, they are glad to embrace every opportunity to serve their Savior in ministering help to the needy, because, their hearts being purified by faith, they love one another, and because this redounds to the praise of Him who first loved them and saved them by His grace.

But those who have no love for pure doctrine, and no patience with those who insist on it as indispensable for church fellowship, have “another gospel” which is not another, because it is not the Gospel at all. Some of these people who are wildly wafted by the winds that blow from the caverns of modern science, care little for what the Scriptures given by inspiration of God say about the way of salvation, and do not hesitate to declare, that if the Bible does not accord with the modern advancement in knowledge and thought, so much the worse for the Bible. They are infidels, and do not hesitate to declare themselves such, although this is done by some in circumstances that induce them to do it in terms that indicate their preference to remain in the service of the Church and, while they draw their subsistence from that source, to agitate for larger liberty in teaching and preaching.

We do not think it right, in passing, to suppress the remark for charity's sake, that this means using the Church's money for the support of lives devoted to its destruction: a high example of the human righteousness and love which is designed to supplant the righteousness which Christ acquired for us by His obedience unto death and the love which comes from faith in His merits unto our salvation.

But there are others who are not ready to go such lengths. They still profess allegiance to the Bible, only they want the Bible better investigated and interpreted on more rational principles than has been customary in the Church. The result of their investigations and interpretations has been that portions of the Bible are not reliable; and that another gospel of humanitari-

anism and human righteousness is in every way more rational than the old Gospel of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Some reject more of the Bible as spurious, some less: but all are finally of one accord in the adoption of principles which undermine the authority of Holy Scripture, and in the preaching of another gospel, which omits the vicarious atonement of the incarnate Son of God and justification by faith in His righteousness. Hence they all agree that the “pure doctrine” of the Reformation, according to which the soul is saved from sin and death by the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, is no longer tenable in the light of modern enlightenment, and that the broader humanitarian views, which furnish a wider basis for human brotherhood and a larger sympathy for other religions than the Christian, must challenge our respect and make our Christianity more humane and more concerned for human interests in this world. That the main point, the salvation of our sinful souls from death and the devil and their restoration to the blessedness for which God had created them and from which the devil seduced them, is entirely overlooked, is manifest without special mention. But for some readers it may be needful to mention, that the whole scheme ignores the fact and foundation on which the Gospel is based. It is that of human sin, and the damnation that is upon it in the just government of God; of the utter impotence of the sinner to lift himself from the depth into which he has fallen; of the impossibility in this condition of doing anything that could help a soul in its degradation, or that could give it spiritual life, or that could deliver it from the doom of death. Only God can help our ruined and condemned race, and that help is offered only in the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ.

The refusal to accept this in faith is the rejection of all possible help for the helpless, so far as the final judgment is concerned, and, at the same time, of all effective and permanent power for help in the present world. For it refuses at once the redemption and the regeneration of our race, and leaves us but “another gospel,” which, being but a training and polishing of the flesh, is not an other, as it neither justifies nor sanctifies. because it rejects the Savior of the world, in whom alone is life. It is therefore a deadly delusion to accept and teach such a system of humanitarianism as another gospel under the Christian name. That some men mean well in doing it, does not help the matter. Poisons kill though they may be taken as wholesome condiments.

To say that the Reformation laid undue stress upon pure doctrine and thus produced unnecessary strifes and contentions in the Church, and that our more cultured age is only striving to strip off some superfluous growths in order to preserve the essence of Christianity, is not a plea that can command the respect of believing children of God who reverence the Bible and mean to hold fast the heritage of the Reformation. It cannot command their respect, because it fails to furnish the proof for the allegation, disregards the plain statements of Holy Scripture, begs the question, and betrays the lack of love for the truth which is given us by revelation for our enlightenment and salvation.

The so-called essence of Christianity, as his modern theology presents it, is simply the religion of nature, and is therefore the same in kind as the nations possessed before the will and way of God for man's salvation was revealed, and which heathens still possess in modern times. Hence the readiness of these so-called liberal Christians to affiliate with all religions. Disregarding the pure doctrine until the truth in Jesus is swept away, and of course disdaining to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, which is the old and exclusive faith that is a special object of their aversion, what have they left that is worth laboring for or caring for?

The improved Christianity which needs no Christ and no grace unto salvation is a delusion and a snare. It contravenes the whole purpose and plan of the divine revelation given in Scripture, and makes no soul wise unto salvation. Even in regard to the present life and its needs, which it falsely charges the divine revelation and the Christian Church with overlooking, it is a failure. For it furnishes, in the nature of things it can furnish, no power to overcome the selfishness which naturally pervades the human soul since man has fallen away from God. The fanatical cry for education, that man's better instincts may be brought to the front, is, rightly interpreted, a wild cry of despair. Selfishness is not eradicated by any polish that may be put on its work. The more you develop the intellectual power of a rascal, the more dangerous he becomes. Increase of the knave's knowledge only increases his skill in knavery. Even the better class of liberals are not so destitute of reason that they fail to see this. But if it were so, that the world's condition in the sphere of economics and civics and politics were improved by the preaching of a supposed betterment in this world instead of a blessedness in the world to come, the true Christian would still, while he goes on in the path of duty in a world of sin and tribulation rejoicing in the hope of glory

through the merits of the Savior whom he delights to serve, be ready with the great question: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Matt. 16:26.

Loyalty to our Augsburg Confession means, as the fundamental thing, loyalty to the Word of God given us by inspiration in the Holy Scriptures; and chief among those things which these require is that we should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto the saving of the soul and confess Him before the world unto the glory of His name. Then we should continue to show forth His praises in humble obedience to His will. It is true, our pure Confession can not be adequately set forth by our lives, because these, by reason of the flesh which lusteth against the Spirit, are not free from the impurities with which sin contaminates all human actions. We therefore cannot admit that our Church is fairly judged when the lives of individual members are made the standard of judgment. Some live far below the spiritual and moral heights actually attained by the Church, and the best have not attained the perfectness which is the goal toward which true children of God are incessantly striving. The Confession based upon the Word of God remains true, even if some professing to accept it are not sincere. Their lives may render it doubtful whether they truly believe what they profess, but cannot by any correct process of reasoning render what they profess doubtful.

If a man pretends to own a million of dollars, any doubts awakened by his conduct may discredit his pretensions, but cannot disprove the value of dollars. And yet the act that such false judgments are frequent and quite natural, must influence members of the Church to walk circumspectly, that they may give no occasion for such false judgments, which, though unrighteous, serve the enemy's purpose of besmirching our banner. But the main consideration will always be that the believer's heart is brought by his faith into harmony with the Savior's will, because his believing the love which God hath to him calls forth love to Him who first loved us and rescued us from the death which was imminent, and because the Lord has made known His will that we should live in righteousness and true holiness to the glory of Him who first loved us and gave Himself for us, and to the welfare of men, who are all embraced in the love which rescued us from the doom which sin has brought upon our race.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:8-10.

The adherents of our Confession believe the truth revealed in Christ unto the salvation of sinners by His grace, and they know that their holiness and work have no merit and contribute nothing to their salvation.

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Rom. 3:28.

“Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom. 5:1.

Having Christ by faith, we need nothing more for our salvation. All the rest, important as it may be for our service of God in time and for the full enjoyment of the blessedness graciously granted us in eternity, has nothing to do with our deliverance from death and our possession of eternal life. Therefore the believer is ready every day to live or die as the Lord may please. His peace in the present and His hope of glory in the future rests wholly on the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whose perfect atonement no amount of good works on our part can enhance or make in any way more effective. And yet he should not, and if his faith is earnest and active, he cannot forget the purpose of his Lord to employ him, now that he is a happy subject in the kingdom of grace, for the promotion of His glory in the extension of His kingdom. It is not that a legal obligation is laid upon him to live a life of gratitude to his Redeemer, which of course is a life of righteousness and true holiness according to the Lord’s revealed will. The obligation is felt in his soul in virtue of his faith, without any law prescribing it. The Holy Spirit moves him to live righteously and godly in this present world, whether the divine law specially prescribes it or not. We are not under the law, but under grace. But because the flesh is still in us and conflicts with the movements and the work of grace, we must not overlook the reminders and the exhortations which our dear Lord gives us in regard to His purpose of love and His will respecting our lives under Him in His kingdom.

“Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” 1 Pet.2:9-12.

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.” Eph. 4:1, 2.

The Christian is expected to have his conversation in heaven, avoiding the very appearance of evil, that he may execute the will of his Lord and glorify His name. Only by strict fidelity to his Lord in his walk and conversation, as well as in his profession of faith, will he manifest strict loyalty to his good confession. Guided by the Spirit of God, who ever leads His people by His Word, he will show his hatred of sin by shunning it not only as it presents itself in the seductive form of false doctrine, but in any and every form of unrighteousness of life as well, and will steadily follow holiness in the fear of God.

“Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Thy statutes always, even unto the end.” Ps. 119:111, 112.

When the confession is sincere it expresses a faith which the Holy Spirit has inspired and moved holy men to record in the Holy Scriptures, and so this Word is its daily comfort and guide in a life of constant devotion and service.

3. Faith Manifests Privately and Publicly

Because faith is a power that pervades the heart and permeates the life, its sincere confession will of necessity manifest itself in the home as well as in the believer’s intercourse and dealings with his neighbors. His aim is to glorify God and do His will always and everywhere, and as his family occupies so large a share of his thoughts and affections, it is preeminently the sphere

in which his faith and love are exercised. When God has given him wife and children, his joy will be to exercise and instill in his household the precious faith which gives him peace. Let it not be thought inappropriate to say that his loyalty to the Augsburg Confession will be a powerful incentive to the establishment of a Lutheran home. The expression is not the customary one, and it may suggest to some minds, unduly swayed by the popular liberalism of our times, an overestimation of the Evangelical Church of the Reformation. But those who have accompanied us thus far will understand us. If we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, we must not be ashamed of the Church which confesses it in its purity and in the completeness of its beauty. The deference to the opinions of others which prevents some from saying exactly what they mean, is not conducive to that rooting and grounding in the faith for which Christians are taught to pray.

The childlike confidence in the Word of God, and the awe of that Word which induces trembling at any departure from it in doctrine or life, may exist in a Romanist or a Methodist; but it is not due to Romanism or Methodism, but to the precious Gospel of God's grace in Christ which the Lutheran Church confesses with a purity which those churches do not possess. If people would only consider they could understand, if they are believers at all, what we Lutherans mean, and would not muddle the matter by the introduction of foreign elements.

The father of a family is certainly not a Lutheran, if he leaves his children unbaptized, according to the tenets of Baptist sects, or inculcates the system of work righteousness and ceremonialism which characterizes the Romish Church. He could not thus be loyal to the banner of the Augsburg Confession, under which he professes to pursue his pilgrimage through a world that lieth in wickedness and fights his battles with the powers of darkness. If he is faithful, he will speak at home as he does in the Church. because he believes; and will not allow any foolish notions of sectarians, who profess to be Christians also, to deter him from the profession and practice of Christianity as he has learned it from Holy Scripture and confessed it in the symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Of course the Baptists will disapprove of his faith, that by baptism his children have been planted into Christ and have thus by the Holy Spirit been made children of God, who are as such to be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Of course the Methodists are not satisfied to have them at once taught that they belong to the household of God and, standing in covenant relation to Him, have well-founded hopes of glory through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and that being risen with Christ as they were buried with Him in baptism, they should now seek those things which are above and walk in newness of life. They would rather leave them in doubt and uncertainty about their relation to God and their prospects in eternity until they shall be converted according to a certain method of which the Scriptures know nothing.

Of course the Romanists are not favorably impressed by the treatment of children after baptism as poor sinners still, who, though regenerated, need the grace of God every day to protect them against the sinfulness of their own hearts as well as against the wiles of the devil. They do not like it that children are taught to cling to the Gospel of salvation by grace in Christ without the deeds of the law, instead of directing them to trust in Mary and multitudinous saints.

And so the various sects have a variety of schemes, and to all of them the way of the Evangelical Church of the Reformation seems foolishness.

Is it reasonable now, even from the sectarian point of view, that our Lutheran heads of families should be deterred by such diversity of opinions and churches from conducting their families according to the faith which they have confessed in the Lutheran Church and which is the faith of their hearts? Which faith among the many shall they follow, if not that which the Holy Spirit has given them through the Gospel? Any course would be as objectionable to the sects as the one followed, and which one could have equal claims in the mind of a Lutheran Christian with that of the Augsburg Confession? And the way of indifference to all alike is the way of unbelief.

Therefore the Lutheran Christian has no other honest course, and as a true believer he thinks of no other course, but that of living a Christian life, conducting his family as a Christian household, and bringing up his children as children of God by the grace conferred in baptism, according to his own Christian faith declared in the Augsburg Confession. There is no other way of loyalty to our Confession but that Lutheran Christians should establish Lutheran families. This implies that the Word of God shall rule and the truth in Jesus shall be taught in their homes as well as that the Triune God shall be daily worshiped at the family altar. A person may be and may remain a Christian, at least for a time, though he does not read the Bible and

gather the family regularly each day to praise the Lord for His goodness and pray to Him for His blessing. Considering how alert and active is the enemy of our souls to prevent faith and to undermine it where it has been wrought, the danger is great that in such a case the faith professed is a mere form, or that it will ere long be reduced to this if it has existed. The Christian cannot regard this as the normal condition of believers. It is merely one of the wiles of the devil to argue that our eternal salvation cannot depend upon such formalism as that of the regular reading of the Bible and the daily gathering of the household for family prayer. Even listening to the argument, in compliance with the motions of the flesh, urging the omission of such duties and privileges, is a symptom that warns us to beware of the tempter; for it indicates that we are yielding to his sophistry by assuming that the underlying falsehood is worth considering. Or is it not a lying accusation, that Christians expect to save their souls by observing certain forms? And do not at least Evangelical Lutheran Christians know that it is a malicious slander?

Among Romanists Satan has succeeded in gaining acceptance for such a heathenish notion, but Christians who have learned from the Gospel and have believed and confessed that we are saved by grace alone through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, without the deeds of the law, can only present as an insult the insinuation that they read and hear the Word of God, use the holy sacraments, and say their prayers, with the thought that for such deeds of the law they shall receive eternal life. You and your household need the grace of God imparted through His Word, and feeling your need of God's blessing every day you will gladly embrace the privilege of asking, that you may receive, not for a moment heeding any such fatuous suggestion as that God owes you something for coming to get His blessing. And parents who themselves daily experience the fortifying power of grace against the sin that is in them and around them. and the peace and comfort and joy derived from the revelation of heavenly truth in Christ their Savior, will not be ashamed, when the household is assembled for worship, or at fixed hours on Sunday, to take the precious Catechism of Luther and stir up the pure hearts of such as are confirmed by way of remembrance. and enlighten the little ones on their glorious privileges and high duties as the children of God, whom He has made His own in Holy Baptism.

This may all sound strangely in the ears of some who not only claim to be Christians, but Evangelical Christians like ourselves; but to such as from their hearts have confessed their faith in the Augsburg Confession, it should

seem the simple consequence of their sincerity and loyalty. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord;” and the faith which makes us Evangelical Lutheran Christians will of necessity make Lutheran homes, because it will make them Christian homes according to the Evangelical Lutheran Confession.

If Christians of other denominations should think fit to reproach us for carrying our Lutheran faith so far and charge us with shameful narrowness, let them know that as sincere believers we carry our faith with us wherever we go and that is just as wide as the Word of God and the kingdom of Christ, which is first of all the kingdom of truth, and the preservation of this is the condition of its continuance among us with its heavenly blessings.

4. Faith Stands With Other Christians

The individual Christian, when the light of the Gospel has shone upon his soul so that he can confess the faith of the Augsburg Confession, cannot stand aloof from other Christians who confess the same precious faith. Both the Word of the Lord and the impulse of the Spirit forbid this. Faith is certainly a personal matter, as the salvation of each individual is plainly such. The fact that there is a Christian Church that confesses the true faith and is thus the ground and pillar of the truth, is of inestimable importance. As this Church is the congregation of believers, which is not constituted such by its visible organization, each individual must be brought to faith in Christ before the Lord recognizes his membership in this assembly of believers and communion of saints. But when one as been gifted with such faith, and has thus been added to the Church as God sees it, only selfishness could induce him to refrain from joining the company which confesses Christ before men and with whose confession he is in accord.

The Lutheran believer by an inward necessity, which is also taught and enforced by the Word of God, is led to unite with the pure visible Church of the Augsburg Confession and perform his duties as well as exercise his privileges and seek his edification in the fellowship of that Church. He cannot without danger to his spiritual life and ultimate salvation deny any portion of his faith by joining another Church which teaches and confesses otherwise than God’s Word teaches, and must be ready to make sacrifices in behalf of the Church of the Augsburg Confession with its pure Word and

Sacraments. It is surely not loyalty to that Confession which inspires the thought that, if there be no congregation of that Confession in the place of our residence, the best thing to be done is to join some other Church that professes to be Christian. Such conduct can reflect no credit upon a professed believer of the evangelical truth for which our fathers contended in the days of the Reformation. Indifference to the truth is thus manifested rather than faith.

If there is no Church of the Augsburg Confession where a Lutheran believer lives, there ought to be; and his calling has evidently become that of a missionary who providentially has the high duty of confessing the truth and, if possible, of gathering other believers around the Augsburg Confession and forming an Evangelical Lutheran congregation.

Meantime instead of denying his faith by holding fellowship with those who confess a different doctrine, he will be content with his own family worship, employing the services of the nearest pastor for the administration of the sacraments and an occasional sermon, until a little congregation can be collected in his own locality.

Loyalty to his Lutheran Confession and Church is entirely out of the question as long as he is resolved that it shall cost him nothing, or even that the sacrifice which it imposes shall be small. If he can endure some hardship in order to establish a home in a new country, he can endure more to establish for himself and his family a church in which his spiritual wants are satisfied. Without this, one of his main comforts, and therefore a principal element even of earthly happiness, is wanting. Only on the assumption that he has never rightly appreciated the blessedness of believing the Gospel and serving the Savior in the gratitude of faith could this be otherwise. The faith that saves the soul and gives it peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ is a power that impels to activity in the kingdom of God for the glory of His name and for the rescue of others from the curse of sin. Not simply because the command of God requires the believer to confess Christ and work in the Church, but because it is his will and pleasure, does he diligently labor to gather and maintain in his locality a congregation which carries the banner of the Augsburg Confession when he has once recognized this to be the banner of the pure Gospel of grace in Christ as revealed for man's salvation and recorded in Holy Scripture to be known and read of all men. It will therefore not seem to him a burden to devote time and money, as well as prayers, to the calling and support of a pastor, the erection and re-

pair of a church building, the maintenance of a parochial school, the congregational meetings for the proper conduct and the discipline of the church, the current expenses requisite for its prosperity, and all other activities incident to its management as an organized body of Lutheran Christians.

First and foremost in all his thoughts will necessarily be the ample provision for the administration of the means of grace, that the kingdom of God may not only be promoted in the hearts of the people forming the congregation, but be extended in the community. That is of more importance than the enlargement of his business or the addition of more acres to his farm, because it pertains to things of eternal worth, the achievements and gains in which will be of inestimable value when temporal business and earthly farms will all have passed away. And next will be the school for the instruction and training of children in the heavenly truth. No Christian who realizes the precious treasure which he has by faith in Christ, compared with which all earthly treasures are tinsel, can think this extravagant language.

“What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

And what reason can there be in gathering riches for children’s supposed welfare in this world, while no provision is made for laying up treasures in heaven? Lutheran Christians are not supposed to be so stupid as to think only of the few years that we are to pass on earth and utterly to forget the eternity toward which we are rapidly tending, and as to make careful provision for the former to the dreadful neglect of the latter. Be loyal to the Augsburg Confession and you will wisely “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you”; for your heavenly Father knows what temporal things you have need of during your earthly pilgrimage, and He cares for you and will supply them.

5. Faith Joins Churches into Synods

Our congregations confessing the pure Gospel in the Augsburg Confession, while they are happy in their home provision for the exercise and promotion of their faith, and while they know assuredly that each one has all the powers and rights of the Church of Christ who, according to His promise, is

present with them and reigns among them, usually join together in larger bodies which we call Synods. They do this because, although there is nothing essentially pertaining to the constitution and work of the holy Christian Church which the local congregation is not empowered to do, there are somethings which can be done more efficiently in association with others than they can by congregations working separately. Not only the great work which the Church is specially commissioned to perform as her proper calling, the preaching of the Gospel to all nations and the administration of the Sacraments or the planting and preservation of the kingdom of grace and salvation, but also the works of love for the amelioration of human misery, which she is moved to do for the glory of her Lord, invite to cooperation of Christian congregations, so that what one could do only with great difficulty a number by their combined strength can accomplish with comparative ease.

Thus the missionary work, specially among the heathen, is not likely to be conducted with vigor and on a scale commensurate with its vast import to humanity and with the Master's will unless numerous congregations unite their efforts for the purpose. But rarely does a single congregation have the faith and courage to undertake such a work alone, and the same measure of efficiency is not attainable, even if the activity of local churches were marvelous, by organizations working separately as when working unitedly. There cannot be the same wise use of means and distribution of forces. Even the existence of different denominations of Christians, each thinking itself obligated to carry on its own missions, works injuriously in this respect: it is an evil manifesting its power in producing other evils.

Our congregations of the Augsburg Confession therefore see the necessity of joining together in larger synodical bodies in order to use their gifts with wisdom and success. The same truth is exemplified in the provision which the Church is called to make for the perpetuation of her Gospel ministry. Each congregation has the right and the duty to call its own pastors and teachers, but the Word of God prescribes certain requisite qualifications for such office, and the Spirit in their hearts, in accordance with the faith which that Spirit has wrought within them, prompts to great care and caution that these prescriptions be duly regarded in giving the all. Not every Christian has these qualifications. Men must be educated for the work. But some congregations are not in a situation to make adequate provision for such education, and the few that have the necessary means can do it only

with such difficulty that the work is after all unsatisfactory. It is only when congregations join together for the purpose that proper and efficient arrangements can be made to do the work well, and at the same time with the greatest economy in the employment of men and money. Institutions of learning are thus established jointly by congregations, and the necessary work is done for them all under the care of them all, thus securing the means for the greatest efficiency with the least possible waste of resources.

Such synodical union of congregations of the same faith has the advantage, moreover, of utilizing the gifts of all for the benefit of all, in maintaining and defending the truth set forth in the Augsburg Confession throughout the whole Synod, each helping the other to support it and perpetuate it in all the congregations, that the great Church of the Reformation may faithfully preserve its glorious heritage and hand it down to the children and children's children to all generations until the Lord shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

In addition to all this the Christian believer will be glad that the union of congregations in Synod affords facilities for the better organization of the charities to which his love draws him and in which his faith delights to find utterance. Orphan Houses, Hospitals, Homes for the aged and infirm, and similar institutions of mercy, can be conducted, wherever found to be necessary, much better when congregations unite for the purpose. There are not many congregations that would be willing to establish an Orphan House or a Hospital of their own, and if some did this, other congregations that feel the same need would of have their want fully supplied. It is therefore a great blessing to congregations of the Lutheran faith that they join together in Synod for mutual encouragement and assistance, and for the more effectual prosecution of work common to all.

From this it is apparent that loyalty to the Augsburg Confession enjoins two duties in regard to Synod. One is to join it, the other is to cordially support its institutions.

Those who love the truth in Jesus and the Church which confesses it in its purity and labors earnestly to preserve it and propagate it, can not fail to see the importance of joining forces with others of the same faith for mutual help and encouragement for cooperative work in a cause so dear, and therefore they will not rest content until the congregation to which they belong connects itself with a Synod that rallies around the same banner of the Augsburg Confession, if this is at all practicable.

It is true that such connection has no direct divine command and is not necessary to secure any powers of the Church, as these are gifts of our Lord which are imparted in their completeness to each congregation of believers. Therefore a congregation loyal to the Lutheran Confession would rather stand aloof from all larger associations than endanger the purity of the faith by joining a Synod that is not sound in the faith, or renders the sincerity of its professions questionable by its inconsistent practice. But the benefits of synodical membership are manifestly so great that congregations should be glad to avail themselves of it as soon as the opportunity is offered to do this in full harmony with its Confession. When such a union has been formed with sister congregations, loyalty to the common faith will assert itself in the same cordial cooperation with Synod as is shown in the individual's cooperation with the congregation. Working together is the condition of achieving the desired results. As long as the unity of a pure faith is maintained, such united effort should not be regarded burdensome or difficult.

There will be differences of opinion on matters subject to human judgment and in regard to which there is full Christian liberty, but just because there is unity in the faith and all the variations in views of expediency fall within the lines of fidelity to the Word of God, which binds all together under the same rule for the attainment of the same purpose, the diversity of opinion cannot affect the conscience, and Christian love easily averts all trouble. What the Bible decides is not debatable among Christians. Its decisions stand, and all the votes in the world could not change the Word of the Lord.

In regard to such objects the acceptance of our good Confession has made all our congregations and synods unanimous. The absurd notion of voting on a subject which the Lord Himself has settled in the Bible, does not enter their minds. But much that solicits the attention of congregational and synodical meetings is not of that kind, but is submitted to the members for decision, because the Lord has so ordained it. When a church building becomes too small or too antiquated, the members of the congregation may differ about the expediency of erecting a new building or about the kind of edifice proposed. Evidently there is no way for them to settle the question, after giving all a hearing who desire it, but that of accepting the decision of the majority. All can see that that is the only solution, and while some of the minority may still be convinced that their judgment is better than that which was accepted, there is no way of peace in the circumstances but that of def-

erence to the judgment of the greater number in the exercise of Christian love. And in Synod the same conditions are presented. The subject, for instance, of the establishment of a new mission in a foreign land, or of the erection of a new institution to facilitate the educational work, may evoke opinions which come into open conflict. Some favor and some oppose, though all pursue the same end of promoting the welfare of the Church. There is again no conceivable way of preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace but that of cordially consenting, in the exercise of the law of love, to let the opinion of the majority prevail. Nor is there any great hardship in this. For the assumption by no means is that a soul will be convinced that his judgment is wrong because a majority is against him. That fact will induce a fair-minded Christian to consider the probability that his judgment is erroneous, but it cannot reasonably be expected to convince him. Neither can he on that account be required to abandon his conviction. Nothing can hinder him from retaining it, if the evidence to his mind is still against the majority's decision. What is expected of him is that he will not, because of his abiding conviction of the correctness of his own judgment adverse to that of the larger number of his brethren, disturb the harmony of the congregation or synod, or in any way cease to cooperate with them in their Christian work because of such a difference, which does not affect the faith of the whole nor his individual conscience, seeing that the matter involved lies entirely in the sphere of liberty.

Christian love secures the whole brotherhood in Christ against conduct that would produce a rupture of fraternal relations to satisfy individual pride of opinion and the triumph of selfishness, which has no claims and can have no standing in a Christian community.

The Lutheran Christian has a mind to work in and with the Church of which he is a member, and with whose purpose and aim to glorify the Lord by contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. he is heartily in accord.

6. Salvation Is Only In Christ's Kingdom

One point more on this subject of loyalty to our Confession we are constrained to mention and to emphasize. The Church which has the Lord's promise and ministers the Lord's peace is the kingdom of Christ in which

alone there is salvation. All zeal and labor are misdirected if this is left out of view, and much of the strenuous effort put forth to extend the Church, however sincere it may be, is for that reason a waste of energy. Among the many evils of sectarianism this is prominent. Some whim takes hold of the fancy or inspires a wild passion, and fanaticism results which in its extravagance practically makes that vagary the sum of Christianity and the one essential of salvation. It can no more surprise us that “zeal without knowledge” than that “false prophets” appear in the Church. Whatever infidels may say about it, religion is an interest of the human soul that is dominant and may be aroused, whether in the right or the wrong and accordingly for weal or for woe, to a high pitch of excitement, as is seen among fanatical Hindus as well as among fanatical Christian sects. And it manifests itself not only where the fanaticism is so extravagant as to be apparant to all minds of ordinary intelligence, but also in the more subdued forms in which it is apparent only to the more sober minded who search the Scriptures.

Who among those that believe these Holy Scriptures has not been pained to observe how deluded Romanists become enthused for the worship of Mary or the glory of the pope, or how equally deluded Baptists wage a wild warfare against the baptism of infants or the administration of that holy sacrament in any other mode than that of immersion? To sober minds it cannot seem a mere exhibition of unkind feeling, when we declare that often in such fanaticism no interest in Christianity is manifest beyond the illusions of Mariolatry and Popery and Anabaptisticism, none of which has ever delivered a soul from death.

We mention these things here, not primarily for the purpose of condemning others among whom such extravagances occur, but with a view of warning our own people and directing them to the better way. We have not the least sympathy with the folly of those who imagine that, when we confess the pure Gospel, as we do in the Augsburg Confession, and thus belong to the pure evangelical Church of the Reformation, we are in no danger of being misled by Satan’s wiles and of misleading others, and eventually failing of our own salvation. Our people know, or at least have abundant means of knowing, that the mere formal confession of the Augustana and consequent membership in the Lutheran Church, or even the sincere acceptance of the Lutheran faith, does not exempt us from the allurements of sin, whether in the form of doctrinal error or unholy living, and that constant watchfulness and prayer are necessary to protect us against the subtle enemy of our souls.

Because of the sin that remains in us, even after we are justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, we are still subject to manifold temptations which may lead to the adoption of notions that gradually assume the proportions of principles of conduct. Thus habits may be formed which are detrimental to the true interests of the Church while these interests are ostensibly pursued, and often without the least consciousness that they are contravened by such conduct. Lutherans as well as members of other denominations may be misled, and it is a matter of experience that they not unseldom are misled when congregational or denominational success and aggrandizement are substituted for the growth of the kingdom of God, and accordingly human expediency is made to take the place of God's wisdom as revealed in Holy Scripture. Examples will best show what we mean.

The argument is presented that a more liberal policy than that which characterized our Church in its dealings with Romanism and Reformism would render the Church of the Augsburg Confession more popular and consequently more successful in extending its borders and building up its institutions. Opposition to secret societies which seek to save souls without grace and Christ and faith, and refusal to fraternize with churches that will not accept our evangelical Confession, are a stumbling block to many, who would otherwise gladly unite with us and aid us in our work. The impression is thus made upon some who are not of our faith, that we are a Church that is narrow in head and heart, that has been left behind in the progress of enlightenment and civilization, and that is entirely out of fashion in this age of progress. We will not here enter upon a refutation of this argument by urging the fact that the Gospel is old and unchangeable, that it is absolutely incapable of improvement because it is an infallible revelation from the all-wise God, who never changes and whose truth is forever the same, and that it can therefore be subject to none of the fashions which come and go in the mutations of the world's thought and taste; nor will we lay stress upon the fact that God's blessing has prospered our Church most where it was most faithful to His Word, though its progress seemed slow and often through severe trials and conflicts, while some trimming sects that sprang forward with leaps and bounds and bade fair to conquer the world, had their little day of earthly glory, then waned and died.

If a true believer could think of policy at all in his service of God he would be quite sure that God's way is better than man's device. But our pur-

pose here is not to argue the question as to the comparative merits of human schemes and of Christian fidelity to the Word of God for the attainment of success in the building and work of the Church. To us Lutherans that is not a debatable question, and we refer to it only because temptations beset our people in this regard, and some become confused, and here and there one succumbs to the delusion that we have as good a right to bid for popular favor as other denominations, which seem to make a success of it. The truth is that no Church has such a right, and none can make a success of usurping it, however much appearances may indicate that a sect has prospered by the usurpation.

“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away, but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.” 1 Pet. 1:24, 25.

Lutherans know this and believe it. Therefore. they know, too, that all solicitations to depart from this Word, though such departures may seem to inure to the benefit of the Church by winning members to our congregations, are wiles of the devil to allure them into his ways, which lead to destruction. Dear brethren, let him not find you sleeping. Do not forget your high calling in Christ Jesus and your glorious hopes through faith in His name. What are we working for and suffering for in our labor of love to build up the great Church of the Reformation with its glorious Augsburg Confession? Is it to gain the temporal glory of outwitting and outstripping the Romanists and Anabaptists, the Zwinglians and Calvinists, and all others who array themselves against the great Lutheran Church that on the Protestant victory centuries ago and must not be permitted to lose its prestige now? Whatever there may be of honorable in this, it is not what our Lord established His kingdom for, and not what He has called us into His kingdom for. He came to bear witness of the truth unto the salvation of a lost world, and to establish a kingdom of believers who embrace that truth and confess it to the glory of His name and declare it to the salvation of all who will hear it and believe it. And now what a travesty of His whole work is it to organize churches with a view of gaining crowds, whether they enlist under the banner of that truth or not, and even knowingly suppressing one portion of that truth after the other until the association has placed itself entirely outside

the kingdom of Christ and become no better than a Masonic lodge or a Hindu temple.

Christians who know what an unspeakable gift God has bestowed upon them in the truth in Jesus, having by its gracious power believed in Him, and found peace in believing, cannot treat these things lightly. If the kingdom of God cannot be promoted by our Church work, what is the use of working? Why should we labor and pray and make sacrifices ostensibly to promote the kingdom of God for the salvation of men, when we know that all our efforts are directed to the mere temporal purpose of glorifying human organization? Even the Lutheran Church, as a visible organization, is not worth preserving, if its members consent to reduce it to a mere sect which can live and thrive only by accommodating itself to the reason and feeling and whim of people who do not love the truth and who accept the Augsburg Confession only because of its historical renown, without a care for the saving Gospel which it proclaims or a concern for the kingdom of God in which alone there is salvation. When church work is done in disregard of the truth unto salvation by which souls are rescued from sin and death, and the glory of our Redeemer is promoted, the whole becomes a solemn farce, in which no Lutheran loyal to the Augsburg Confession can consent to engage. Such sham work would be even more disgraceful to Lutherans than to sectarians, because they certainly know better.

Our great interest in the Church of the Augsburg Confession enters in the pure Gospel which is confessed and in the one great kingdom of Christ in which souls are saved by the power of that truth, of which the great King came into the world to bear witness. Lutherans are not loyal to their Confession when they confine their zeal to the external association and overlook the main thing. All our work in the visible organization receives its true consecration and value only when it is directed to the building of the one Holy Christian Church, which is the congregation of believers and the ground and pillar of the truth. Those who swerve from that truth are not loyal to the Gospel and the Church which confesses the Gospel.

The same fault is apparent when a congregation resorts to other methods of increasing and holding its membership than those which the Lord prescribes in His infallible Word.

Many ways of enticing people into the congregations and of keeping them there, commend themselves to the wisdom of this world, to which the simple way of preaching the Gospel in season and out of season seems quite

inadequate; and many are the sophistries to which this wisdom resorts to induce Christians to adopt its devices. Alas, that it is so often successful in urging its strong delusions even on members of Lutheran congregations, who relax their vigilance and fall into ways that are inconsistent with their good Confession. Certainly cakes and candies, socials and games, fun and frolic are more attractive to the natural man than Word and Sacrament, Bible study and prayer, the Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. No one disputes his. And therefore the argument seems sound, that if you want to attract the masses to your church, you must not depend on the power of the Gospel with which our fallen human nature is not in sympathy.

It is undeniable that, if our purpose were to gather a crowd into an association for worldly uses of education, business, and pleasure, calling it a Christian congregation with a view of giving it a moral standing in the community and thus capturing a class that does not want its religious instincts ignored, the policy of the worldly-wise would probably be the shortest and surest way to achieve the desired result. But if that were our purpose the Augsburg Confession could no longer be our banner, except by a hypocritical pretense.

Let our people beware of such “wiles of the devil” who exerts his great power and cunning to defeat the purpose of the Church, and gladly and shrewdly pursues his nefarious plans by helping congregations which pursue worldly ends under the Christian name, and keep poor sinners away from Christ and the truth unto salvation by offering a substitute for the Christian Church with its great salvation from sin and death. Lutherans must know that the wisdom of this world never saved a soul, and never can save a soul, whether by its art and science, its promotion of the brotherhood of our race, its provision for the gratification of our natural wants in the social line of business or pleasure, or even in its highest efforts in the sphere of religion, and that if they desire to work in consistency with their Confession their aim must be to extend and perpetuate the kingdom which is not of this world. Therefore our heart’s desire and prayer must be, not primarily to gather people into the visible congregation, but to lead them through repentance and faith into the blessed assembly of those who are saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. And this can be accomplished only by those means which human reason pronounces inadequate, and for which it would substitute devices and con-

trivances which may allure people into our visible society, but cannot convert them to Christ and make them children of God.

The Church was not established for temporal purposes, and those who make out of it an institution of merchandise or amusement are guilty of a perversion that endangers souls, because, innocent as secular employments may be, their introduction into the Church can only tend to encourage the notion that these too constitute the kingdom of God and to confound nature and grace and promote work-righteousness, but especially to divert attention from the one thing needful for sinful souls that are children of wrath by nature. Both faith and charity urge true believers to give earnest heed to the commission which our Lord has given to all His disciples as the necessary way of building and preserving His Church:

“Jesus came and spake unto them, saying. All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and each all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Matt. 28:18-20.

When we think of it, must it not seem marvelous that disciples of our Savior who have had the advantage of hearing of the Reformation, and some even who have united with the great Church of the Reformation under its glorious banner of the Augsburg Confession, should so far forget their precious heritage and neglect the things which belong to their peace, as to adopt other means of building and preserving the Church than those which our all-powerful and ever-present Lord has prescribed?

O Lord, increase our faith!

Lutheran loyalty now means fidelity to the great principles of the Reformation, and to the doctrines of Holy Scripture which, in accordance with those principles, the Reformation contended for against the perversions and usurpations of Rome and set down as the result of its victory in the Augsburg Confession. This Confession gathered around it the souls that believed the Gospel and were glad to proclaim it for the salvation of men. Thus the Evangelical Lutheran Church came into the sphere of history as the Church of the Reformation. Fidelity to the truth of the Gospel, which was victorious in the days of the Reformation, now means fidelity to the Confession rendered at Augsburg and to the Evangelical Lutheran Church which gathered around that Confession, declaring its allegiance to God and His Word and

therefore its independence of councils or popes and of human ordinances of every sort and of every claim.

The case was reduced to one of great plainness: the King rules in His kingdom, and therefore only His Word is binding. On that basis the Evangelical Lutheran Church stood and still stands. That other churches have arisen, and that they profess equal loyalty to the Holy Scriptures, cannot alter her faith or her relation to God and to the world, or the fidelity which her members owe to her and her Confession and work. These other churches have adopted a different Confession, have a separate organization, choose their own course, and are alone responsible for their work. If they think it well to speak of church loyalty at all, they cannot fairly be presumed to mean anything else but fidelity to their own Church, in which they profess to lead their spiritual lives and receive their spiritual nourishment, and to whose work their strength is devoted in the kingdom of Christ as they understand it. No Lutheran reproaches them for that. If one is a Romanist or a Methodist, we never think of blaming him for living and working according to his faith and convictions. That is just what a sincere and honest man is expected to do. Our controversy is with Romanism and Methodism as departures from the pure doctrine of the Gospel as the Reformation restored it to the world and as the Evangelical Lutheran Church maintains it in the Augsburg Confession, not at all with the honesty of those who think that Romanism and Methodism are right and therefore practice what they profess and preach. Our people are Lutherans, who profess to believe the truth as the Scriptures teach it and as the Augsburg Confession sets it forth, and who as sincere and honest Christians are rightly expected to practice what they profess and teach.

Probably members of other churches, because they are wedded to different doctrines, will not like our Lutheran ways because they do not like the Lutheran Confession. That is natural and so far reasonable that the conclusions must be as the premises. We have no quarrel with such reasoning of Roman and Reformed parties, and when we renounce all participation in their church organizations and all responsibility for their practices, it is not because their inferences from the premises which their confessions furnish are illogical, though sometimes they are, but because their confessions are not in accord with the Scriptures. Lutherans believe, and therefore they speak and act according to their faith. That faith is expressed in the Augs-

burg Confession. According to that they organize and regulate their congregations.

If others will not accept this Confession we have no concessions to make and no inducements to offer in counteraction of objections raised. There were people in the times of the Reformation who would not accept the pure Gospel. Romanists resisted the evangelical truth and hardened themselves into the Romish sect at the Council of Trent; Zwinglians and Calvinists refused to submit to the pure Gospel declared in the Augsburg Confession and became the Reformed Church with its multitudinous sects; the Lutherans continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and with one consent declared their pure evangelical faith in their Augsburg Confession. By the grace of God they have arched and fought under this banner until this day, and have brought souls to Christ and built churches without number, so that they have become the largest and mightiest evangelical host in the world.

That was because the Lord of hosts is with them in their advocacy of His Word and their purpose to glorify His name by bringing the Gospel of salvation to the souls of men. Lutheran loyalty means continuing this glorious work by steadfast adherence to the evangelical faith as set forth in the Augsburg Confession, by cordial cooperation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church that confesses this faith, without being disturbed by those who confess a different faith and build churches in opposition to theirs, and by zealous and energetic work to build and maintain churches of the pure Gospel and make sacrifices, for the attainment of this end, being instant in prayer that God would bless our humble labors as He has blessed the labors of our fathers and given us grace to inherit the blessing.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 15:58.

Part II. Exposition

Introduction

The Augsburg Confession is not a systematic theological treatise of dogmatic theology. It is not a theological treatise of any kind. It is a confession of the faith which lived in the hearts of Luther and his companions in labor and suffering for the truth of the Gospel, and as gladdened the hearts of millions of Evangelical Christians since the heroic days of the Reformation. Such a declaration of the faith, drawn up with the deep sense of responsibility which pervaded the hearts of the confessors in those trying times, and with the care and solicitude which such a condition of severe trial must impose, would in the nature of the case not be an elaborate disquisition on metaphysical problems or a precise arrangement of biblical doctrines to satisfy the demands of those who delight in science and love system more than the matter which it comprehends. As a system of theology our Confession would be found faulty in matter and form. But that does not imply that it is merely a rambling statement of points about which the fierce controversy of the Reformation raged. As a confession of the evangelical faith that came forth purified and victorious in the battles with Rome, it is a masterpiece, and has been recognized as such during all the centuries since its presentation at Augsburg in 1530. This it would not be if there were no order in the arrangement of its contents, although that is a secondary matter in the momentous subject which moved the hearts of our fathers and rolled the results of their controversies as mighty waves into their souls.

The Confession has two parts. The first part sets forth the principal articles of the faith which the Christian Church has held from the beginning, including the articles from which the Romanists had fallen away and which were specifically Lutheran; the second part treats of the abuses which Rome introduced and which, as conflicting with the Gospel, the Reformation abolished.

There is order in the arrangement of the articles. The first division sets forth the articles which are presupposed in the work of salvation, which was the great concern of the Reformation, the next shows the salvation itself as brought to us in Christ through the means of grace, and the third part sets forth the results. In our exposition we shall follow the order of the Confession in both its parts, taking the articles in the order in which they are presented.

Article I. Of God.

The churches with common consent among us teach that the decree of the Nicene Synod concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and of the Three Persons is true and without doubt to be believed; to-wit, that there is one Divine Essence, which is called and is God, eternal, without body, indivisible, of infinite power, wisdom, goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet that there be Three Persons of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And they use the name of person in this cause to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which properly subsists. They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichees, who set down two principles, one good and one evil; in the same manner the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Islamics, and all such like. They condemn also the Samosatenes, the old and the new, who, when they earnestly contend that there is but one person, craftily and wickedly trifle, after the manner of rhetoricians, about the Word and the Holy Ghost, that they are not distinct persons, but that the Word signifies a vocal word, and the Spirit a motion created in things.

THIS FIRST ARTICLE perplexes common people. In its positive part it sets forth a mystery of divine revelation; in its negative part it presents a mystery of iniquity. But it sets forth a fundamental truth which all true Christians believe, because the Bible teaches it, and the profound and far reaching import of which it behooves all to understand. There was need for confessing it in the days of the Reformation, though it was not a point of controversy in that great struggle, because it lies at the foundation of the whole Christian faith; and there is the same need of confessing it now for the additional reason that the prevalent thought and sentiment, based on sense and reason, is against all supernatural truth.

Our fathers were in perfect accord with the old faith of the Christian Church which was founded on the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. That was a comfort to them in the bitter sufferings which they were called to endure in their contest for the truth of the Gospel. It was therefore an important matter with them that their harmony with the ancient Church should be known, and that no occasion should be given to the Romanists, who had in so many respects departed

from the Scriptures, to suspect and to charge them with any deviation from the acknowledged path of the Gospel. They therefore refer to the Nicene Creed as the expression of the faith of their own churches, which they have in common with the whole Church of Christ in all time.

The Nicene Creed was adopted at a Council held in the city of Nice in 325, though as it existed when the reference was made to it by our Confession and as we have it now, the Nicene Creed was that which was adopted with some additions at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

There had been discussions among theologians about the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Speculations about its import had arisen, and reason, as is always the case when it is allowed a voice in matters of faith, had devised heresies. The Bible knows of only one God, but it speaks of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost as God, without giving us the explanation that our prying reason is prone to desire. In consequence of this some concluded that there is one God, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are only different forms in which this one God was pleased to make Himself known to men, and that accordingly the different names and activities only indicated different manifestations of the same Supreme Being who alone is God. On the other hand some presumed that what is ascribed to the Son and the Holy Spirit is the work of God through agents created for the purpose, and that it is idolatry to worship these agents as gods, seeing that there is and can be but one God. Thus two sorts of heresies appeared. One denied that the Son and Holy Ghost are real beings at all in distinction from the Father, but are only different names for the same person under different forms of manifestation. The other denied that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God, but assumed that they were creatures employed by the Father in the execution of His will. Both rejected the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but with different interpretations of the names given in the Scriptures to the three persons; the one maintaining that the Son and the Holy Ghost are the same person as the Father, therefore not three distinct persons, but only one person; the other contending that the Son and the Holy Ghost are not the same person as the Father, but that they are not God. The orthodox writers earnestly rebuked these errorists, and the controversy was sharp and widespread and prolonged. It was with a view of settling the dispute that the Synod of Nice was convened. This was the first of the great Councils of the Church, as the Arian controversy in its various ramifications was the earliest among the great struggles of the Church to maintain the truth in Jesus. To some minds

in our time it seems an insignificant affair to make so much ado about, and many are the sallies of wit which so-called polite literature exhibits in reference to the contest of the early fathers with the heretics of the olden time and the wrestling of spiritual truth against carnal error at the Nicene Council. But nothing serves better to show forth the spirit of the world in its antagonism to the Spirit of Christ than this earnest struggle for the truth unto salvation which resulted in the Nicene Creed. Shallow souls still make merry over the scholastic exercises upon a problem of the Trinity, which is on all sides acknowledged to be a great mystery, and laugh at the subtle distinction that amounts in their carnal estimation, which is blind to the whole spiritual world with its heavenly glories, to a mere difference of a single letter as between *homoousion* and *homoiousion*. God pity them in their ignorance, and let the Gospel shine into their souls that they may know better!

Luther and his fellow believers in the Gospel knew better. Their faith was wrought by the Gospel and sustained by the Gospel, and therefore they knew better. By the grace of God they were made aware of their lost condition in the sin which he law condemns, and of the divine love that had made a way of escape from the damnation of hell through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus by faith in His name. This was proclaimed in the Gospel, and by the power of the Holy Spirit they believed it. Was this Son of God, who was presented as their Savior, a mere nothing, or a mere man that in the eternal realm of God could accomplish nothing? They knew from the Scriptures that the God of all mercy does not mean to tantalize helpless sinners, but to save them with an everlasting salvation. They fled for refuge to the hope set before them. They believed the Word of God and therefore trusted that He who came to save them was mighty to save. An alleged Savior who was mere man, and therefore to the utmost could only save himself, was not what they wanted and what the Scriptures promised. They knew in whom they believed, because they believed the revelation given them in the Gospel. Therefore they knew assuredly that the faith wrought in their hearts was not a product of human reason or sentiment, but a work of the Holy Ghost. They believed in Jesus Christ as their mighty Savior, who is God over all, blessed forever, and in the Holy Spirit as the divine Comforter, who shows us the mind of God and establishes us in His grace. Therefore they were in accord with the Creed of ancient Christendom as it was declared at the Council of Nice, and has in all ages been the Creed of believers who accepted the Gospel, as it is of Lutheran Christians now.

The doctrine that is set forth in that Creed is that there is one God, but that there are three persons in the Godhead. This is the great mystery of the Holy Trinity, which is revealed as heavenly truth, but which remains a mystery to the comprehension of our limited faculties even after the fact has been revealed. We know only in part, but we know with certainty what is graciously declared in the revelation given us.

More particularly:

“there is one divine essence, which is called and is God, eternal, without body, indivisible, of infinite power, wisdom, goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible, and that yet there are three persons of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

In coincidence with the Church of all ages the Church of the Augsburg Confession believes and confesses that there is one God, and that the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, but that these three persons are one God. There is a trinity of persons revealed in Holy Scripture, though this trinity of persons is in the unity of one essence.

There is one God. So the revelation of God, which is written in the Scriptures for our learning, clearly teaches. It is a truth repeated again and again in both the Old and the New Testaments. When the commandments were given the one God declared to the children of Israel,

“I am the Lord thy God: thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Ex. 20:2, 3.

Moses introduces the exhortation to obey the commandments by the words,

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” Deut. 6:4.

“I am the Lord,” are the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah, “and there is none else, there is no God beside me”; and again the Lord says by the same prophet:

“There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me and be ye saved. all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” Is. 45:5, 21, 22.

St. Paul writes:

“We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.” 1 Cor. 8:4.

“There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism: one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Eph. 4:4-6.

According to the Scriptures there can be but one God; for they reveal Him as the infinite Being and supreme Lord, beside whom it is impossible that there could be another, as the admission of another would be a denial that He is infinite in Being and supreme in authority.

This one God is described in His principal attributes as the absolute Being. He is eternal, without beginning and without end, independent of time with its successions and changes.

“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to ever lasting Thou art God.” Ps. 90:2.

He is without body, incorporeal.

“God is a Spirit.” John 4:24.

A spirit hath not flesh and bones. We cannot see God with our bodily eyes, as we could if He too were corporeal, having a body such as we have. Therefore He is indivisible. He has no parts, as bodies have. Even the divisions which we are accustomed to make into substance and attribute do not strictly apply to Him; for every attribute of God, who is the one absolute Being, designates Him, not a part of Him.

God is of infinite power, wisdom, goodness. We have some knowledge of these qualities as manifested in creatures. But in these they are always limited. In God they are infinite. They are without bounds and limits. Among men we notice these qualities in larger or smaller measure. In God all are infinite. Hence He is the Almighty.

“The Lord appeared unto Abram and said unto him, I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect.” Gen. 17:1.

Therefore

“with God all things are possible.” Matt. 19:26.

The same infinity belongs to His wisdom. Men are endowed with this in a limited degree. They receive in measure. But in God it is infinite, without degrees or measures, limits or bounds.

“He hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom.” Jer. 10:12.

“O Lord, how manifold are Thy works; in wisdom hast Thou made them all.” Ps. 104, 24.

“Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.” 1 Tim. 1:17.

He is a God of infinite goodness as well as of infinite wisdom. God is love, and His goodness knows no limit; for who is there or what is there that could set any bounds to His loving kindness that endureth or ever?

“The word of the Lord is right and all His works are done in truth; He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.” Ps. 33:4, 5.

“Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” Rom. 2:4.

This one God of infinite power and wisdom and goodness is the Creator and Preserver of all things visible and invisible. He alone has existed from eternity, and whatever exists beside Himself is His creature, whether it be the visible things of earth or the invisible spirits that were designed for His service.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Gen. 1:1.

“O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast.” Ps. 36:6.

The Almighty Maker of heaven and earth upholds all things by the same power which called them into being, and governs the universe in infinite goodness, that the wise and good purpose of His creation may be ultimately attained, notwithstanding the disturbing element of sin which the highest of His creatures, whom He endowed with intellect and will, have introduced.

This one God is Triune; that is, there is one God, but three persons in the one Godhead. So the Holy Scriptures teach. They not only speak of God, the Father Almighty, but also of His Eternal Son as the Word:

“and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life as the light of men.” John 1:1-4.

This

“Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” John 1:14.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds: who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right Hand of the Majesty on high.” Heb. 1:1-3.

This Mighty Savior, Christ our Lord, “is over all, God blessed for ever.” Rom. 9:5. And so the Scriptures speak also of the Holy Spirit as God. It was God who spake by the mouth of prophets, and gave us the Scriptures by His inspiration;

“for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” 2 Pet. 1:21.

It is God the Holy Spirit who gives us the Word of Salvation.

“No an can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.” 1 Cor. 12:3.

Hence the saving work of God is summarily stated by the apostle as the work of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, when He addresses his first epistle to the strangers in many lands as the

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” 1 Pet. 1:2.

Hence the command is given to baptize

“in the name of the Father and of the Son. and of the Holy Ghost.” Matt. 28:19.

And hence also the apostolic benediction is threefold.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all.” 2 Cor. 13:14.

There is a manifest reference to this Trinity of the Godhead in the thrice repeated name of the Lord in the blessing ordered to be pronounced in the Old Testament:

“The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.” Num. 6:24-26.

These three are not in every respect the same. It is plain to every attentive reader, that when the Bible tells us that

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,”

and that

“God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved,” John 3:16, 17

He who gave His only Son and He who sent Him into the world was not in all respects the same as He who was given and who was sent. When the

apostle Paul says that

“God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4:4, 5

the meaning is evidently not that God the Father Himself came to be born of a woman and put under the law to make atonement for the sins of the world. God was made flesh, but it was not God the Father, but God the Son. And when in immediate connection with the passage just quoted it is said:

“Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father,” Gal. 4:6

it is equally manifest that the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. There are three who are called God and who really are God. But there is a difference between them.

That difference, though it lies beyond our comprehension, is revealed in the Scriptures. The Father is not begotten, as is the Son, and does not proceed from Another, as does the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not beget and is not begotten, but proceeds from the Father and the Son. When the fulness of the time had come the Father sent His Son into this world of sin to redeem our ruined race. The Son, not the Father nor the Holy Spirit. but the Son was “made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” But it is God who is our Savior, as it is God who is our Maker and our Sanctifier.

The Athanasian Creed, which the ancient Church set forth in opposition to the Arian heresy and which the Church of the Reformation adopted as the expression of her harmony with all Christendom, declares:

"Whoever will be saved, it is necessary before all things that he hold the true Christian faith; which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the true Christian faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son. and another of the Holy Ghost.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet there are not three Eternals, but one Eternal.

As also there are not three Incomprehensibles, or three Uncreated, but One Eternal and One Incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet here are not three Almightyies, but One Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Ghost is Lord; and yet not three Lords, but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Christian Religion to say, There be three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, not created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers: one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before or after the other, none is greater or less than another; but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together, and co-equals: so that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped."

Words must needs fail adequately to express the incomprehensible mystery of the Triune God. It is only to protect herself against Satanic and soul-destroying errors that the Church has struggled with the inadequacies of language to give expression to her faith in the revealed truth concerning God. Heretics have blamed her for this ever since the days of the apostles and continue to repeat their reproaches in our own day. With a pretense of piety and especially of a solicitude for the unlearned they object to the introduction of terms which are not used in the Bible, and which they represent as devised merely in the interest of theological speculation. The writer has spent the best portion of his life as a Professor of theology and knows how hollow such pretensions are so far at least as Lutheran teachers are concerned. We readily admit that the words Essence or Substance, Person, and

Trinity are not used in the revelation which God makes of Himself in Holy Scripture. What the Church designed and still designs by the use of such terms is simply to maintain what the Scriptures containing that revelation so plainly say, and what reason, because it cannot comprehend that is said, and refusing to believe what it cannot comprehend, perverts and degrades to the level of human infirmity, and thus utterly renounces.

The Bible clearly tells us that there is and can be but one God; but it tells us with equal clearness that the Father is God, and that the Son is God, and that the Holy Ghost is God; and yet again it tells us with the same clearness that the Father is not the Son, and that the Holy Ghost is neither the Father nor the Son. Of course human reason finds this contradictory on the face of it, and is compelled either entirely to reject the revelation given in the Bible, or on grounds satisfactory to itself rather to accept the Bible and torture its statements into harmony with its own requirements. Thus heresies arise.

Some conclude that there are three Gods, and that their unity is only a figure of speech. The Church believed the Word as God gave it, without any speculations or refinements. According to that Word God is One; the Father is God, the son is God, the Holy Ghost is God; there are three who are God, but God is One, only One: there are not three Gods.

Every thinking reader sees how hard it is to express in any words this incomprehensible mystery. Undoubtedly it looks reasonable when opponents of the Church's unanimous confession represent and remonstrate, that Christians ought to be satisfied with the revelation as the Bible gives it. She is satisfied with it, and accepts the sacred mystery in simple, unquestioning faith. She knows the truth revealed is incomprehensible, but she knows with certainty that what is revealed is truth, and in her consciousness of the limitations of the human mind and in her humility of childlike faith she is not disturbed by its incomprehensibility. But she prizes the truth, and there are some who dislike it, and pronounce it absurd. That would not trouble her much, because it is natural and expected, and the teaching of Scripture prepares us for it. The Gospel is to the Greeks foolishness, as it is to the Jews a stumbling-block. Under the conditions as they exist this can not be otherwise.

It would be foolish and even faithless to endeavor to satisfy them that are without, because they judge by the standard of reason, which has no calling and no right to sit in judgment on God's message to His fallen creature, and because they reject the revelation which is the ground of our faith

and which the Church acknowledges to be her only warrant for maintaining it. But there are some who desire to be called Christians and who claim some right in the Church, without

“casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” 1 Cor. 10:5

That does cause trouble, and requires the Church to be vigilant, that the enemy may not make successful assaults upon her citadel. These errorists subjected to their reason the revelation given in Scripture, and while they professed to accept its authority they claimed the liberty to put their own so-called reasonable construction on what it teaches. Some of them alleged that, because there is only one God, according to the Scriptures, the Son could not be God and the Holy Ghost could not be God, otherwise there would be three Gods. Some of them alleged that, because, according to the Scriptures, the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God, and one is not the other, there must be three Gods, who are said to be one only because of their perfect harmony in will and work. These reasonings and imaginings appeared in a variety of forms and produced a variety of sects in the efforts to explain how One is Three and how Three are One. The Church was thus under the necessity of using some terms which are not in the Scriptures that she might protect the truth committed to her trust against assaults made by the flesh and the devil under cover of loyalty to the Bible.

Our readers will perceive that the object of the early Christians, and of the Christians ever since, was not to unravel the mystery, which is recognized to be an impossibility, but to protect it against human efforts to explain it away by reducing it to the level of common sense, and thus substituting reason for the Scripture as prime authority in matters of faith. The Church therefore used the words Essence or Substance, and Person and Trinity, which are not in the Bible, to express what the Bible teaches about the One God, who is Father and Son and Holy Ghost. “There is One Divine Essence, which is called and is God.” and yet “there be three Persons of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, he Son, and the Holy Ghost.” These Three are called the Holy Trinity, which means the Holy Three in One and the Holy One in Three. So far was the Church from any thought of unfolding and resolving the mystery by the use of these terms

that she confessed from the beginning that she could not and did not profess to use them in the sense which human philosophy ordinarily attached to them, but only by an analogous employment of distinctions to which human thought was accustomed, to make intelligible the fact that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct from each other, and yet God is One. Nothing in heaven or earth is like it; the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth is above all creatures in His infinite Being, and nothing in His creatures, which are necessarily finite, can explain His Triune Godhead. The Church seeks to ward off error, but the mystery remains the same. It is purely an article of faith, which human reason cannot comprehend and which, therefore, the carnal mind cannot receive. This accounts for the numerous sects which have troubled the Church on this subject, some of the most prominent of which are mentioned.

Our churches “condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this Article, as the Manichees, who set down two principles, good and evil; in the same manner the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Islamics, and all such like.”

The Manichees were the followers of a Persian philosopher by the same of Mani or Manes, who lived in the third century. Speculating on the origin of evil in the world he fell upon the notion that there must be another power besides God, who is the source of all good, and therefore taught that there always was another principle that is the source of all evil. He denied that the Son is God or that He was incarnate, or that an atonement was made, and pretended that he himself is the Comforter of whom the Scriptures speak as the Holy Ghost.

We wonder how that such a heathen system could gain any favor among people who claimed to be Christians, but he secured a comparatively large number of adherents, and although the sect disappeared in the course of time, some of his notions are still entertained by men who give ear to “science falsely so-called” rather than to the truth given by inspiration of God in Holy Scripture.

The Valentinians were an earlier sect than the Manichees. It was composed of the followers of Valentinus, who taught at Rome in the second century and who was a leader among the Gnostics, at whose introduction of the wild flights of human imagination into the Christian religion readers of Church history so greatly marvel.

The Gnostics were a party who desired to know everything, including all mysteries. They were the Knowers: that is what the Greek word Gnostics means. Essentially they were of the same sort as our modern Rationalists, and specifically as the Evolutionists in the theology of our time. Their aim was to make all revelation conform to the dictates of reason. It is but a natural and rational consequence of the principle that, if any book of the Bible could not be reduced to the level of reason, it must be rejected. Valentinus was one of the masters of this science. He had many followers, and made much trouble. But he denied that the Word was God and was made flesh, and he and his system and his sect have long since perished, though some of his contentions still haunt the philosophy of our times.

The Arians were a powerful party of the fourth century who accepted the teaching of Arius, a minister of the Church in Alexandria. He denied that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is "God over all, blessed forever," as the Scriptures teach. While he was willing to accord Him honor above other men, he would not recognize that He is God, but maintained that He is but a creature. He gained a large following by his appeals to reason, and notwithstanding the efforts of the Church to impress and enforce the teaching of the Scriptures, his adherents grew in number and worried the people of God for centuries. The declarations of the Council of Nice in A.D. 325 set forth the doctrine of the Bible against his reason, which would annul all our hopes of glory through the redemption affected by the incarnate Son of God, and the Athanasian Creed, about a century later, carefully and clearly presented the doctrine of the Bible in opposition to the Arian speculations of reason.

The Church triumphed over the enemies of revealed truth, but the Arian heresy still continues to harass the Christian people with its strong delusions that are temptations to the flesh.

Eunomius, after whom the sect of Eunomians was named, was an Arian of the fourth century who was bolder than his master and who was less cautious in the expression of his disbelief in the doctrine of the Trinity. He was a Rationalist of the more outspoken sort, and while he gathered around him a party of kindred spirits that for a little while had influence, it was soon lost in the wider stream of Arianism and disappeared when that had had its day.

The Islamics are a later religious organization and one that was spread more widely and that still exists and exerts its power for evil over a large portion of the earth. Mahomet, after whom it was called, was born in Arabia

about 570, claimed to be the prophet of the one true God, from whom he professed to receive revelations from time to time through the angel Gabriel, and in 611 began to disseminate his new religion. He seems to have had some acquaintance with the Bible, but his guide was his alleged revelations, which were collected into a volume called the Koran.

The Islamic is the one religion in the world's history that is confessedly propagated by physical force, fire and sword being the principal means by which it is spread. It has thus gained millions of adherents among oriental people. Mention is made of it in our Confession not because it claims a place among Christian Churches, of which it is a declared and bitter enemy, seeking to exterminate Christianity, but because it proclaims that there is but one God, while it denies the Trinity of the Godhead, and thus renounces the salvation which the Gospel reaches.

Our churches "condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new; who, when they earnestly contend that there is but one Person, do craftily and wickedly trifle, after the manner of rhetoricians, about the Word and the Holy Ghost, that they are not distinct Persons, but that the Word signifies a vocal word and the Spirit a motion created in things." The Samosatenes were named after Paul of Samosata, who became Bishop of Antioch in 260 and was deposed as a heretic, but whose party under different names continued to trouble the Church for a hundred years. His heresy is sufficiently characterized in our Confession. When the Bible says that "the Word was God," and that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father," he applied his rhetorical art to make it appear that this means only the great influence of the words which declare the majesty of the Father.

Rhetoricians pay little attention to the statements which do not accord with their contrivance to rid themselves of the plain meaning of propositions to which their reason objects, and the incongruity of the assumed rhetorical figure with the acts stated did not disturb them, seeing that figures are often lame and that in many instances they will necessarily seem so because the resemblances between two things presuppose that in some respects they are different. That the difference is essential in regard to the point of comparison and that the figure is accordingly absurd, will not be apparent to many readers, and the rhetorician's art still consists in hiding what it is his interest not to make apparent.

The more we observe the dealings of men in history and in our own observation, the more the deceivableness of all unrighteousness is impressed upon our minds. The same rhetorical tricks which were played by Paul of Samosata are repeated by Samosatenes of later date. They were represented by Servetus and Socinus in the time of the Reformation; they have a large following now in the Unitarians and Universalists and the other so-called Liberalists of our own time. The ancient heretics are long since dead; the names of, the old heretical parties are preserved only in history: but old heresies still survive, and Satan sees to it that they shall not perish from the earth as long as he is permitted to go about seeking whom he may destroy. The new Samosatenes are still among us, though now they call themselves by other names, and Christians are not wise when they flatter themselves that they are in no danger. And this danger is equally great in regard to the Holy Spirit.

The fact that the Samosatenian evasion of Scripture truth by saying that He is only a “motion in created things” is so obscure that few have any conception of its meaning, does not change the matter. The Holy Spirit regenerates, converts, sanctifies. He applies the grace secured to us through the redemption accomplished by the incarnate Son of God in His vicarious obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. That is a motion in things, an influence in our hearts. O, how any detach this motion from the Holy Spirit, and regard what ever religious motions or emotions appear in consciousness as the Holy Spirit. The history of fanaticism is a warning that Christians must not treat lightly.

The doctrine of God is a great mystery. It is the doctrine of one God in three Persons — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The very first article of our Augsburg Confession presents the test whether we are Christians who live by faith, or whether we are virtually heathens who live by sight, and therefore without God and without hope in the world. Hence it surprises no sincere believer in Christ that doubters and disbelievers so strenuously object to the ancient Athanasian Creed, not only because of the doctrine of the Trinity, which it sets forth with so much care and clearness, but also because of its unqualified statement of the importance of that doctrine. “This is the true Christian faith,” it says, “which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.”

To many who are not Christians and to some who are, or at least profess to be, this is a hard saying. But it is precisely what the Scriptures teach and

what the Church has in all ages confessed.

“Hereby know we that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God.” 1 John 4, 13-15.

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” 2 John 9-11.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” 1 John 4, 1-3.

Those who are striving to enter in at the strait gate will not disregard the exhortation and warning which the Holy Spirit gives through the apostle of love, and will not forget that the rule by which the spirits must be tried is the Holy Scripture given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isa. 8:20.

The Church of Christ has always given heed to this Word. By its power of divine grace she was called into being and has been preserved in her beauty and holiness unto this hour. She has passed through manifold trials, but God was always with her, and will be with her unto the end of the world. In her manifestation on earth she has been rent into parties of various denominations, and was troubled, and is troubled still by the discordance of her divided appearance with her real unity. But even in her outward appearance, where human sin and human weakness exert so mighty an influence, she has maintained her fundamental truth of the Trinity in the Unity of God.

The Roman and the Greek Churches, which rejected the Reformation, and the Reformed Church which accepted it, but refused to accept its results as stated in the Augsburg Confession, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church

in its contention for the evangelical truth revealed in Holy Scripture, are all a unit in declaring the great mystery of One God in Three Persons. This was a comfort to Luther and his fellow believers in the tempestuous days of the Reformation, and it is a comfort to the Lutheran Church in our own times. Not that the general agreement of the other Churches in confessing the biblical doctrine of the Trinity makes Lutherans sure of their faith and confession. They have a better foundation than that in the Word of God, which endures when all human fabrics, as well those of human imagination and reason as those of human hands and skill, fade and fall and crumble and perish. They know the truth given is by revelation of God in Holy Scripture, and believing it they are sure of it, whatever the creature man may say against it, and are no surer of it when that creature, by the power of that revelation and the grace which it carries with it confesses he truth. But still it is a comfort to know that the might of truth has preserved millions from the Antichristian delusions which false prophets have spread in the world, and that the Roman and Greek and Reformed Churches can still be recognized as organizations that confess the same God as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and may therefore, notwithstanding all their errors to which we can by no means be indifferent, be recognized as Christian Churches whose rights as such must be acknowledged, though we earnestly contend against their false and dangerous doctrines and, refusing to be partakers of their unscriptural work, decline to fellowship them, but warn against them. All true Christians confess the same One God. who is Father, Son and Holy Ghost — Three in One. Where this fundamental truth of the Bible is denied there can be no Christian faith, and no Christian Church, and no salvation. The Athanasian Creed merely states a fact which God has revealed and which he Scriptures make plain.

A little reflection on the truth to which our Savior came to testify will make this evident to every believer in the redemption which He has wrought. In Him alone is there salvation.

“We know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” 1 John 5:20.

They deceive themselves who suppose that they are worshiping the true God when they pray to the Father while they refuse to give honor to the Son

and the Holy Ghost. God the Father does not exist apart from God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. The three Persons are one and the same God, distinct in person, but one in essence. We cannot believe in and worship one without the other. God is what He has revealed Himself to be, the One in Three and Three in One. The one does not exist without the other, and paying divine honors to one to the exclusion of the other is worshiping an idol. Even if such a separation of the Persons in the one indivisible Godhead were possible, a true worship would still be impossible without faith in the Trinity. For:

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.” John 14:6.7.

And:

“no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.” 1 Cor. 12:3.

Those who reject the Trinity reject the only true God as He has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture and therefore cannot be Christians, and their religious organizations cannot be recognized as Christian Churches.

When people by their own choice, by declining to accept the truth unto salvation through the mediation of God manifest in the flesh, place themselves outside of the whole Christian plan of salvation, and give special emphasis to their refusal by rejecting the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, who alone bestows the power to call Jesus Lord, they cannot reasonably complain when Christians take them at their word, and regard them as standing outside of the pale of Christendom. Unitarians, and all other parties that claim recognition as Protestant sects of Christians, though they reject the whole foundation of Christianity in the revealed truth concerning God, and multitudinous associations of Masons and mimics of Masonry that claim allegiance to the great Father of all the world, though they build only on what nature dimly teaches concerning its Creator, and what their perverted understanding makes of that teaching, are not satisfied with the verdict of the Church. Naturally to them it seems biased, though it is based entirely on their own professions, because they presumed that eventually the Church would abandon its faith and come over to the results of their reasoning. This would mean that they should renounce the faith which the Holy Spirit has

wrought in their souls, that they should abandon the bright hope of glory which their faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world had wrought in their hearts, and that they should fall back into the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity whence the grace of God had delivered them. The expectation that Christians would be so stupid as to accept their proposals would be preposterous and only subject them to ridicule, were it not that the sin in our nature is in their favor. That gives Arians and Socinians and Unitarians the advantage of having the sinful nature of our fallen race on their side, and it is evidently that that gives Masonry, Odd Fellowship, and kindred institutions their hold upon the natural man, whose religious and humanitarian instincts are apparently satisfied by the natural religion and the natural sentiment of charity thus presented. But the Church of Christ, which rejoices in the salvation by grace through the atonement made by the incarnate Son of God and applied by the Holy Spirit, was not thus befooled, but stood fast in the faith which gave her peace, and continued and continues to sing:

“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.”

Article II. Of Original Sin.

Also they teach that, after Adam's fall, all men begotten after the common course of nature are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in Him, and with fleshly appetite; and that this disease, or original fault, is truly sin, condemning and bringing eternal death now also upon all that are not born again by Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

They condemn the Pelagians, and others, who deny this original fault to be sin indeed, and who, so as to lessen the glory of the merits and benefits of Christ, argue that a man may, by the strength of his own reason, be justified before God.

THE LUTHERANS were of one mind in regard to the depravity of man, of which the Romanists had so superficial an opinion, and in regard to the unspeakable mercy of God in sending His Son to save us from the impending death; and they are of the same mind still in opposition to the notions of the Romish and other sects that make light of sin, and disparage the merits of the incarnate Son of God, who offered Himself as sacrifice upon the cross for the sins of the world. The knowledge of Adam's fall and its consequences for our race is necessary to set forth the relation in which man stands to God, of whom the first article of our Confession treats, and to prepare the way for the third article, which treats of the deliverance of man from the condemnation into which he had fallen by his rebellion against the Creator and Lord of the universe.

Appreciating the importance of the subject, the essential features of the doctrine of original sin, as it is set forth in Holy Scripture, are presented by our fathers in this second article of the Confession. They confess what the Bible teaches in regard to the universality, the nature, and the consequences of original sin, and condemn the errors which would set aside the truth revealed in Holy Scripture, and substitute for it the imaginings of men.

1. Sin Is Universal.

“All men begotten after the common course of nature are born with sin.”

There is no exception. One case occurs in the world’s history in which a Child was born without subjection to the common course of nature, and therefore without sin. It is the altogether unique birth of our Savior, who was begotten of the Holy Ghost and born of a virgin. But that is a miracle that lies in the higher sphere of God’s government, to which our earthly wisdom has no access and of which, since we are naturally limited in our knowledge to the things of nature, we can have no knowledge but that which God is pleased supernaturally to give us by revelation. Therefore the statement stands without limitation or exception, that “all men begotten after the common course of nature are born with sin.” That is exactly what the Scriptures teach.

“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Gen. 6:5.

And it never grew better. It could become worse in appearance by the sinful contrivances of men, and sometimes seem to be bettered by the polish put upon sin, but it was always the utterance of the same defection from God and all righteousness which He requires. The testimony of all time is that which St. John bears by inspiration of the Holy Ghost: “The whole world lieth in wickedness.” 1 John 5, 19.

Whence comes this all? Certainly it was not the will of God that it should be so. He created man after His own image in righteousness and true holiness.

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.” Rev. 4:11.

But His pleasure is in mercy and truth and righteousness.

“For Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Thee.” Ps. 5:4.

Sin is an abomination in His sight, and He could not have made a creature to be hateful in His sight: and forever contravene His pleasure. His verdict

upon all His creatures was that they were good, and this was emphatically declared of man who was made in His own image.

“God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.” Gen. 1:31.

There is evil in the world, but it does not come from the Creator. He neither made an unholy nor so constituted his nature that in the exercise and development of his powers unrighteousness would necessarily result. He desired that man, endowed with the capacity to know and love God, should walk with Him in purity and blessedness or ever. “There is no iniquity with the Lord our God,” and the command is given, “Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” 2 Chron. 19:17; Lev. 19:2. Sin came after the creation was finished.

“God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.” Eccl. 7:29.

The Confession says that “after Adam’s fall, all men be gotten after the common course of nature are born with sin.” This came into the world by Adam’s fall, not by Adam’s creation. Until the time of the appalling catastrophe narrated in the third chapter of Genesis, sin and its consequent misery was unknown on earth. God made man good and happy in his garden of delight. The change was made by Adam’s fall. This was possible because he was designed for a place which required his endowment with freedom of will.

“God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” Gen. 1:27, 28.

This image elevated man above all other creatures on earth, but in his exalted position gave him the power to go wrong. He was meant to be a rational creature, to whom other creatures not endowed with intelligence should be subject. He was therefore endowed with intellect, sensibility and will, and was free in the exercise of his thinking and feeling and willing. In view of the fact that man is a creature and therefore with limitations which this of necessity involves in his subordination to the Creator, this seems dangerous.

But God provided for this by impressing this subordination upon the very nature of His intelligent creature, and by communicating to him His holy will. Both by nature and revelation God placed safeguards around His highly gifted creature, that he might not err in the use of his noble gifts.

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded he man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Gen. 2:15-17.

What some evil-disposed persons regard as a designed temptation for man, was manifestly designed by God to remind Adam and Eve that they were subject to the Creator and must order all their volitions according to His holy will. They could do this with ease and with pleasure, because their knowledge of God, and their love of God, and the harmony of their will with this knowledge and love which the Creator had implanted in their nature, together with the happiness which they experienced in walking with God, all tended to lead to obedience to the Creator’s pleasure, with which their own was coincident. That they transgressed the will of God notwithstanding is a mystery which no human reason can fathom, even when the blandishments of the devil and the desirableness of the forbidden fruit are taken into account, as much of the activity of the human will in other respects must always remain a mystery which our philosophy fails to solve.

We are not left in darkness regarding this image of God which was lost by Adam’s fall. Romanists imagine that it was a gift superadded to the original endowment of human nature which is supposed to have been morally indifferent and to have been raised above this indifference simply by an extraordinary gift of divine grace which was no part of created nature. With them the fall therefore consisted only in the use of the natural powers of reason and feeling and will, and the loss meant nothing more than the neglect of the supernatural gift without affecting the integrity of our nature. Others suppose that the image of God consisted only in the dominion which God gave to man over other creatures, and that the exercise of man’s intelligence and desire and will in opposition to the divine commandment imported only a loss of that dominion, whilst human nature remained the same, not otherwise affected in its intrinsic powers by its disobedience to its Maker and the implied defection from His dominion.

These and numerous errors result from a disregard of the teaching of Scripture concerning the nature of the image of God. It does imply that man is an intelligent creature, who is capable of free deliberation and choice, and we are expressly told that as such he was designed to have dominion over other creatures of inferior powers; and in a wider sense all these endowments, being implied in the image of God, may be included in the expression. But they are not what constitutes its essence. What this is we learn distinctly from statements directly referring to it when the apostle speaks of its restoration through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which we regain what was lost through Adam's fall. Christians "have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." Col. 3:9, 10. Man was originally created with the knowledge of God. By the fall his "foolish heart was darkened." Rom. 1:21. When the Gospel came the knowledge originally imparted was restored by faith in Christ "after the image of Him that created him." But this is not all that the Scriptures tell us about this image. St. Paul says further:

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. 4:22-24.

The new man, created by the bestowal of the new life in Christ, in contradistinction to the old man, which designates our natural condition after the fall, is man as God designed that he should be and as he was originally made; for as he was created "in the image of God," so he is by the grace of the Holy Spirit created anew "after God," and this is further explained by the statement that the new man "after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The image of God is therefore not strictly the noble gifts of intelligence and will, which remained after the fall and which are accordingly common to the old and the new man, but the high quality of righteousness and true holiness, which man originally possessed, which he lost by his fall into sin, and which he regains "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Adam's fall accordingly means the fall from the righteousness and true holiness which belonged to man from the beginning, in consequence of which dreadful apostasy the whole world lieth in wickedness and wretched-

ness and ruin, and must sink into everlasting perdition unless the mercy of its Maker intervenes to rescue it from the just doom of eternal death.

“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:12.

The universality of sin is so frequently and so emphatically testified in Scripture that no sincere Christian can ignore it or be in doubt about it; and even those who are not Christians and have no regard for the testimony of Scripture are in excusable when they deny it. For as the Word of God testifies, so the honest testimony of experience always reads. Those must be blind indeed who cannot see the sinfulness manifested in the lives of men around them, and in the lives of men as history records hem in the past, notwithstanding all the ingenuity of men to conceal the wickedness of their motives and of the carnal philosophies of men to explain away the wickedness which human activity displays. Eyes that can discern the oral quality of actions, even though the charitable construction be put upon them which is required of Christians and of which they only are capable, must see how lacking in all the elements of love to God and man and how manifest in all the ingredients of selfishness are the lives of men.

“For all have inned and come short of the glory of God.” Rom. 3:23.

And although the blindness which sin has brought upon the moral sight of our race prevents multitudes from seeing the sinfulness of human actions which violate the divine law, because they are incapable of discerning or understanding the spiritual import of that law, they could, if they would, in many an action see the deviation from rectitude as even the natural conscience requires it. The whole history of man since the fall, and the entire experience of all men in the course of that history, as well as in the experience of the present, combine to show that sin has reigned and still reigns in the hearts of men ever since the fall. Christians at least recognize this in all the fulness of its import; for it is the truth which underlies the whole plan of salvation through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

“The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” Gal. 3 22.

2. Our Confession Sets Forth The Nature Of This Sin.

Our Confession in a few words sets forth the nature of this sin.

“They teach that, after Adam’s fall, all men begotten after the common course of nature are born with sin; that is, without the fear of God, without trust in Him, and with fleshly appetite; and that this disease or original fault, is truly sin.”

Four points are thus stated, each of which is worthy of special consideration.

In the first place, our Confession sets forth the truth, that after Adam’s fall all men begotten after the common course of nature are born with sin. That not only refers the universal sinfulness of man to the change effected by Adam’s abuse of the freedom herewith God had endowed him, and his wanton transgression of the righteous and holy law which God had given him, and which he was created with power and inclination to obey, so that the nature which God had made good after His own image became evil after the mind of Satan who seduced and corrupted him, but points also to the manner in which all his descendants came to share his sin and death. Sin is transmitted with the nature in which it inheres. “All men begotten after the common course of nature are born with sin.” The offspring will be of the same nature as the parents: that is the universal law. Therefore it is said that:

“Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image.” Gen. 5:3

The image of God was lost, and the image of the tempter had taken its place in the heart of Adam and Eve. Hence it came that:

“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Gen. 6:5

Human nature is propagated, but it is transmitted as it is, not as it originally was, but is not since Adam’s fall brought death into the world and all our woe.

The attempt to account for the undeniable prevalence of sin by imputing it to the contagious force of bad example, is obviously a subterfuge in which even its authors have little confidence and find little comfort. Evil communications do corrupt good manners. Vices do spread, and when not resisted infect whole communities. Forms of sin may be learned and imitated, as forms of holiness may be earned and imitated. All this is true. But the evil of sin lies deeper than these forms which it assumes. The child does not earn the first motions of sin, which become manifest as soon as it can give utterance at all to its mental life, from the example of those around it. Instead of learning from its parents how to do evil, one of the first manifestations of the evil in it is in the assertion of its own self-will in rebellion against parental restraints.

Even those who have no regard to the divinely inspired authority of the Bible could easily perceive, if they would candidly examine and confess, how sin unfolds as the mind unfolds in children, and how it continues to assert its evil power as they grow to manhood and old age. The very denial of the universality of sin and of “the exceeding sinfulness of sin” is to the Christian believer a confirmation of the biblical doctrine of human depravity; for it is reasoning in opposition to the facts that lie open to all men’s inspection, and to the verdict of conscience which is within every man’s reach.

But to those who believe the Bible, which necessarily includes all true Christians, such arguments are not necessary. The truth is clearly stated in Holy Scripture, and there is no excuse for the errorists who claim to be reckoned among Christians, when they deny that “after Adam’s fall all men begotten after the common course of nature are born with sin,” and all the less excuse because history and observation corroborate the statement of the Bible. The sin that troubles man does not come from without: its seat and source is within.

“From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man.” Mark 7:21-23.

There would be no evil in the world around us, if there were no evil within us. The creatures of God are all good as they came from His good hands.

Sin does not belong to the creative plan of God. It is no part of the creation, although it proceeds from the creature.

It is in contravention of the Creator's design and purpose, and is forbidden and condemned by His righteous law. But under the divine design of a creature endowed with will it was possible, and it came. Let us not vainly speculate on the unfathomable mystery but accept the facts as they are presented, assured that God doeth all things well, especially as He has provided far greater blessings in Christ than our race has lost in Adam. Sin has come, and it is ours to flee for refuge from the death which it entails to the hope set before us. This sin is in our nature, not an extraneous affair that may or may not affect us, according as we deport ourselves toward the incursion of evil from without. We are born with sin. That is the fundamental truth which must determine all effectual dealing with it both under the law and under the Gospel. That is what the Scriptures teach and what all Christian experience confirms. There is no intelligent answer to the inquiry, how it comes that all men, from the cradle to the grave, and from Adam's time until now, are under the reign of sin and "the whole world lieth in wickedness," but that which the Bible gives.

"Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Ps. 51:5.

The sinful nature of Adam, after his defection from God, the fountain of all righteousness and true holiness, was transmitted to all his posterity. Ever since, men are born with sin. Hence our Savior says:

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again." John 3:5-7.

Our nature is sinful, by inheritance from Adam through all the generations born since the day of his fall, when in virtue of his transgression he became flesh, in distinction from the Spirit of holiness from which he fell and in virtue of which he was spiritual. Man fell away from God and became flesh, and that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and must be born again of the Spirit in order to escape the condemnation which lies upon sin.

“We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.”

Not by following bad examples and forming bad habits do we become sinners, but we are “by nature the children of wrath, —”born with sin.”

In the second place, the Confession indicates the nature of the sin with which all men are born. It does this negatively and positively, pointing out something which ought to be in our nature, but which is absent, and something which ought not to be there, but is present. All are “born with sin; that is, without the fear of God, without trust in Him, and with fleshly appetite.”

As man was originally created in the image of God he loved and feared and trusted in God above all things. This the will of the Creator expressed in the first and fundamental commandment requires, and this he was by his nature, formed after the image of God, fitted to do, and thus to walk with God and be happy in communion with Him. The parents of our race violated the fear and love of God which was planted in their hearts, and listened to the tempter’s enticements: they disregarded the trust in God with which they had been blessed, and hearkened to the adverse reasoning of Satan; “and when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat.” Gen. 3:6 The dreadful catastrophe had come, and so far as man could see all human happiness was forever lost. A blight came upon the whole beautiful creation, and death and darkness came, where life and light with all the joy and happiness they bring had reigned. Paradise was lost, and expelled from the beautiful garden man went out into the night among the thorns and brambles which the earth produced under the curse which sin had brought upon it, and wandered about without hope and without God in the world. And so it has been in this painful earth ever since Adam’s fall.

Man has sought out many inventions, and often in the course of centuries he has thought that the panacea for all his ills and the elixir of life had been found. He was always disappointed, but ever frames new hopes out of the figments of his imagination, and ever meets with new disappointments. It cannot be otherwise. Neither His philosophy nor his sensual indulgences can help him. He was made for happiness in the service of his Maker, and in his fall from Him and from all the noble gifts which were implied in the

destination for His companionship and the sharing of His happiness, what could help him?

Our help is always and only in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He is still merciful and mighty to help. In His infinite mercy He sent His own dear Son to save us. But that lies outside of our sinful nature, which is “without the fear of God and without trust in Him.” Remedies for the evils which afflict us are offered in abundance. Human reason suggests them in multitudinous variety, and we Christians are often reproached and not infrequently despised because we do not fall in with popular movements that are rationally devised and enthusiastically set afloat to set wrong headed and wrong-hearted humanity right and thus regain the lost Paradise. The remedies cure nothing, and only serve to hinder the work of grace which the Gospel of Christ offers, and which is God’s merciful way of deliverance from the death and damnation which sin has brought upon us. This sin is the want of the fear of God and the trust in God which makes men wanderers without a guide in the dark wilds of this world, and which hinders them from giving heed to the gracious call of the Gospel to seek refuge in the Savior whom infinite Love has provided for our rescue from the misery of sin.

The whole history of the world is full of proof, in the wickedness which is everywhere apparent in the lives of men, that they have not the fear of God before their eyes, and have no confidence in the government and guidance of God, preferring to be the architects of their own fortunes and to trust their own wisdom; and the observation everywhere made in this regard is emphasized by the fact patent to all, that when God, who alone can deliver from the body of this death, offers grace and peace by the Gospel, men do not trust in Him, but uniformly reject the offer, and no one calls Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost.

In addition to this absence of the fear and trust in God, which belong to the image of God in which man was originally created, he now has fleshly appetite. Since Adam’s fall all men are born without the fear of God and trust in Him, which according to the will of God he ought to have, but with evil desires and inclinations which he ought not to have. The depravity resulting from his renunciation of God’s authority and transgression of His commandment renders him powerless to love and fear and trust in God. Instead of being gladdened by the presence of God and happy in His companionship, as was the case before the fall, he afterwards dreaded to meet his

Maker, against whom he wantonly sinned. The filial fear, in which he loved and trusted his gracious God, was now supplanted by the slavish fear, in which he sought to hide his face from his righteous Creator.

“They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said: I heard Thy voice in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” Gen. 3:8-10.

The narrative continues to show the working of sin in the soul by reporting the efforts made by the transgressors to palliate and excuse their wrong and to lay its guilt upon each other. Evil desires had usurped the place of holy affections. Selfishness reigned in the heart, instead of blessedness in giving glory to God. That is the positive side of original sin. It is the fleshly appetite of which our Confession speaks, and which the Scriptures call concupiscence or lust, which is an inordinate desire and which is often called the lust of the flesh. When Adam fell he did not cease to be a human being, though he lost the righteousness and true holiness which were his noblest endowment and which properly constituted the image of God in which he was made. He still had soul and body with all their faculties and members. But when the righteousness was gone, not only were love and fear and faith toward God gone also, and that beyond his power of recovery, but some thing else was substituted for the divine guidance which they had enjoyed and which had led them to objects and in ways of perpetual felicity. The intellect, the sensibilities, the will, still exist in the fallen creature; the head, the hands, the feet are still there. These powers of the mind still think and feel and choose, and these members of the body still move in obedience to the will.

If the soul were holy, as God created it after His image, all its activities would be holy, for God is holy. Every motion would accord with the will of God. His intellect would run in the channels of truth, his feelings would pursue the course of purity and holiness, and his will would always choose the way of righteousness; and the members of his body would never fail, under its direction, to walk and work and move in the ways of God. That is man’s normal state — the state of integrity and happiness for which he was designed, in which he was created, from which he fell, and to which the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ is sent to restore him. But now that sin

and woe and death have come into the world, all is changed, — only God remains the same.

By turning away from God, the source of all light and love and holiness and blessedness, man's understanding has been darkened, his affections have been corrupted, his will has been perverted, and all his bodily motions have been misguided. How can a man see and think rightly when he does not fear God and trust in Him, who alone governs the universe and directs all for the accomplishment of His will and the glory of His name, all of which is excluded from the sinner's vision and thought?

How can man's affections be fixed upon the right objects and realize their purpose in his happiness, when the very object, God and His glory in all things, and man's blessedness in beholding that glory and exalting His goodness, is excluded from his contemplation by the exclusion of God from his love and fear and trust? How can the will of man do its legitimate work and execute his high calling on earth for his own good and the welfare of his fellowmen. as well as for the glory of God who has ordained the happy activity and loving service, when God's love and fear and trust are not in the heart which directs these activities, and have no part in directing them to the right object or in the right way? There is not only a defect in the human soul since the fall, but the defect in the nature of things makes it necessary that something else should supply the place of that which is wanting.

The soul would come to a standstill, which means destruction, if it did not continue to act; and it cannot act, seeing that it is created in dependence on the power which brought it into being, without some principle that sets it in motion. The benighted soul supplies the want. That is the fleshly appetite. It is that which man supplies in separation from God and thrown upon his own resources "without God in the world." It is the selfish heart determining the entire activity of man in mind and body. For as the heart is turned away from God, the source of all good, it cannot be otherwise than that after the fall,

"God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Gen. 6:5.

It is not only the verdict of all candid observers, biased as they usually are in favor of our corrupt race, but it is the constant testimony of Holy Scripture, which has no respect of persons, that:

“...there is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Rom. 3:10-12.

When man concluded to depart from the commandment and government of God, a revolution was effected which has changed the whole life of man and the whole history of the world. Man declared himself independent of God, and the world has shown all the effects of riot and revolution and ruin ever since. He lives without God, and therefore without spiritual life and without any guidance but such as his own corrupt heart can give. This is capable indeed of an external show of morality, because a mysterious witness for the eternal supremacy of righteousness, which we call conscience, remains in our nature, and asserts itself incorruptibly amid all the wickedness in which the world lies and all the corruption which has blighted our other powers. But as it is a power of the human soul that has turned away from God and refuses to submit to His rightful reign, and therefore so often perverts the right, which conscience can maintain only as the intellect is capable of seeing it, nothing more than a show of righteousness, an external morality that in action conforms to the prescription of the moral law, while the heart still remains in the bondage of sin, is possible even when the natural man does his best.

“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”
Matt. 7:18.

Man is by nature, being born in sin and with sin, full of fleshly appetite, which dominates his life. The sin is in his nature, not merely in his mental and bodily actions. His thoughts and volitions, his works and ways are bad because his heart, out of which they all spring, is bad.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Jer. 17:9.

“Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Matt. 15:19.

The heart is desperately wicked, therefore it gives birth to these wicked things. From the sinful cause spring the sinful effects. In its nature the origi-

nal sin that is transmitted from parent to child brings forth actual sins, These are the evil actions of our evil nature. The corrupt tree brings forth its corresponding corrupt fruit. It is the fleshly appetite, the evil desire and propensity of our nature, the concupiscence of a corrupt heart, that is the evil root of this wickedness in which the whole world lies. The law of God exposes this sin, which human reason is slow to recognize and which, in its propensity to self-justification, it cannot without the light of the Gospel realize in the depth of its depravity and the enormity of its turpitude.

“I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.” Rom. 7:7, 8.

Fleshly appetites are manifest in the consciousness of men, but naturally their reason does not know what is fleshly in the biblical sense, and they have little suspicion even that the appetites which are called fleshly, being natural since Adam’s fall, are sinful. Only when the written law was given with its prohibition of coveting, inordinately desiring, lusting, did concupiscence appear as sin, and raged the more in the soul, as a supposed right of man founded in his nature, the more it was condemned. The law thus seemed to increase the evil, because it denounced death against the sinner in whom it wrought wrath, not reformation.

“Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.” Rom. 7:13.

It is difficult to convince sinful man that his very nature is sinful, because this nature that is reprov'd of sin stubbornly resists the proof which convicts it and condemns it. But that does not change the fact or the Scripture testimony of the fact, that since Adam’s fall fleshly appetite has taken the place in man’s heart of the fear and love of God and the trust in Him, which originally belonged to his nature. That testimony is clear and complete. Christians, who are delivered by the grace of God from the bonds of iniquity, and are therefore brought into harmony with His will and no longer subject to the tyranny of Satan and of sin, must pursue sanctification, which

is the will of God, and thus live “not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God.” 1 Thess. 4:5

3. This Appetite Is Really Sin

This fleshly appetite, this inborn concupiscence and evil desire and propensity, is really sin, and subject to all the divinely proclaimed condemnation and punishment of sin. “This disease, or original fault, is truly sin,” our Confession further declares, “condemning and bringing eternal death now also upon all that are. not born again by Baptism and the Holy Spirit.”

It is by no means a needless declaration that is thus made in view of the statement, that after Adam’s fall all men are born with out the fear of God and faith in Him, and with fleshly appetite. Apparently this would be enough to show that man is now estranged from God and determined, by the power of intelligence which he still possesses, to maintain his independence and assert his imaginary rights. It would be enough to make manifest the conflict of the creature with his Creator, and to render reasonable any supposition that God would blast that creature with infinite contempt. But God is infinite in love as well as in righteousness, and our human thoughts, which are finite, are no measure for His merciful dealings with His fallen creatures. He still had thoughts of peace towards those who were in hopeless rebellion against His infinite authority and power, and sought to save what could be saved by His grace. He sent His Son to save us from our sin.

But it was no imaginary sin from which there was no deliverance but that which He offered, and from the condemnation of which there was no escape. Original sin is not only nominally or figuratively, but truly sin, and brings damnation upon all who are not rescued from its curse by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This defect of faith and presence of concupiscence is truly sin. That which prevents many from recognizing this, is the superficial view of sin which is itself a symptom of the sinfulness denied.

“This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be learned and believed from the revelation of Scripture,”

say our Smalcald Articles III, I. And in our Formula of Concord (I, I):

“...we believe, teach and confess that original sin is not a slight, but so deep a corruption of human nature that nothing healthy or incorrupt in man’s body or soul, in inner or outward powers, remains, but, as the Church sings, ‘Through Adam’s fall is all corrupt, Nature and essence human.’ This unspeakable injury cannot be discerned by the reason, but only from God’s Word.”

Reason is offended at the imputation and labors zealously to refute it. According to its standard sin consists only in the actions of men, and these are to be pronounced sinful only when they are premeditated and consciously willed; and even this is by most of the natural moralists restricted to the actions which become externally manifest. It is thus argued that the plant which kills is not poison, but only its deadly exhalation, that the heart is not sinful, but only its wicked products. And this seems plausible, because in our dealings with each other in the affairs of this life it looks reasonable that we should not hold a man responsible for deeds which he has not sanctioned in his intelligence and performed of his own free choice and volition. Moreover, the opinion that thoughts and impulses of evil, so long as they are resisted or from inherent weakness fail to produce action in the external sphere, are not sin, commends itself to the natural judgment. Man is always lenient towards his own faults, and it looks like charity to deny the sinfulness of similar faults in others. In this way carnal reason even makes a virtue of its evasion of the law and the sanction which conscience may still endeavor to give it.

The result of the operation is that not only original sin is declared to be no sin at all, but that even most of the actual sins which result from it are not sin at all and do not merit condemnation. On that basis the world never did learn, and never will learn, “the exceeding sinfulness of sin,” and therefore never can be led to that terror of conscience and despair of self-help which the Holy Spirit employs to induce the sinner to flee for refuge to the hope set before us in Christ, the Savior of the world.

We Christians recognize the light which God has graciously sent into the darkness of this world, and learn from His Word to see, what reason under the obscuring power of sin is unable to see. We too make all proper account of the high power of reason with which God has endowed His human creature. But we appeal to the mind of man under the enlightenment of God’s Word, as against the carnal mind that is enmity against God. And that Word tells us what sin is.

“Sin is the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3:4.

It is that which is in opposition to God’s will.

It is the departure from the communion with God and from the acknowledgment of His supreme authority.

It is the creature’s setting up for himself in assumed independence of the absolute Sovereign over His creatures.

It is Satan’s rebellion and Adam’s fall.

It is the propagation of that fall from God and participation in the devil’s crime to all our race.

It is the condition in which our human nature was placed by the fatuous proclamation of man’s independence of God, and its resultant anarchy and usurpation by Satan of the government of a fallen world that lieth in wickedness.

It is the state of our poor human nature, bereft of divine direction and support, struggling to maintain itself, under Satan’s guidance, against the law of the Lord.

It is the action of this fallen nature, in pursuance of its fallen condition, whatever control its remaining powers may exercise in this miserable state in which all its powers are implicated.

No wonder that reason cannot comprehend the seriousness of the situation, and cannot realize the sinfulness which renders it an accomplice in the misery, and disqualifies it for any truly rational judgment on its import. Our nature since the fall is not what God made it to be and what His will requires it to be. It is against His law. That is the radical sin, and out of that all man’s delinquencies and transgressions grow. And that is the fundamental sin which blind reason denies, but which the Holy Scriptures set forth as the moral rottenness that ruins our race. It is the absence of that fear and love of God in our nature with which He endowed us and which He cannot cease to require, and the presence of that carnal self love and self-exaltation which makes fleshly appetite the dominant power in man’s life instead of the holy will of His Maker. Hence the Scriptures exhort Christians:

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience, in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.” Col. 3:5-7.

4. The Consequence Is Eternal Condemnation and Damnation For All Who Are Not Born Again

The consequences of this sin of our nature, which leave no room for doubt in a believing mind that it is truly sin, our Confession states when it says, “that this disease or original fault is truly sin, condemning and bringing eternal death now also upon all that are not born again by Baptism and the Holy Spirit.” Adam fell. He lost the righteousness which he had, and was filled with fleshly appetite, the lust of concupiscence. God had warned him that the consequence of his departure from God, the source of life, would be death. He sinned, he begat children in sin.

“God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.” Gen. 6:12.

“The whole world lieth in wickedness.” And God is righteous. “The wages of sin is death.”

“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:12.

Death has come upon all, because sin has come upon all; for “that which is born of the flesh, is flesh.” John 3, 6.

“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Rom. 1:18.

The soul that sinneth is doomed to die. And the ungodliness that lies in our corrupt nature is the radical sin.

“You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath even as others.” Eph. 2:1-3.

Children are born of the flesh, and therefore in a condition not conformable to the will and law of God. They lack the righteousness which they ought to have, they have the fleshly appetites which they ought not to have; and as they grow and gradually unfold their innate qualities, the desires of the flesh, which is at enmity with God and His requirements of holiness, according to His original gift and intent, bring forth the corresponding sins of the flesh out of their fleshly hearts. Accordingly they are by nature, not only by action, the children of wrath.

Therefore our Confession unhesitatingly, and unqualifiedly, as it becomes a confession of faith, not of opinions or policies, declares that this original fault “is truly sin, condemning and bringing eternal death now also upon all that are not born again by Baptism and the Holy Spirit.” It thus offends the flesh, which naturally strives and struggles in its ruins to uphold its eminent dignity, in view of its superiority over all other earthly creatures in its gift of intelligence. The wisdom of the world of course refuses to accept our creed, which rests upon the light given by revelation on the nature of man, whose natural consciousness, under the manipulations of sin in the mental faculties, reveals so imperfectly the moral condition of our nature.

“The carnal mind is enmity against God.” Rom. 8:7.

This basal truth the carnal mind is not even capable of recognizing, much less of appreciating in its thoughts about the moral condition and powers of man in his condition of sin and death. Thoughtful Christians are therefore not taken by surprise when they find the philosophies of the world, not only among the benighted heathens, who have no opportunity to see the light of the Gospel, but also in the schools of nominally Christian lands, whose teachers have never risen above the light of nature, arraying themselves against the revealed truth concerning human sin. They expect that. They would not be wise if they did not expect what is so natural and, as the natural man views it, must seem so reasonable.

But the flesh still exists in Christians — in those who have become true believers as well as in those who have only pretended to believe. And that makes trouble. The trouble is not diminished by the fact that Christians are not perfect in holiness, and that imperfect knowledge does not prove want of faith. The flesh is not annihilated when a person becomes a believer. It still exists in all of us, and makes constant vigilance a necessity, as well as

constant prayer for divine help against the foe of our salvation. And so it comes about that even Christians, some no doubt only such by profession and name, but some truly believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, take the part of those who oppose the revealed truth. The result is an unhappy dissension among Christians, which is not expected and for which they are not prepared, as they are for the contradiction of nature against grace. It therefore saddens us, while the opposition of unbelievers does not. But it does not affect the revealed truth. That is the same, whether men like it or discard it, and whether those who discard it profess to be Christians or infidels.

Some who are members of Christian churches are not willing to accept our Confession, as many who are not Christian believers are not willing to accept it. There are mainly two points to which exception is taken. One is that the sin of our nature condemns and brings eternal death to all who are not born again, and the other is that this new birth takes place by Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

As regards the first, the attentive reader will not have over looked how the Scriptures set sin and death on the one hand, and grace and life on the other, over against each other, and how Adam and Christ are contrasted as the source of the disease on the one hand, and of the remedy on the other. The whole counsel of God for our salvation is perverted by the denial of sin.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us.” 1 John 1:8-10

The rejection of the truth regarding man’s natural depravity runs out into a rejection of the redemption, and is in its practical effect a barrier to repentance and faith. It is thus subversive of Christianity both in doctrine and life. Even if the error does not work itself out in all its deadly force in every soul, and some still profess to be believers in Christ notwithstanding their false view of the nature and power of sin, it is still certain that the truth is not in them, and their profession of Christianity does not change the fact.

Nor can the error in any case be harmless. If there are some who are saved by the power of grace in spite of the counteracting power of their denial of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the general effect is the complete re-

nunciation of the revealed plan of salvation, or at least the perversion of it into a scheme of natural religion in which Christ remains only a teacher of the law and an example of obedience to its requirements, and man depends on his own righteousness for divine approval and eternal blessedness. The Scriptures show us our ruin by nature and our utter helplessness in the misery of sin and point us to Christ as the mighty Savior from the curse which it has brought upon us.

“As by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all to the justification of life.” Rom. 5:18.

As by Adam’s fall we all became sinners, so by Christ’s conquest of sin and death we are all redeemed. As by our birth of the flesh we are all partakers of Adam’s sin, so by the new birth of the Spirit we are all partakers of the righteousness acquired for all men by His fulfillment of all righteousness in our stead.

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” Rom. 3:19.

By Adam’s fall we all became sinners. The obedience of our Savior unto death, even the death of the cross, restored Paradise to all men. That does not mean that all are henceforth pleasing to God, notwithstanding their rebellion against him; it does not mean that our righteous God has been changed into another Being, with whom unrighteousness shall henceforth pass for righteousness because He has succumbed to the human weakness of setting right aside to give place to the emotion of pity: but it does mean that infinite wisdom has provided a way by which, through the mediation of His Son, He could “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Rom. 3:26. The way of life is the way of faith, by which we are brought into union and communion with Him who died for us that we might live.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” 1 Cor 15:22.

Without Him all remains death and damnation, because there is no refuge else from sin and death.

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on Him.” John 3:36.

We are by nature children of wrath. The curse is on us by reason of our sin. Christ was made a curse for us that we might escape the damnation of hell by fleeing to Him by faith in His name. He that believeth shall be saved. There is no condemnation to them which believe in Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. They are safe in their Savior. But how about those who reject Him? The sentence of God is irrevocable:

“the wrath of God abideth on him.”

God’s plan is plain:

“He that believeth shall be saved. but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

No man can be saved otherwise than through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Without this he will remain in his natural condition of sin, and the wrath of God abideth on him. Therefore our Lord says:

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Eph. 2:8.

Man has lost the image of God in which he was created and the blessedness which he possessed in communion with his Maker, and in his sin nothing can help him but the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost. He must be born again and receive a new life from Him who is “the way and the truth and the life,” and of whose “fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” John 1:16. This grace for the necessary new birth God communicates in Baptism, as His chosen means for the work. Our Confession says that the sin of our nature is of such gravity that it condemns and brings “eternal death now also upon all that are not born again by Baptism and the Holy Spirit.” That saying is a grievous offense to the natural man. It implies that “the whole head is sick

and the whole heart faint”: that the application of human remedies is useless in such a forlorn condition; that the case in this regard is desperate; nay, that man is not only afflicted with a mortal disease, but that the sentence of death has already been passed upon him and spiritually he is already “dead in trespasses and sins.” Therefore he is past all human cure, and needs a new life — he must be born again.

Proud man resents the humiliating imputation. He does not realize that his condition is so bad and so hopeless; and if he cannot persuade himself that he is entirely faultless, seeing that so much presents itself in his life that he cannot without protests of conscience pronounce right and good, he presumes that by a little more care in his training and culture the dubious spots will disappear and all will be irreproachably righteous.

“Professing themselves to be wise they became fools.” Rom. 1:22.

And the offense of the cross is increased when it is stated that the new birth, without which no one can enter into the kingdom of heaven, is effected “by Baptism and the Holy Spirit.” The carnal mind can see no need of a Savior to deliver us from sin and death, and can therefore recognize no necessity for putting on Christ at all, and least of all by means of Holy Baptism. Unhappily some Christians so far give way to such objections to the flesh that, while they do not join the sects which reject the atonement through the blood of Christ and deny the necessity of regeneration, they decline to accept Baptism as the means by which the Holy Spirit effects it. Our Confession adheres to the Word of God as the highest reason for faith, and gives no heed to the scoffs and jeers of those who profess to be wise above what is written. We humbly abide by the truth recorded in Holy Scripture:

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” John 3:5 .

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in, Christ Jesus, for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal. 3:26, 27.

The subject is of so much importance that a separate article is devoted to Baptism, in considering which further explanations will be in place.

5. Current Errors

One more point claims our attention before closing this exposition of the second article. It is the antithesis, rejecting current errors on the subject. So sincere and so earnest were our Lutheran forefathers in their faith and its confession, that they had nothing to say for the securing of human favor and nothing to conceal for the conciliation of human disfavor. They declared the truth as God gave it in His Word, and were heartily desirous of winning souls for that truth, that it might liberate them from sin and death and make them free citizens in the kingdom of God with its bright hopes of eternal glory. Therefore they set forth the truth plainly, that all might know it, and condemned its opposite, that none might be mistaken or misled. They are often censured for this result of the earnestness of their faith and candor of their confession, as if faith, originated and governed by the inspired Scriptures, which give us an infallible revelation of God and His will, meant only a human opinion claiming consideration among other human opinions equally uncertain, and, as mere emanations of the carnal mind equally false. God graciously gave the men of the Lutheran Reformation the truth of His Word, and the truth made them free. Therefore they confessed it, and therefore they rejected the errors opposing it, and the errorists who persist in that opposition.

“They condemn the Pelagians, and others who deny this original fault to be sin indeed, and who, so as to lessen the merits and benefits of Christ, argue that a man may by the strength of his own reason be justified before God.”

There were errorists then, as there are now, who deny that original sin is really sin, who thus detract from the glory of Christ, and who think that man can justify himself before God, and our Confession condemns them. The Pelagians were a religious party of the ancient Church who followed the teachings of a British monk by the name of Pelagius. This man for many years troubled the Church by his false doctrine concerning sin and the natural powers of man after Adam’s fall. The sect denied that children are born with sin, that any fault in their nature is really sin, that death is the wages of sin, and that a new birth is necessary that they may have eternal life. Thus the whole foundation of Christianity came into controversy, and prolonged attempts were made to undermine it. Only after many fierce conflicts since

the Pelagian errors began to be disseminated in the early years of the fifth century, the celebrated St. Augustine being the leader in the opposing host, did the truth gain the victory in the councils of the Church, but not without some residuum of error which continued to afflict her and which exerted its power in making the Roman Church the half Pelagian body which in the days of the Reformation opposed the exclusive power of God's grace and the exclusive merits of Christ.

The Pelagians of those days and the Pelagians of our own time do not call themselves by that name. They did not establish a Pelagian Church. But their doctrine still exerts an influence in people's thinking, and continues to trouble the Church of God and to mislead many. There are many "Pelagians and others" in our day whom our Confession rejects as teachers of the same false doctrine which was known in the ancient Church as Pelagianism, and which seeks to exalt man at the cost of our Savior's glory. These errorists, denying the depravity of our nature, "argue that a man may, by the strength of his own reason, be justified before God." Theirs is that delusive system of self-righteousness which recognizes no need of the righteousness of Christ to secure salvation. As it denies that the root of all actual sin in our inherited corrupt nature is sin at all, it finds little difficulty in extenuating all faults and excusing all departures from the law, and deems it but reasonable that a man's virtuous intentions should be regarded as a sufficient justification in case of any apparent deviation from the path of rectitude.

When men resist the work of the law by which is the knowledge of sin, denying not only that they are sinful, but even that sin is truly sin, it is easy to see how they come to harbor the delusion that they can by the strength of their own reason be justified before God; but it is not so easy to see how they can without blushing still profess to believe the Scriptures, which so plainly tell us that "if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," and that "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace." Gal. 5:4. It is on this account, which is the chief interest of all Christians in all time, that our Confession points to the effect, whether it is the purpose of the errorists or not, of the error concerning man's natural depravity, which is "to lessen the glory of the merits and benefits of Christ."

The statement shows how profound is the concern of the Church to preserve the evangelical foundation on which all the hopes of its members rest, and how in pursuance of this, and only of this, they were moved to con-

demn the false doctrines which reason arrays against their faith founded on the Holy Scriptures. The metaphysical questions about sin, and the psychological difficulties which its entrance into the world and its continuance as a power after regeneration present, are not matters of great solicitude to believers, except so far as the latter are seduced to advocate the rights of the flesh against the decrees of God. But the truth in Jesus, as recorded by divine inspiration in Holy Scripture which condemns the flesh and all allegiance to its authority, is of fundamental import, and to preserve that in its integrity the Church rejects every effort of carnal reason to usurp the place and authority of the Bible.

Be they who they may, and on whatever grounds they may reason against the revealed truth, and whatever motive they may assign, the doctrine that “lessens the glory and benefits of Christ” is condemned: for to all true believers this is certain, that beside the name of Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:12.

The Pelagians and others, who teach contrary to the Scriptures on this subject, have represented their teaching and continue to represent it as a mere difference of opinion which, from their point of view, is of little moment, since they do not deny that salvation is attainable as well by grace as by nature.

The Church acknowledges no such terms of peace. It condemns all who think their own righteousness avails and thus reject the only way of salvation.

Article III. Of The Son Of God And Of The Holy Spirit.

Also they teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, took unto Him man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are two natures, the divine and the human, inseparably joined together in unity of person: one Christ, true God and true man; who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and might be a sacrifice not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men. The same also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day. Afterward He ascended into the heavens, that He might sit at the right hand of the Father, and reign forever, and have dominion over all creatures; might sanctify those that believe in Him by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts, who shall purify, rule, comfort and quicken them, and shall defend them against the devil and the power of sin.

The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead according as the Apostles' Creed declareth these and other things.

IN STRICTLY LOGICAL ORDER our Confession proceeds from the doctrine of God and of original sin to that of the Son of god and His work of redemption. God is great and good in His Triune Majesty. He made man and all other creatures good. Nothing evil proceeds from Him. On that account our natural reason would not expect the second article to treat of sin. But the will of God was not executed by man, the noblest of His earthly creatures, who was endowed with intelligence and will, and sin came with its misery and death. In consequence of this the whole current of history was changed, and what reason could rightly expect did not ensue. The doctrine of man in his might became the doctrine of man in his misery and helplessness. But it was not the will of God that His noble creature, who had chosen death instead of life, and who therefore merited perdition, should be consigned without hope to his eternal doom.

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:16:17.

That is the reason why the article of the Son of God follows next in order.

Man is lost in sin, upon which, as rebellion against the Creator and renunciation of His supreme authority and of the life which is alone in Him, the primal curse must of necessity rest; but a Savior has come, and not all is irretrievably lost.

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” Tit. 2:11.

That salvation was not a device of man, who is impotent to save. From the beginning to the end it is God’s work. He, against whom man has sinned, and from whom reason can rightfully expect nothing but indignation and wrath against every soul of man that doeth evil, and of whom it is written that He is angry with the wicked every day, could alone devise and execute a plan by which it would be possible that the Creator could maintain His righteousness and still let the culprit escape his due punishment. It is a stupendous plan of divine wisdom and goodness that is revealed in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,

“...whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Rom. 3:25:26.

How this wonderful work, which transcends all human thought and imagination, was brought about according to the Scriptures, our Confession proceeds to set forth as the faith of all Christians who believe the inspired Word.

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4:4, 5.

The marvelous plan was to substitute God’s own dear Son for the offending creature. To this end He must become one of our race, be born as a true man

in this world of sin, and be subject to the law in our stead, and bear the punishment which was our due. Therefore the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth was born of a woman, and thus born under the law, that our redemption might be accomplished by His vicarious sacrifice.

“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.” Isa. 53:5.

To this end the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, came into this world of sin as a man, born of a woman, that He might redeem us from the curse that sin brought upon us.

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Gal. 3:13, 14.

But to effect this redemption it was necessary that He should become one of us.

“Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” 1 Tim. 3:16.

“In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Col. 2:9.

This is the great mystery which St. John more explicitly sets forth in the first chapter of his Gospel.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” John 1:1-14.

It is this that our Confession sets forth when it begins the third article by saying that our churches “teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, took

unto Him man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are two natures, the divine and the human, inseparably joined together in unity of person, one Christ, true God and true man."

1. The Lord's Person According To The Scriptures

We have thus, in the first place, a clear account of our Lord's Person according to the Scriptures. It is the same precious truth which had been so plainly expressed in the Small Catechism and which our children still learn and repeat as their confession in the words:

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord."

There is but one Christ, our only Savior; but He has two natures, the divine and the human. inseparably united in one person. So the Christians always believed, because so the Bible teaches. The Lutheran Church confessed what the Church had always confessed. In the ancient Athanasian Creed the mystery is thus set forth:

"Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that we also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man: God, of the substance of the Father begotten before the worlds, and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world: perfect God, and perfect Man of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father as touching His and inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood; who, although He be God and Man, yet is not two, but one Christ: one, not by the conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the Manhood into God: one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ."

It will not be overlooked that our article deals with a great mystery, which is beyond our comprehension. But that does not imply that no efforts should be made to understand what God has been pleased to reveal concerning it. On the contrary, what the Scriptures contain is written for our learning, and when God speaks we should reverently hear, that we may know the truth, though it involve much that is too high for our attainment. For our faith and

our comfort what is made known to us is of great importance, and we should diligently study it.

The presentation of the subject in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel is a great help to the understanding of God's thoughts for our salvation and God's ways for their execution, although much is beyond our comprehension and serves to impress on us the truth that His thoughts and ways are not ours, there being a great chasm between the divine and the human. The evangelist begins by stating who the person is of whose life and teaching he proposes to give an account. A Savior from the sin and death, in which humanity lies, has come.

“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”

It is a sorrowful story. A Savior was provided for the children of Israel, God's own chosen people, but when in the fulness of time He came, they refused to receive Him.

“But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12.

His mission was not in vain, though His apostles were rejected by the majority of the chosen people, and they were constrained to turn to the Gentiles. The salvation which He brought was for all the earth, which lieth in wickedness, and against whose unrighteousness the wrath of God is revealed. Who is this person that came for the world's deliverance from everlasting ruin?

St. John answers the question. He is the Word that was made flesh, and whose glory was beheld as at of the Only Begotten of the Father. He was accordingly the Eternal Son of the Everlasting Father, who “so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This Son is described as the Word that was in the beginning, that was with God, and that was God.

“All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”

This Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. There is nothing lacking to identify Him as the Only Begotten of the Father, the Eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. who came to save us from our sins.

This Eternal Son, the Word that was in the beginning with God and that was God. became man for our salvation. It is a stupendous mystery. Our thoughts cannot attain to it in its divine height of wisdom and mercy. But the truth is made known to us with wonderful clearness. The Virgin Mary “shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.”

“Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet. saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call His name Emanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us.” Matt. 1:21-23.

“He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the house of David forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end.” Luke 1:32, 33.

Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. But it was needful that it should be so, perplexing as the thoughts of God are to our finite minds. It is the way which infinite wisdom devised for our salvation, and so far as we can know the only possible way. Man, endowed with a will of his own, though designed to subject himself to his Maker and be happy in His service, asserted that will in disobedience to his Lord and became miserable in his unrighteous choice. He sinned, and the wages of sin is death. Unable to deliver him self from the doom that was upon him by his own ungodly choice, whither should he now flee for refuge? His only possible help was in God, but it was God against whom he had sinned, and it was He in His righteousness that pronounced upon him the sentence of death, of which he had been warned as the inevitable consequence of transgression.

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

So far as reason could see, there was no possibility of salvation in man or nature or God. Man is dead in trespasses and sins, and a dead man can do nothing for his restoration. All the powers of nature are sheer impotence in the wretchedness that is spiritual and lies wholly beyond the sphere of the

natural. Only God has power to help, and He is the great King whose holy law has been violated and whose righteous wrath has been incurred. And yet He calls to His rebellious creature:

“O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself: but in me is thy help.” Hos. 13:9.

Man has turned away from God, but God has not forsaken man and abandoned him in his helplessness and hopelessness. This would have been just; but God is love, and therefore merciful as well as just. He so loved the world that He gave His own dear Son as a ransom for its salvation.

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Rom. 5:6-8.

Even all this does not make it quite evident why throughout all the Scriptures so much stress is laid upon the advent of Christ into the world, and why all evangelistic preaching knows nothing but Christ and Him crucified. For reason suggests and thousands even of such as call themselves Christians have adopted the suggestion, that God as the absolute Monarch, if He really desires to save His forlorn creature from the ruin into which it had plunged, needs only to say the word of pardon, and the whole dreadful account would be canceled. It does seem so to the poor reason of fallen man, and no wonder that sects have been constructed on a theory so plausible. But when religionists build platforms in ignorance both of God and man for the reconciliation of the Creator and His sinful creature, the result is necessarily an arrant failure. God is not a man that in His pity of human misery He should disregard the requirements of eternal righteousness and thus adopt a temporary human sentiment instead of His eternal principle of divine love and mercy, nor that He should let the ungodly rebel go on in his rebellion, which would leave him still in the misery of a fictitious independence that deprives him of the communion with God and the subjection to His holy will, for which he was made and in which alone he can find happiness. The answer to the question why such a theory of absolute forgiveness of all the wrong of which humanity is guilty could not supply all that the situation demands, will prepare the way for the understanding of the won-

derful plan of divine wisdom and mercy to save us all from the impending doom, which in its nature must be eternal unless God averts it.

Man has sinned, and according to the righteous law of the Lord he must die. The Lord of all cannot surrender His supreme authority and give His glory to another. There is no other that is God, and there can be no other. He who is the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth alone is Lord of all, and can tolerate no other gods and lords that would dispute His absolute sovereignty. When angels rebelled against Him they could only be condemned to everlasting perdition. When their leader succeeded in seducing our first parents to join the rebellion, the curse came also upon our human race. Righteousness must reign, and the wages of sin is death. Adam and Eve and all of their descendants, born in the sin with which their nature was contaminated, must die. If God, against whom the rebellion was directed, the purpose of which was the dethronement of the only Lord of all, had connived at the sin against His Majesty or declared a universal pardon, He would not only have given aid and comfort to the rebellion against His supreme authority, but would virtually have renounced His absolute sovereignty and the eternal reign of righteousness, and thus consented to the reign of anarchy, with its arbitrary choice of ends and means, and its disregard of all righteousness as the rule of the universe and the fundamental law of all human welfare. God could not do this. He could not do this and still be God. The effort to discrown Him in His dominion of holiness must be abandoned or crushed by His almighty power. The conditions after the failure of our first parents to abide by the will of God, for which they were endowed and by which their happiness was to be secured, presented the alternative of at once destroying the rebellious race or finding a way to rescue it from the doom to which its sin of necessity consigned it. God is love, and He chose to redeem our sinful and condemned race.

“He so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

This is the gracious plan of infinite love and mercy, according to which God could “be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Rom 3:26.

It thus becomes manifest why the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. Man had failed to fulfill the righteousness which God in His holiness required of him, and was thus subjected to the penalty of his sin. The

curse of the law was upon him. God desired to rescue him from that curse of everlasting death. To let him go unpunished would have been a violation of righteousness, which is impossible with the Holy One.

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Gen. 18:25.

The wages of sin is death, and the righteous requirement of God must be satisfied. Either the human race must die eternally, or the penalty of man’s sin must be borne by one who is able to meet all the demands of righteousness and who is willing to subject himself in man’s place to the law and the penalty of its violation. These conditions of salvation could be fulfilled only by the mission into the world of the Only Begotten of the Father. The Word must be made flesh. The Savior must be God, because He alone is able to fulfill all righteousness and pay the infinite debt of human sin. And yet He must be man, because it was man that sinned, and upon whom the penalty was laid. God alone could bear the infinite burden, but the fulfillment of the demand involved suffering and death. So the incarnation of the Son of God was necessary in the counsel of God to effect the divine purpose of delivering man from his doom of death and making peace between God and man.

“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:17.

If the Son of God had come in His majesty as the Judge of all the earth to mete out the punishment on man which his sin has merited, it would not have been necessary that He should become man; but He came not to condemn our guilty race, but to save it from the consequence of its guilt by offering Himself as its substitute under the condemnation of sin.

“For there is one God and One Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” 1 Tim. 2:5, 6.

“The Word was made flesh,” and thus the Savior born of the Virgin Mary was God and man, two natures in one Person. “The Word was God” — true God, begotten of the Father from eternity. He existed as a Divine Person before the fulness of the time had come, when for our salvation He should be born of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the

law. From everlasting He was God. “All things were made by Him,” and therefore He was of course before all worlds. The same was in the beginning with God. We are not to suppose that He came into being when the joyous announcement was made by the angel at Bethlehem that the promised Savior is born. On that assumption it would be impossible to understand the Scriptures in their presentation of Christ.

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”. Isa. 9:6.

He was from eternity and shall be to eternity “God over all, blessed forever.” Rom. 9:5. Nor are we to suppose that, when the Word was made flesh, a different Person came into existence. It is true that then another nature was joined to that of the Eternal Son, and that therefore He was thenceforward God and man in one Person. But it will be observed that the Scriptures always speak of Him as the same Person still. He who was born of the Virgin Mary was the Lord of all, true man indeed, but “over all, God blessed for ever.” This assures us that the child that “was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary” was not a person distinct from the Word, or the Son of God who is called the Word. The truth revealed in Holy Scripture is not that a child was born of the Virgin who had a personality of His own, to which another person of the Word, who was God, joined himself, so that two persons walked and worked in unison to accomplish the divine will. The Scriptures know nothing of such thoughts of human wisdom, which is foolishness with God. They have no account of a man Christ Jesus who was not the Son of God, and who afterwards became such by divine favor. There never was a child Jesus born of the Virgin Mary who was other than the Word who was God. The Word, who was in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made, and who was God, was made flesh. He assumed the human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary, but remained the same Person, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, who from that time on forever was the God-Man. He sacrificed nothing of His Godhead by assuming the human nature, and this nature was none the less human because of its assumption into the unity of the Person of the Eternal Son of God. The same Person who existed from eternity now became man, not by joining Himself to a man born of the Virgin, and existing as different

person, but by assuming the human nature into the unity of His preexisting Person, so that He was now the God-Man. That means that the Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity, now also became a true man, born of the Virgin Mary. He was the same Person that He was before the incarnation, but now had in addition to the unchanged and unchangeable divine nature which was His from eternity, our human nature, assumed into the unity of His Person for the execution of His vicarious work as the Redeemer of the World. The Word was made flesh for our salvation. The one Person of Christ now had two natures in an inseparable personal union without confusion of natures. He who was born of Mary was not a different person from the Son of God who was in the beginning and by whom all things were made, so that after the incarnation there was one Christ who was God and another Christ who was man, but one Christ who was both God and Man in one undivided Person.

It is a great mystery, God manifest in the flesh, but it is the mystery of infinite love and wisdom making divine provision for the rescue of man from the endless and unspeakable misery which his infinite wrong against Divine Majesty had brought upon him. No wonder it is said, when those things are spoken of which the Gospel reports with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, that “these things the angels desire to look into.” 1 Pet. 1:12.

2. The Reconciliation And Sacrifice For All Actual Sins of Men

All this marvelous plan was devised by the love of God that the Word made flesh “might reconcile the Father unto us and might be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.” The Savior was God and man that in one Person He might fulfill all righteousness, as the representative of our race, in our stead, and thus accomplish the work of our deliverance from sin and death. The angel said to Joseph when the set time was come:

“Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was Spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us.” Matt. 1:20-23.

To this end the Son of God clothed Himself in human flesh, that He might do all and suffer all that the righteousness of God required of us. Voluntarily and sinlessly He submitted Himself to all that divine justice could demand, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

“Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” Heb. 9:11-12.

That redemption was wrought out by the God-Man, God manifest in the flesh, in the life of obedience through suffering and death, to the glory that lies beyond the triumph over sin.

It is usual to speak of the different stages through which this led Him as His humiliation and exaltation. It is some help to the understanding of the stupendous work which followed the stupendous mystery of the incarnation to note this distinction and these stages, and the whole combines to give us a glimpse of the amazing design and work of God for the salvation of us miserable sinners, who had no claim upon God’s clemency and merited nothing but the eternal misery to which everlasting righteousness dooms us.

God sent His beloved Son that men, though they deserved only death, might not perish, but have everlasting life; and the Son, who was one with the Father in essence and therefore one with Him in all the will of His love as well as in the will of His righteousness, came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

The salvation of our lost race was the purpose and object of the whole counsel of God, which is beyond our comprehension in its infinite wisdom and mercy. It is high; we cannot attain unto it. Again we say, no wonder that the angels desire to look into it. But one thing is made plain as the sunlight, that it was all for our salvation, though much of the divine mystery remains incomprehensible.

The Son of God, who was made flesh and dwelt among us nineteen hundred years ago, “truly suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried.” That was necessary in the plan and counsel of God, but it was not the final purpose for which He came. He must live a holy life, as the holy law of God demands, and must be despised and rejected of men, while His zeal for the house of the Lord consumed Him, but that was only an incident in His life. He must suffer the garden agony, when His soul was sorrowful even unto death, and must suffer the contradiction of sinners to the utmost extreme. But it is not a cruel design of God to have the innocent punished. God is love and has no thoughts of evil. But this suffering and death was needful for the accomplishment of God’s infinite thoughts of peace. It was the divine and only way for the salvation of our lost souls, and our blessed Savior did not shrink from paying the stupendous price of our rescue from everlasting misery.

To save us He must fulfill all righteousness in our stead. We could not fulfill it ourselves, and were therefore doomed to eternal perdition. No one else could do it for us and thus enable us to escape the penalty of our failure. God alone is mighty to save, and in His infinite mercy He sent His Son to save us.

“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:10-12.

The Scriptures make it obvious why this is the only name.

“When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law. that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4:4, 5.

Let it not be forgotten that God sent His son into the world to be our Savior, that the Word was made flesh that He might take man’s place, “made of a woman” that He might be one of us, though “over all God blessed forever,” and “made under the law” that, though He was the Maker of the law and in His assumed humanity perfectly sinless, so that for Himself the law had no

jurisdiction over Him or claims upon Him, He might fulfill all righteousness for us as our substitute in the wonderful counsel of God for our salvation.

“Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.” Isa. 53:4-6.

All our sins were laid on Him, and the wages of sin is death. He “was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification.” Rom. 4:25. It should not startle us to read that the curse of God was upon Him, the Holy One, “who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.”

His whole work was vicarious from His birth to His death. He took the sinners’ place that the sinners might be delivered from the doom of death that was upon them.

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident; for the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith; but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.” Gal. 3:10-13.

It is pitiful that so many, though they have the Bible in their hands and the message of salvation resounding in their ears, still refuse to heed the divine call, “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29. The words are plain, but the wisdom of this world despises them.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Cor. 2:14.

“For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” 1 Cor. 1:21-24.

It does not meet the reason or the expectations of Jews or Gentiles that the Son of God should become man to suffer and die under the curse of the law instead of the transgressors on whom the curse had come; but it is the truth of God in which alone the sinner can find hope and comfort: it is the good tidings of the Gospel, which shall be to all people. The Son of God, the Word made flesh, has become a real Savior, who by the Gospel is preached to us for our reception by faith, that we might have peace on earth and blessedness in heaven.

“Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood. to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God, — to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Rom. 3:21-26.

The infinite wisdom of God has devised a plan of salvation that transcends all human thought and imagination. This was executed by the mission of His own dear Son to live and die under the law in our place, being “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” and thus “tasting death for every man,” that through His stripes we might be healed. This is the precious Gospel of Grace which is summed up in the precious words:

“God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

For:

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” 2 Cor. 5:19, 20.

Our Confession mentions the stages through which the Word made flesh passed in the accomplishment of this reconciliation. The Son of God became man by the assumption of our human nature into the unity of His Person as the Only Begotten of the Father from eternity. He was thus the God-

Man who could fulfill all righteousness in obedience to the law even unto death. Therefore He who was born of the Virgin Mary as God manifest in the flesh, true God and true man, passed through humiliation to glory. He “truly suffered, was crucified, died and was buried.”

His sufferings were intense beyond all power of language to express, because the sin of our whole race with all its terrible consequences was laid upon Him, the Lamb of God, who came to bear it all for our deliverance from its unspeakable curse. No wonder that His soul was sorrowful even unto death, and that He cried in agony, "My God, my God, why 'hast Thou forsaken me!" The immense weight of human sin lay upon Him and would have crushed Him, if He had not been true God as well as true man. He died because He must bear the wages of sin. But He conquered death by fulfilling all righteousness in the sinners' stead.

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself like wise took part in the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” Heb. 2:14-17.

Because our Savior died, we shall live; for He tasted death for us, that we might not die, but suffering what was our due, overcame death and every foe of our salvation and wrought out for us an eternal redemption. He died, but He rose again, and life and immortality in Him are now offered in the Gospel.

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know, — Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; for it was not possible that He should be holden of it.” Acts 2:22-24.

The death of our Savior was vicarious and purely voluntary. It was therefore not possible that death should hold Him in its embrace for ever. Death was the sinner's due according to the demands of divine righteousness; but when these demands were satisfied by the Holy One, who was marvelously

constituted as the God-Man for the stupendous work, no further claims could in justice be possible, and He arose again in triumph over sin and death. It is a great salvation which the Gospel announces.

“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” John 10:17, 18.

He exercised His loving power according to His loving Father’s will, and laid down His precious life under unutterable pain and suffering to redeem us, but He took it again in His glorious resurrection, that He might impart it, free from the demands made upon it on our account and from the curse which was upon it because of our sin, all righteousness having been fulfilled and all demands having been satisfied, to all them that believe and thus share in His glorious victory over sin and death. He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. Therefore we take part in the triumph and sing with the apostle:

“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting; O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor. 15:43-47.

The saving work of our blessed Savior is done. All righteousness is fulfilled. It is finished. Glory to God in the Highest!

Our Confession mentions the grades which it is customary to present under the name of the Lord’s humiliation and exaltation. He passed through abundant labors and self-denials and sufferings to the glory of His Father. He lived and loved under manifold privations until His ignominious death. He went down into the depths of humiliation from His conception and birth to His death and burial. Then He arose in His exaltation from His descent into hell to His session at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He took up again the life which He laid down for the sins of the world, and showed Himself as the glorious Conqueror among the lost in the abode of Satan, the enemy of God and man, then on earth in His resurrection among His disciples, then in heaven in His ascension, where He takes His place as the Lord of the kingdom which He has purchased with His blood. The apostle expresses it all when he says:

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Phil. 2:5-11.

This teaches us that when for our salvation the Word was made flesh, the Only Begotten of the Father, now God and man in one Person, did not choose to present Himself, man that He now was, as clothed with the eternal Majesty of God, in which He might have posed as the equal of God in virtue of the divine attributes which the divine nature had conferred upon the humanity through its assumption into the unity of the one Person of the Son of God, but rather in His infinite wisdom and love, for the purpose of accomplishing our salvation, chose to abnegate, not His divinity, which could not be and would have frustrated His design if it could have been, but His employment of the powers conferred on His human nature by its reception into the unity of the Person of the Son of God.

He was God over all as to His divine nature, and He was, as to His human nature, possessed of divine powers, so that He could have trampled under His feet all the arts and schemes of the enemies who sought to kill Him. But He came to save our race from sin and death, and was therefore perfectly willing to forego the use of these powers, and humbly submit Himself to persecution and vilification, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He came not to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. The judgment of the quick and the dead is committed into His hands also, but that shall come later when the end of all things is at hand. Then He shall come again, but now in that glory into which He entered after the work of redemption through obedience unto death was finished.

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” 1 Thess. 4:16-18.

That is what our Lord Himself said to His disciples when He was yet visibly present among them and saw their sorrow on account of His announced departure:

“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.” John 14:2, 3.

3. The Application by The Holy Spirit

But so intent were our believing ancestors of the Reformation era to make the truth unto salvation plain to the people in their august Confession, that they would not forego the opportunity to insert into our article concerning the Son of God a statement concerning the application by the Holy Spirit of the great salvation accomplished by the Word made flesh.

Logically this could have been postponed to the next article, which shows how the redemption is embraced by the faith which the Holy Spirit produces in the hearts of redeemed sinners; but the whole matter becomes clearer by introducing the Spirit’s sanctifying work in connection with the eternal Son’s redeeming work, all of which belongs together in the marvelous thoughts of God for the salvation of our ruined race.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

Those who imagine that now, since the Savior has come and wrought out an eternal salvation for all men by His substitution for all and His representation of all in His obedience to all the requirements of the law and His suffering of all the penalties of transgressors, all men are necessarily exempt from the demands of holiness and the condemnation of sin, are nursing a deadly delusion. Human reason makes bad work of it when it settles upon some statement of Scripture and makes its deductions without regard to other statements, or to the whole plan of salvation. It is true that God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, and that in the mission of His Son He has provided for the salvation of all men. Whosoever will, may come and partake of the waters of life freely. But it is not true that now that the Savior has come the salvation of all from sin and death is an accomplished fact,

whether men repent of their sin and believe the Gospel or not. It is not true that at least a portion of our race, who in some unaccountable way are favorites of God, are elect unto salvation without reference to faith. It is not true that now whoever makes up his mind to obey the golden rule and live righteously before God and men, will thus become acceptable to God notwithstanding all his shortcomings and transgressions, though he may be so deluded as to deny them or any guilt in his nature or in his acts. Whatever inferences the human intellect may make in accord with its natural principles and with the system which it has devised, though it be with the help of some passages of Scripture which have been wrested for the purpose, the truth is plain for all that are willing to learn, that "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16:16. It is the fundamental declaration of the Gospel that God sent His own dear son, the Word made flesh, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish."

"He came unto His own and His own received Him not; but as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."
John 1:11, 12.

Therefore our article says that after our Lord's atoning work was done "He ascended into the heavens, that He might sit at the right hand of the Father, and reign forever, and have dominion over all creatures, might sanctify those that believe in Him by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts to rule, comfort and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil" and the power of sin." The Lord of glory, whom the people, chosen of old to prepare the way for His advent as the Savior of the world, dis owned and crucified, now reigns for ever as the Lord of all. He has established a kingdom of grace, and by His Spirit rules in the hearts of all believers. He has a Church on earth that glorifies His name as over all, God blessed forever.

As we cannot by our own reason and strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him, the Holy Spirit, whom He sends for the purpose, calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith, even as He calls, gathers, enlightens the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. We are saved by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. But we are saved by faith in His name, which only the Holy Spirit can work and preserve in our hearts. For

this the same love of God which sent His Son into the world to save us has made all necessary provision in the institution of the means of grace.

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” Heb. 2:3.

Article IV. Of Justification.

Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works, but are justified freely for Christ's sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who by His death has satisfied for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness before Him. Rom. 3 and 4.

THIS FOURTH ARTICLE of our Confession sets forth in words of admirable simplicity the doctrine of the Gospel which lay at the foundation of the whole glorious work of the Reformation, and which Luther rightly pronounced the article of a standing or a falling Church, meaning that this truth of the sinner's justification by faith is the final test of the Christian Church, the departure from which would indicate its fall from grace and from Christ and thus manifest its apostasy from the truth which our Lord revealed and to which He came as the King of Zion to bear witness. Our teachers have accordingly always insisted upon this as the criterion of evangelical fidelity, and refused fellowship with any Church or party that denied, or even ignored, the fundamental import of this precious truth. How could they do otherwise, seeing that this doctrine involves the whole counsel of God for the salvation of all men, whom sin has brought under condemnation and for whom no salvation is possible save through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. The entire cause of Christianity depends on the maintenance of this article in its evangelical purity.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Church of the Reformation, has never failed to stand by her evangelical banner in regard to this central truth of the Christian revelation. Some Protestants in the face of assaults made upon it by the natural man, whose reason cannot apprehend or receive the truth of revelation, that far exceeds all human powers to understand, have grown weak in its defense; some have abandoned it and gone over to the enemy, whose appeals to the natural man in his pride of reason they had not the grace to resist; and even some of who professed to be Lutherans suc-

cumbed to the pressure of nature in its resistance of grace: but the Lutheran Church still stood, albeit in some stages of her history with a feebleness in her indulgence of weak brethren that was not creditable, for the great truth of the sinner's justification by faith alone through the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification.

Of this cardinal doctrine of the Gospel our Confession sets forth the truth in few words. It is a golden truth of God that human language cannot gild. Our fathers believed it as the Scriptures presented it, and so the Church of the Reformation believes it now. Our Confession only states with a simplicity that is childlike, that we are truly justified before God, that we are justified freely, by grace, for Christ's sake, and that this justification takes place by faith. It is a truth of heavenly magnitude, under which earthly words stagger and which the multiplication of words often seems only to obscure. Poor sinners are justified; they are justified freely for Christ's sake; they are justified by faith in His name. That is all. But that is much. Let us try to realize it.

1. Sinners Are Justified

How can that be? That is the first question that confronts us when we seek to understand our Confession. It presents a problem which our reason cannot solve with its utmost efforts, but which faith makes plain even to a child.

Certainly it cannot be that God, who knoweth all things and who knows the sinfulness of the human heart as no man can know it, could declare His sinful creature innocent of all sin. Man has sinned, and God knows it. He not only knows it. but He has pronounced His curse upon it. Man has violated the law of righteousness, for the observance of which He was made and on the observance of which his happiness was dependent. He is therefore under the Creator's curse with its attendant misery. How shall he escape the just punishment of his violation of righteousness by his sin? God is just; He gave a just law; He proclaimed His just penalty on the transgression of His righteous law. Man transgressed. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. How then can any sinner escape the just sentence of the law? It seems impossible. How could God be just and a justifier of the soul that trans-

gresses His righteous law? It is impossible. But it is impossible only with man. With God all things are possible; only unrighteousness is not. There can be no connivance at wrongdoing with God; there can be no winking at sin. Should not the Judge of all the earth do right? As far as our human thought can see, there is no possibility that the sinner should be justified. How can he escape the damnation of hell? But God's thoughts are not our thoughts. He knows of ways that lie beyond our horizon. He is mighty to save, when in our human estimation all is lost.

The sinner is justified. That is a wonderful revelation. Most assuredly it is not that God fails to see His creature's sin or that He decides to ignore it. That cannot be. It cannot be that He does not see it, and it cannot be that He does not condemn it. The plan of salvation lies in a higher domain.' Of the way which divine wisdom and mercy pursues we shall speak presently. Now we are concerned about the gracious fact, that God justifies sinners.

This means that they obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God. How can this be? The Scriptures impress upon our minds the fact, that "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." Prov. 17:15 Two important points in regard to our subject are made plain by this passage. One is the sinfulness of all efforts to excuse wickedness and shield the wicked, as if the violation of God's holy law were a trivial matter: it is an abomination in the sight of God, just as is the condemnation of the innocent. The other is the determination of the Scriptural usage of the word justify, which is not to make, but to declare just. This is evident, in the first place, from the context, as making a wicked man just could not be an abomination to the Lord who desires all men to live righteously and demands this in the righteous law which He has laid upon all; and, in the second place, from the antithesis in which it is placed with condemnation, which does not mean to make, but to declare worthy of punishment. It is an act of injustice to pronounce a wicked man good, and the consequences are only bad, though it may seem an act of charity; and it is an act of injustice to pronounce a just man wicked, though it may seem but the strenuousness of righteousness.

But while the Scriptures thus leave no room to doubt the forensic sense of the important word "justify" in the divine plan of salvation, difficulties are suggested in another direction. How can God justify the wicked, when the clear statement is made that such conduct is an "abomination to the Lord?" It is not a suggestion made by enemies of the truth with malicious

intent. Sincere believers have been perplexed by it when they endeavored to understand the Scriptures and the import of their faith. God does not fail with His all-seeing eye to see the sinfulness of those whom He would justify and save from their just condemnation by the law of righteousness. It does not satisfy any inquiring soul to say that God has determined by a sovereign decree of His will, that He will not perceive His creatures' violation of His righteous law and that He will take no account of such violation, notwithstanding that the law has denounced indignation and wrath against every one that doeth evil. It cannot satisfy such a soul because the truth is too plainly revealed to be overlooked or ignored or explained away, that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," and that all of us are "children of wrath by nature" because of the sin that is in us and that becomes manifest in our consciousness and life. In the divine act of justification the sinner stands before the judgment bar of God as a culprit. He is undeniably a sinner, and just as undeniably he has merited the sinner's death. The case is perfectly plain. The sinner is guilty under the law, and the penalty of the law is manifestly his due. The Lord knows this better than any man can know it, and the Lord is judge. He cannot say that the culprit is guiltless: He knows that he is guilty. He cannot say that the offense is of little account; for He knows that it is against His holy law and rebellion against His righteous government. He cannot say that He will, by a mere arbitrary act of His sovereign authority, decide to ignore the sinner's sin and treat him as if he were innocent; for He who is the Judge is also the Giver of the law that condemns him to death. The sinner is not falsely accused of sin and is not guiltless: he is worthy of death. The Judge of all the earth, being the Holy One, must do right, and cannot declare the guilty innocent: He knows that this is not so, and it cannot be. Moreover, the Lord God, who is Maker of all and Judge of all, has issued His law of righteousness, and as He is everlastingly and unchangeably the same, He cannot, as the Holy One, change His law, least of all change it in favor, of unrighteousness, that He may justify the wicked. The doctrine of justification seems thus utterly baseless. And it would be, without the good tidings of the Gospel. Reason can make nothing of it. It is wholly a matter of faith.

2. The Scriptural Ground of Justification By Faith

This shows the great necessity of giving earnest heed to the Scriptural ground of the sinner's justification by faith. Without giving due attention to this, the soul that seeks to have its inquiries as well as its longings satisfied will not easily find undisturbed peace in believing.

Our article says of our evangelical churches that "also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits or works, but are justified freely for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who by His death has satisfied for our sins." This presents the whole subject, in all its essential features, both in its negative and in its positive aspects. It is the central point of the conflict between the Church of the Reformation, with its insistence on the pure truth of the Gospel, and the Church of Rome, with its human traditions and ordinances, by which it had perverted the ways of the Lord and corrupted the revealed plan of salvation. We cannot be justified before God by our own powers, merits or works; we are justified by divine grace, for Christ's sake, through faith.

1. That Man Needs Justification Was Not A Subject Of Contention In The Battles Of The Reformation

All admitted that man has sinned and needs deliverance from his sin and its baleful consequences. The Romanists did, indeed, have a very superficial knowledge of the "exceeding sinfulness of sin." This was manifest in our consideration of the second article, and is indicated, in the statement of the third, that our Lord offered Himself as "a sacrifice not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men," which was aimed at the Romish error that man is able to satisfy for his own actual sins. In the doctrine of justification the entire result of Romish shallowness in the conception of sin concentrates in fundamental error. Man is magnified, and the grace of God is minimized: little account is made of human sin, that the more account may be made of human virtue: great account is made of human power, that less account may be made of divine grace; stress is laid upon human merit, that the merit of Christ may seem the less: in short. man is exalted and the glory of God is proportionably diminished. But still Rome never denied that man is in some degree at fault and needs justification before God. much as its doctrine concerning man and of his fall and his remaining powers tended to darken the revealed truth about sin and its consequences, and to block the

way to a right understanding of the glorious plan of God for man's redemption through the Word made flesh and the appropriation of His merits by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is the misery of our times, whose advance in the knowledge of nature has been utilized by Satan to impress men with a monstrous notion of their own greatness and glory, to be deluded with the vain conceit that sin is not sin, and is neither damnable nor disabling, but is only, so far as it is not really a virtue but partially understood, a transient phase of the necessary development to a higher stage of being. The vagary of the imagination that man has no sin is, indeed, nothing new in the world. Such opinions have existed of old and have appeared sporadically through the whole history of the world and of the Church. Even in the time of the apostles the wild dream demanded notice.

“If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.”
1 John 1:8-10.

Alas, our modern age cares little for such solemn words, which are as easily relegated to the refuse heap as the first chapters of Genesis. A generation has sprung up that not only cares nothing for the material principle of the Reformation, called justification by faith, but cares nothing for the formal principle of the Reformation, called the absolute authority of Holy Scripture. To those who are living under the strong delusions of such an age nothing can be proved by an appeal to the revelation made by God for man's enlightenment and recorded in Holy Scripture for the learning of all who are willing to see the light; for they close their eyes and declare that there is no light in the Word, else the natural eye would see it. It is an evil time, when old theories of heathenism that knows not the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, are revived and made more plausible to the darkened understanding by the discoveries of science, falsely so called, because discarding the light which would make clear what to the natural mind must remain obscure.

To Christian believers, enlightened by the Spirit of God through the Word of Scripture, the entrance of which giveth light, it is amazing that even so many who desire to be enlisted among Christians are carried away by the speculations of science and philosophy to notions which leave them

without God and without hope in the world. The outlook in that direction is one of despair. But God still lives and His Word abides. There are still some, no thanks to the preachers of natural evolution and progress and social improvement, who feel the misery of sin and seek relief from its crushing burden. For these we write. The Lutheran Church is well content to be reproached as behind the times, if it can only lead some souls to see the preciousness of the great salvation in Christ and enable them to find peace in believing. Sin is a fact which cannot be denied, and the sinner's justification before God is made possible by His infinite wisdom and mercy.

“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:12.

“We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin: as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” Rom. 3:9, 10.

Sin is a fact which no denials by the blinded sinner can put out of the way or hinder in its deadly work. But the power and mercy of God are equally sure. The sinner can be justified. He can not justify himself, but God can justify him and save him.

“For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.” Rom. 5:19-21.

"The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. Gal. 3:22.

Human sin, and the need of justification is made so plain in the hearts and experience of men, and is so explicitly and emphatically declared in the Word of God, that only those who discard the revelation which was given man for his enlightenment, and refuse even to hear the voice of conscience, can remain ignorant of sin and think of a natural righteousness which excludes all thought of needing any other to satisfy all just demands. But those who yet see the need have all reason to give due heed to our confes-

sional statement respecting the divine plan by which our justification is made possible.

2. Our Confessors “Teach That Man Cannot Be Justified Before God By Their Own Powers, Merits, Or Works”

The sinner cannot save himself. If he is saved at all, God must save him. He cannot justify his sin, he cannot justify himself as the guilty subject of sin. He has violated the law of God, which condemns him, and he cannot reasonably expect that God will recede from His demand of righteousness and repeal His pronounced penalty on man's unrighteousness. So far as the matter lies within the scope of man's natural knowledge and thought, his case is hopeless. Unless God, against whom man has sinned and who has affixed the penalty of death to the violation of His law of righteousness, Himself intervenes to rescue the sinner, he is forever lost. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

In the first place, he cannot justify himself by his own powers. That means that now, since sin has come and he has turned away from God, the source of his and of all life, he has no ability left by which he could expel from his soul the poison of sin, and return to the life of righteousness in which and for which He was created in the image of God. That poison has done its deadly work. By sin man has separated from God and set up for himself. He has chosen to be his own master and to do as he pleases. He has sundered himself from the life of God, and the life that remains in him is merely the animal life which is called the flesh. Spiritually he is dead. He is still man. He has not lost the qualities which distinguish him from creatures of a lower order of being. He has not become essentially a brute. He still has the human form and in this human body he still has a living soul that can know and feel and will. He can still see the material world around him, think of the relation of things which he perceives with his senses, build his perceptions into a system called science, distinguish between that which pleases him and that which disgusts him, enjoy and suffer, give expression to his thoughts and feelings in the various forms of art, and act upon his environment by the exercise of his will. He still has human powers of a high order. The field of science and philosophy, of literature and art, of politics and sociology, are open before him still. And he cultivates these fields and delights in the progress which he has made, and exults in the ability which

he feels capable of exerting as well as in the results of his exertion. He has not ceased to be man, and he feels his superiority over creatures whose gifts are manifestly of a lower order and over which he can exert his power. He does not feel the spiritually lost estate into which sin has reduced him; and professing to be wise, he becomes a fool. In his fallen condition he lacks the main thing, which is the communion with God for which he was created, and in which alone his mission could be fulfilled and his happiness could be attained. And hence it comes that the Gospel is foolishness to him when it announces the divine plan of grace for his restoration to such communion, that he may acquit himself like a man. His created powers are comparatively great, and he foolishly thinks that his exploits will blind God to his sins.

The fall of man has not left his mind utterly a blank with regard to the divine demand of righteousness. He has a monitor in his soul that not only shows him the preferableness of right over wrong, but holds him to it, and insists on his allegiance to it.

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.” Rom. 2:14, 15.

In consequence of this he cannot wholly deny the claims of righteousness. His conscience rebels against every effort which his sinfulness makes in this direction. But his intelligence, since the fall into the service of sin, devises a way to quiet the clamors of his soul for right as against wrong.

“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart.” Eph. 4:17, 18.

Nor are the Jews by nature in a better condition;

“for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.” Rom. 3:9.

The former have the law of the ten commandments, and the latter have at least the work of the law written in their hearts. While some disregard the

voice of God and live recklessly according to the dictates of the flesh, there are always more serious minds that are restless under the condemnation of the law and strive to lead a life of rectitude. Such morality, or civil righteousness, is but too often mistaken, sometimes even by Christians, for the righteousness which God requires. The natural man therefore is disposed to deny the truth of our Confession, "that men cannot be justified before God by their own powers;" and many who profess to be followers of Christ, moved by the flesh that is still in them, join them in their delusion. They think that outward conformity to the requirements of the holy law of God is holiness. Thus it comes that heathens, whose right conduct is justly praised, are supposed to be justified before God, and the scrupulous observance of the law exemplified by many Jews is supposed to entitle them to acceptance with God. The result is illustrated in the Pharisees. Experience thus seems to show that all that is requisite to be justified before God is to exert our powers in behalf of righteousness. It is the best that the natural man can do, and this is certainly better than a life of reckless devotion to the lusts of the flesh. But it does not fulfill the divine requirement, "Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." Alienated by his sin from the life of God, man produces a morality "having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Tim. 3:5. It is the righteousness of a galvanized corpse set to the performance of works prescribed by the law. The righteousness of God, which is by faith in the Redeemer, is an entirely different thing, which the powers of our corrupt nature cannot attain. "We cannot by our own; reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him," after He has fulfilled all righteousness for us, much less work out a righteousness of our own which could be acceptable to God.

"You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love, wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ: by grace ye are saved." Eph. 3:1-5.

Hence it is evident, in the second place, 'that men cannot be justified before God by their own merits.' When it is once seen that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." and that in this ruined condition of our

race no power is left in us to effect a righteousness by which the demands of God could be satisfied. not many words are needed to make it plain that no merit of ours could avail for our justification. The claim of merit before God could not be entertained in any case. Not even if we were without sin could there be a reasonable ground for asserting it; for in that case we would only be fulfilling the obligation laid upon us as intelligent creatures by our Maker. That is what our Lord teaches us when He speaks of the servant who simply discharges his duty towards His Master.

“Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” Luke 17:7-10.

Not that the Lord in His lovingkindness leaves faithful service unrewarded; but He will not recognize any claim against Him that is based on the erring thought that He owes us something for discharging our obligation to Him. We are worthy of punishment if we fail to do what duty requires, but our doing it does not constitute Him our debtor. He owes us nothing, and we can merit nothing but the penalty of transgression. And that we have merited. Even if we had the power now to fulfill all the requirements of the law, we would only stultify ourselves by imagining that this would atone for our unrighteousness and constitute a claim of merit besides, on account of which God owes us eternal life. Human merit before God is entirely out of the question, and in the article of justification the point of inquiry can only be. how to be delivered from the sin whose wages is death.

In the third place. “men cannot be justified before God by their own works.” Creatures spiritually dead can of course do no spiritually good works. But men have a natural life, though they are under sin, and can perform works, though these are not spiritual. And this is the occasion of much confusion. It seems absurd to maintain that a man is dead when he and everybody else sees that he is alive; and it seems only a manifestation of inveterate prejudice to say that his works are not good according to the divine requirement, when all agree that they are beneficent and, as compared with others that are vicious and hurtful, they are good. It is extremely difficult to convince the blind of distinctions in color. When the natural man does the right as he sees it, are not his right actions good works? Even Christians are sometimes confounded by such questions. The light of nature does not en-

able us to distinguish between the carnal and the spiritual, and even whole churches, like the Romish, maintain that works conforming to the law are good and serve to justify the doer. That good fruit can be produced only by a good tree, and that the fruit can not make the tree good, is not plain to them. The multitude judges the actions by their conformity to the law, as the Pharisees have always done, without troubling themselves with inquiries about the heart's attitude towards the Lord or His law. The outward conformity to the prescribed rule is pronounced good, whether the man inwardly conforms to it or not. Hence many a work is regarded good that is not good at all in the sight of God." and virtue is attached to deeds that are only refined works of the flesh.

That such works of the natural man cannot justify before God every believer of the Bible readily understands. If there were any atoning power in good works, these actions could not exert it, because, notwithstanding the appearance, they are not good works in the sight of God, who judges the heart and is never deceived by appearances. The law of God is good. and obedience to it is blessed, but fallen man is not in harmony with Him and His law, and outwardly doing the prescribed deeds cannot restore harmony. The law is good, but man remains bad despite all his efforts to square his conduct with a good rule.

"If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." Gal. 3:21.

The law leaves us dead in our trespasses and sins; it cannot give us life, but only shows what we ought to be and are not, and thus reveals our sin and its penalty, instead of making us righteous.

"Wherefore the law was our school master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Gal. 3:24.

Without Christ we can do nothing good.

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace: because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” Rom. 8:3-8.

It is impossible for man, in his natural condition of enmity against God, to do any works that are good in His sight, and no reasonable thought can be entertained of being justified by such works.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we’ should walk in them.” Eph. 2:8-10.

But some argue that the exclusion of good works from the article of justification does not apply in the case of those who receive Christ by faith and are thus created in Him unto works that are really good. Their contention is that the alleged good works performed by men in their natural state cannot justify before God, because they are merely spurious imitations of the good works which the law requires, but that this proves nothing against the justifying efficacy of the genuine good works done by those who are in Christ Jesus. In reply to this it is sufficient to remind Christians that, when they are in Christ Jesus and thus justified by faith, they have no need of any other or any further justification before God, and that they would only be entrapped by the wiles of the devil if they yielded to the sophistries which are calculated to disturb their peace in the believing possession by faith of the only righteousness which avails before God. All works of man are excluded, that there may be no boasting of his ability or prowess or merit, but all the glory of our salvation may be given to the Savior, who loved us and gave Himself for us.

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Christ Jesus, unto all and upon all them that believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Rom. 3:20-28.

3. Our Churches Teach That While “Men Cannot Be Justified Before God By Their Own Powers, Merits, Or Works,” They “Are Justified Freely, For Christ’s Sake, Through Faith”

That does not indicate that in some marvelous way God makes it possible for man to do what by his sin became necessary for his deliverance from eternal death, but what that very sin rendered him unable to do. He cannot justify himself, and the power and goodness of God does not render him capable of doing it. Man can be justified, but “it is God that justifieth.” Rom. 8:33. He does this freely, for Christ’s sake, “when men by the power of the Gospel believe that they are received into favor and their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who by His death has satisfied for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness be fore Him. Rom. 3 and 4.”

These words of our Confession point us, in the first place, to the efficient cause of our justification, which is the grace of God. We are justified freely. The plan to save sinners from the curse which sin has brought upon them was devised in the eternal counsels of God and executed in time by the stupendous sacrifice of His only Son, simply because God in His infinite love and mercy willed it so. He owed His fallen creature nothing. He was under no kind of obligation to the sinful world, which was guilty of death. He did it freely. This wholly unmerited loving kindness, interposed for our rescue from everlasting misery, is called grace, which is love exercised towards those who are helpless.

“God so loved the world that He gave His Only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

Everlasting death was the world's due, because it lieth in wickedness, but "God sent not His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:17. Not to deal out in righteousness the punishment which man deserved did God become man and dwell among us, but vicariously to work out a righteousness by which we could be saved from the death which is our due.

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His Only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:9, 10.

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die; but God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Rom. 5:6-10.

Everything needed for our justification was supplied by the love of God which passeth knowledge. We are justified freely by His grace.

Nor does this apply less to the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the redemption which is in Christ Jesus than to the Incarnate Son's vicarious work in executing the wondrous plan. The thoughts of Romanists are vain, that after our Savior's obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, was finished and His victory over every foe of God and man was won. all that yet remains to be done for each individual's salvation must be done by man himself. It seems quite reasonable that, since God has prepared a way for our escape from the damnation of hell, He should leave it entirely to us whether we shall flee for refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel. Unquestionably the damnation of those who reject the gracious offer of salvation in our crucified and risen Redeemer is just. Their sin deserves the death which is its wages, whether the Savior had come or not. The plan of salvation through the mediation of the Son of God and His obedience unto death made it possible for God to be just and still a justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. But this justification is by faith in His name.

“God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that who soever believeth in Him should not perish.”

He who will not accept the salvation freely offered can have no part in it.

“As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12.

Those who will not receive the good tidings of salvation through Jesus’ atoning blood remain under the condemnation of their sin, which is just. They cannot be justified without faith, though Christ died for them.

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” John 3:36.

Hence the unchangeable rule in the divine order of salvation is:

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:16.

The one indispensable requisite for salvation, now that the work of redemption is finished and the atonement is made, is faith in Christ, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. Nothing else is necessary for the sinner’s justification before God, but this is indispensable.

And this too is a work of grace.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” Eph. 2:8, 9.

“Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.” Rom. 4:16.

“And if by grace then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.” Rom. 11:6.

God justifies the sinner freely, of His own good and gracious will. The sinner must not in his pride imagine that his work establishes a claim, in view

of which God owes him something. If this were so, justification and salvation would not be by grace, but would be in compensation for work done. If it is by grace, then all idea of merit and debt is excluded. Neither can it be due to both, the power and glory being divided between grace and works. The one wholly excludes the other. This shows how subversive of the plan for the sinner's justification, which God in His infinite love and wisdom has devised and which He has revealed from heaven in the blessed Gospel, is the theory of creature merit and justification by works against which the reformers waged their glorious warfare, but to which Romanists still stubbornly adhere and which many Protestant sectarians blindly adopt. How sad that so many for whom Christ died and to whom His Word of salvation by grace through the redemption which He effected is given, refuse to give Him the glory due to His name and deprive themselves of the unspeakable blessings which believers have in the assurance of faith.

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace.” Gal. 5:4.

But, in the second place, our Confession lays equal stress upon the meritorious cause, which is the obedience of our Savior unto death, even the death of the cross. Men “are justified freely, for Christ's sake, through faith.” It has been shown on a previous page that God, being the Holy One, cannot let the sinner escape the penalty of his sin. Human thought has often suggested that, as He is the Maker of all and absolute Sovereign over all, there could be nothing in the way of His granting our rebellious race an absolute pardon, if His compassion for us in our fallen condition should move Him to desire this. Why could He not, pitying us in our folly and wretchedness, absolve us from our guilt and confer on us the blessedness of the righteous, unrighteous as we are? Can He not do absolutely as He pleases? And many have adopted the suggestion, and on this account have rejected the whole plan of salvation through the atonement of Christ as a needless device. We are quite sure that if it were possible to save man kind from everlasting death without the sacrifice of God's own dear Son, who was made flesh that He might live and labor and suffer and die in our stead, it would have been done. But it could not be. God can, indeed, do whatever He pleases, and with Him all things are possible. But He, being God, cannot permit Himself to be dethroned by His creatures, and cannot discrown Himself and cease to

be God in order to remove the obstacle which His holiness and righteousness presents to the reign of sin and misery in the universe. He can do what He wills, but He cannot will to let the unrighteousness of His creatures triumph over His eternal nature and will of holiness. It is not possible, and the result, even if it were possible, could not be the sinner's salvation, but rather the overthrow of heaven and earth and the eternal ruin of all that exists. God is righteous, and righteousness must reign forever, as surely as God is God. Hence the Gospel knows of no divine connivance at sin or sentimental condoning of wrong, but even in treating of the sinner's justification continues to emphasize the need of righteousness, and speaks of the righteousness of God as indispensable for acceptance with God. Only let it be well noted that the righteousness which avails before Him is not an imaginary righteousness of the guilty creature, but the righteousness of God.

The demands of God's righteous law are satisfied by our blessed Savior's fulfillment in our place. He was our Substitute under the law, and in our stead did and suffered all that was required of us. This vicarious obedience of our Lord, God accepts as a complete satisfaction of His just requirements. That constitutes the righteousness or the merits of Christ, on the ground of which the sinner can be justified, or declared just, and is justified when he believes. For now God can "be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," because every thing is done and everything is suffered which the justice of God demands of men, and by faith the sinner apprehends it all and makes it his own. He still merits nothing himself, but the merits of Christ are imputed to Him through the faith which accepts them.

"Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." Rom. 3:21, 22.

This is the righteousness which is preached in the Gospel for our justification by faith. Hence the apostle declares:

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Rom. 1:16, 17.

This righteousness of Christ is the very substance of the Gospel, the burden of which is Christ and He crucified, because He was' delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.

We do not deem it needless to remind the reader that this "righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe," is not the righteousness which God has from eternity as inherent in His nature and which the Son shares as one with the Father from eternity, nor the incipient righteousness which the Holy Spirit works in us when He purifies our hearts by faith, but the righteousness which our Lord acquired by His obedience unto death, being made of a woman and made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law. For the righteousness that is in God lies at the root of all the demands made upon us, and can only condemn us for our failure to fulfill them; and the righteousness wrought in us by the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification is always imperfect while we live in the flesh, and can never be a foundation upon which to rest a hope to escape the just penalty of our sins. Only the perfect righteousness of our Savior's holy life and bitter death in our stead, embraced by the faith which the Holy Spirit works, can avail for our acceptance with God and give our souls peace. Every thought of a righteousness of our own, whether before or after conversion, is a barrier in the way of realizing the grace of God in Christ and attaining the rest of God's people. Christ alone is our righteousness;

"neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12.

3. Justification Is By Faith

Our Confession, according to the explicit and oft repeated declaration of the Scriptures, sets this truth in a light so clear that no one with eyes can have an excuse for not seeing it and enjoying the blessings which it conveys. It teaches that while no one can be justified by his own powers, merits, or works, men "are justified freely for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who by His death has satisfied for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness before Him." Rom. 3 and 4.

1. It Is Needful, First Of All, To Understand What Is Meant By The Word Faith, Or Believing

It is a word of frequent use in the social relations of men, and what it designates plays a prominent part in the intercourse of men with men in the natural world. We believe each other's statements, or disbelieve them. We have faith in the teachings of scientists, or doubt and disbelieve when their declarations lack convincing proof; we have faith in some people and trust them, we have no faith in some others and distrust them. In business and in history and in science we believe some men and do not believe others; we have confidence in some and have no confidence in others. It is manifest that we thus exercise our natural powers of mind, and believe or disbelieve according as the evidence, or inclinations, or circumstances require or suggest, the weight of the one being largely determined by the influence which the other two exert. Faith is thus a product of our natural powers, and there is some reason, when the term is thus employed, for the contention that every man has a right to believe as he pleases. In this domain each one's own light and conscience and character must ultimately be his own standard of judgment.

Nothing more than the bare statement is necessary to assure true Christians that this does not express the full import of the word as used in the Gospel. Its radical meaning is in deed the same. But the object is so different that the conditions are fundamentally changed. As in our natural relations with men, believing still means that the words spoken are accepted as true and that the person speaking them is trusted. But as the person speaking in Holy Scripture is God, who is Lord over all, against whom no evidence of any sort can have any weight and to whom every soul is absolutely subject, what ever his inclinations and circumstances may be, or his character or conscience might claim; and as the things spoken in the supernatural revelation given us through the Scriptures lie entirely beyond the scope of our natural abilities and cannot fall within the realm of rational judgment and sentimental rights of nature, the circumstances alter the case. It is God that speaks in His Word, and man has no right but that of hearing. He knows nothing of the things revealed and has nothing in his fallen nature that could furnish a test by which his reason could judge the truth of revelation. There is therefore no reasonable attitude which he could assume towards it but that of hearing and submitting to the authority of his Maker

who has mercifully condescended to be his Redeemer. The Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world has come, and we poor, forlorn, condemned sinners are saved by His grace.

Do we believe it?

Some do, but millions, though they hear the good tidings, do not. Nature furnishes no evidence that they are true, but rather resents the humiliating imputation of helplessness which they imply. Therefore “many are called, but few are chosen.” The largest number will not believe the Gospel. Seeing how much all need it and what an unspeakable blessing it offers, this seems amazing; but it is plainly the fact. The great majority of people treat it, if they give it their attention at all, as they are accustomed to treat the opinions and statements of men, applying their subjective tests and exercising their individual judgments. That they thus decide against the truth of the Gospel is quite natural. Our fallen nature cannot do otherwise. It is only the grace of God that can change this unhappy condition. Some believe, but it is never by their own reason or strength, and the word faith thus employed in regard to a new object receives a new meaning. It still retains the radical signification of accepting testimony and trusting its bearer. But in its new connection its meaning is exalted and intensified. It is not a mere human conviction formed on natural grounds or confidence determined by personal proclivities, but a result of supernatural power. It is God’s gift of grace, and as such is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Heb. 11:1. We believe what God says in His Word, and in that we put our trust.

But the chief thing that is set forth in that Word is the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, who “was made of woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4:4, 5. The object of our faith is specially the Lord Jesus, the Savior of our souls, to whom all the Scriptures bear witness.

Faith, which is the gift of God, is thus trust in the revealed truth. In its widest sense, the word is sometimes used with reference to religious subjects without the peculiarly Christian signification. It is then our natural power of forming beliefs and opinions transferred to matters of religion, and means the same as when it is applied to things and persons and relations of this world. Thus men speak of religious faiths generally, and put the Christian faith in the same category with the faith of Jews and Gentiles and Islamics. This usage is misleading, and many have used it in the interest of

false religions, all of which are religions of the flesh as distinguished from the one true religion of the Spirit, who by His Word works faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. This natural religion, arising from the religious element in our nature and thus presumed to be the universal religion of humanity as it is set forth in Masonry and other secret orders, and as it is exhibited in every form of Rationalistic, so-called churches, assumes to be the genus of which Christianity is a species, thus claiming to be superior to all of them, deceives people, and be fools many who call themselves Christians. Our times afford painfully abundant instances of this trick of the devil in his scheme of delusion. The Church of Christ has all the more reason to heed the admonition of the Spirit to be on its guard against the deceivableness of unrighteousness. Faith, in the Scriptural employment of the word, is not the product of human reason, acting upon human evidence, but ultimately determined by human sentiment and will. It deals with divine things, and, as these lie beyond the compass of our natural powers, with the Word of God as a supernatural revelation.

This faith has a general and a special object. We believe the Holy Scriptures; we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the sun and sum of these Scriptures. Accordingly it is customary to speak of a general and of a special faith. As the Bible sets forth Christ as the Savior of the world, and no one can believe the Scriptures without believing in Christ, the distinction might seem needless. But it is not. There are many who profess faith in the Bible without believing “that they are received into favor, and their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who by His death has satisfied for our sins.” They are not necessarily hypocrites. They may be sincere when they say that they believe in the Scriptures. But they deceive themselves when they imagine that such a merely historical faith will save them. “The devils also believe and tremble.” James 2:19. Such an attitude towards the Gospel the Scriptures designate as a “dead faith.” Therefore we speak of a special faith which exists in the penitent soul, which trusts in the merits of Christ, and which has peace in believing.

2. Some Believe That Faith Fulfills All God’s Requirements

Some readers are inclined to assume, when this cardinal doctrine of the Gospel is presented to their minds, that faith must be the greatest of human

virtues, the presence of which compensates for the absence or inefficiency of all others, and which, as the culmination and summary of all human virtues, constitutes a righteousness which God must recognize and accept as the fulfillment of all His requirements. It would be unaccountable how such an error could find entrance into a soul that reads or hears the Gospel of God's grace in Christ, were it not that man in His natural condition is spiritually blind and cannot receive the things of the Spirit. The assumption overthrows the truth which is seeking admission, and so perverts the meaning of the divine words that they are made to say the very reverse of what they plainly declare and are designed to convey. There is no human virtue that can avail before God as righteousness and justify the sinner. That is the very reason why God "gave His Only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." The sinner is condemned. He cannot justify himself. God in His mercy justifies him. Even He, as the righteous one, could not do this without the satisfaction of His righteous requirements. He sent His Son into the world, the Word made flesh, to take the sinners' place and render such satisfaction by His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.

"When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem, them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Gal. 4:4, 5.

That is the righteousness which God sets before us in the Gospel. It is the righteousness acquired for us by our Savior, not a righteousness acquired by any virtue, merit or work of our own. That is the righteousness of Christ which faith embraces and which the grace of God imputes to us. No virtue of ours has anything to do with it. If this could have any proper place in the article of justification, that place would belong to love, which is the fulfillment of the law. But precisely because we have failed of such fulfillment are we condemned sinners, so that in God's sight no man living can be justified, save by the gracious imputation of Christ's righteousness or merit to the believer. Whenever people talk of the merit of their own acquisitions or achievements as a ground of their hope of salvation, or dream of their faith as a great virtue in consideration of which God will remit the penalty of their sin and crown them with eternal blessedness, they depart from the

Gospel of God's grace in Christ, and their boast of justification by faith is a deadly delusion.

3. The Faith Which Embraces Christ Is The Gift of God

The faith which embraces Christ, and which is imputed to the believer for righteousness, is the gift of God. "I believe," Lutheran Christians say in the Catechism, "that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, en lightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." There is no health or strength in us to remove our sin or acquire a righteousness before God, not even to accept the righteousness which our Savior has acquired for us.

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. 2:14.

We are dead in sins, and are quickened and saved only through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Without Him we can do nothing.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Eph. 2:8.

The whole work of salvation is God's. He gave us a mighty Savior, and He enables us to embrace Him by faith as the Lord, our righteousness. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." 1 Cor. 12:3. Hence our Savior says:

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." John 6:44.

The sinner is saved by grace, not only in the sense that the Father's love has made justification possible by the mission of His Son to redeem us, but also in that of the mission of the Holy Spirit to apply this redemption by the means of grace and by His power working the faith which appropriates the righteousness of Christ. It is God that saves us. He gives us His Son to be our Savior. He gives us the faith which embraces the salvation freely of-

ferred. He declares us justified when by His grace we believe the good tidings which He proclaims.

4. The Faith Which The Holy Ghost Works In Our Hearts Is The Only Means Whereby The Righteousness Acquired For Us By The Vicarious Work And Suffering Of Our Savior Can Be Appropriated.

The sinner is justified by faith alone. In the nature of things there is no way of availing ourselves of the mercy of God and the promises made but that of believing them. When God gives us commands, we readily see that what is required on our part is obedience, and that whatever blessings are connected with their fulfillment, or whatever penalties are attached to their transgression, are dependent on such obedience. But when He declares what in His infinite grace He has done for us and purposes still to do for us in our helplessness, manifestly there is nothing to do on our part but to believe the gracious announcement. That Christ was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification is a fact which the Holy Spirit makes known to us in the Gospel.

“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because He believeth not the record that God gave of His Son.” 1 John 5:10.

If Christian people would think of it they would shun the absurdity of imagining that now, since the Savior has done everything for us that divine righteousness requires, they must yet do something to perfect His work. It needs no perfecting; it lacks nothing: it is perfect and complete; it is finished. They would see, moreover, how ungrateful it is, notwithstanding all the plain and explicit assurances of God in Holy Scripture, that the redeeming work is finished, to entertain the thought that He who came to save us without money and without price, paying all our enormous debt with His own precious blood, yet left something undone which we must do for our justification. And this too they would see, that while they disparage the gracious work of our blessed Savior by their carnal imaginings and basely arrogate to themselves the glory which belongs to Him alone, they are depriving themselves of the peace and joy which only the assurance of justification

through Jesus' blood by faith can bring. Believers of the pure Gospel, who have come to Jesus and found rest for their souls, know full well that all their deeds of mind and body are tainted by the sin that dwelleth in them and that lusteth against the Spirit in all His sanctifying work, and that however small may be the work supposed to be needed for their salvation as complementary of the work of Christ, that supposed additional work renders their salvation insecure and undermines the peace which the Holy Spirit works through faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. If Christians would consider not only the things which belong to the glory of their Savior, but the things which equally belong to their own peace, they would cease to blame, and learn to honor, the Lutheran firmness of faith, which refused in the days of the Reformation and refuses now to abate one jot or tittle of the truth in Jesus unto man's justification by faith alone. Rome and those who heed the unevangelical traditions and carnal reasonings of Rome may boast of their meritorious works and gain prestige in the world by catering to the natural reason of our fallen race, but the humble child of God rejoices in the work of our Redeemer; for "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 5:1. Such peace the soul enlightened by the Word of God, which by the law shows him his lost and helpless estate by nature, but also by the Gospel his redeemed and restored estate by grace through faith in the Savior of the world, possesses in the assurance that all that is requisite for our salvation from sin and death is furnished by Christ's vicarious obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. He is helpless, but God is his Helper.

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Rom. 3:28.

The deeds of the law have nothing to do with our justification, so far as our deeds of the law are concerned. Christ fulfilled all righteousness for us, and when by faith we appropriate this fulfillment and make it ours, what possible deed of the law could be wanting to make it perfect? If there were anything wanting, we certainly could not supply it, and our condition would be hopeless. Faith worketh by love. Good works follow when the heart is purified by faith. But faith, not the works which follow, embraces the perfect righteousness acquired for us by our Savior, which is graciously imputed to

us when we believe. Neither our believing nor the deeds of the law which follow our believing, but only the perfect obedience of our Savior, the merits of Christ, constitutes our righteousness. Of good works and their place in the economy of grace our Confession treats in a subsequent article. With our justification before God they have nothing to do. This takes place by grace alone, by the obedience of Christ alone, through faith alone.

5. The Faith Which The Holy Spirit Works By The Gospel And Which Appropriates The Righteousness Of Christ Presented In The Gospel, Is A Living Power In The Realm Of Grace

It is not a product of our natural faculties or a result of natural influences acting upon them or assimilated or appropriated by them. It is a gift of God, and a divine gift of grace, not of nature. It is necessary not only to mention this, but to lay due stress upon it, because Satan seeks to deceive souls to their ruin in this as in every other respect. There is a faith which is a human product and which does not justify. We commonly speak of believing what men tell us. We accept their statements when these are sustained by sufficient evidence to render them acceptable to reason. It is a belief that is as necessary in social life as in the whole field of learning. The entire fabric of society rests on a certain confidence which man has in his fellowman. To distrust everybody is a disgrace. We accept as facts the reports seriously communicated and believe the assurances which others give us of their intentions and purposes. Business flags when men fail to trust each other. Progress in science is impossible when investigators believe only what they themselves experience. There is a faith which is natural. But such faith does not justify before God. It is not that which is meant when the Holy Spirit declares that we are justified by faith without the deeds of the law. It avails us nothing for our deliverance from the curse of sin, to believe that our neighbor can be trusted when he makes us a promise, or that Washington was the patriotic leader in our American revolutionary war, or that the Copernican theory is correct. It would not be our eternal loss if these things were all a delusion. Our salvation is in no sense dependent upon the truth or falsity of the judgments involved and is in no way affected by our belief or disbelief in regard to them.

Facts of natural experience and history are often of great importance for our earthly welfare, but have no direct relation to the salvation of our souls, the rescue of which from death and hell is dependent wholly on powers that lie above the plane of nature. Historical faith has its uses, but men deceive them selves when they presume that its natural uses lift them above the natural level of sinful humanity. Even the glorious facts which the Scriptures report concerning the life and death of the Incarnate Son of God may be humanly received as correct, and still the main purpose for which the communication is made fail of attainment. Men, even some Christian men, foolishly de claim against doctrine and especially upon the insistence on the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and stigmatize this as hollow dogmatizing which heartless men bring in as their speculations on the facts in order to stir up and keep up quarrels among simple believers. It is a pity that well-meaning men should be so deceived. That a man who was called Jesus appeared in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago, went about doing good, taught a sound morality that made clearer the profound spiritual import of the Mosaic law, was rejected by the Jewish leaders, and finally was crucified, attesting his sincerity and sealing his testimony by his humble submission to the unjust authorities — do only the children of God believe these facts? There was such a man, and Jews and Gentiles and Christians all agree that there was such a man. Even the devils in hell believe it. But what good does that do?

The natural man receives the testimony of history and may know all the facts about the man of Nazareth, as he may know all the facts of the Macedonian Alexander and the Roman Caesar, and the French Napoleon and the American Washington: but what has all that to do with the salvation of our sinful and condemned souls? Are all those who believe these undeniable facts true Christians and followers of the Lamb? The devils, too, believe that there is one God and tremble. Manifestly this is not the faith which secures salvation from sin and death. That this Jesus is the Son of God, made flesh and put under the law to redeem them that were under the law, that He fulfilled all righteousness in our stead and suffered the penalty of our sins, and that He was raised again for our justification, ascending to heaven and giving gifts to men, and preparing a place for us, that where He is, His disciples may be also — this is the supernatural truth which deluded men call the refinements of dogmatism, but which brings to view the very truth in Je-

sus as the Savior of sinners and ministers the consolation which sinners need.

“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death, that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.”

That is the faith which saves, because that is the faith which flees for refuge from sin and death to the hope set before us in Christ and embraces the Savior of the world.

And this faith is imputed to the believer for righteousness. The justification is the declaration of God that the sinner shall be regarded in the judgment of God as if he had fulfilled the entire law and suffered the full penalty of his sin. To one who does not believe the Gospel of God's grace in Christ it must all seem an extravagant dream of beauty, a fiction that in the nature of things is impossible. For how can the Holy One regard and treat the unholy and rebellious sinner as holy and righteous and admit him to the realms of blessedness and glory where sin can not enter? The whole Gospel is foolishness to the natural man in his unbelief. But to him no righteousness is imputed. On him the wrath of God abideth. He has no righteousness, and the righteous curse is upon his unrighteousness. There is no imputation of righteousness to him. How could there be? Neither in nature nor in grace could this be possible. But there has been a perfect righteousness acquired for our sinful race, by our Redeemer in His vicarious obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. According to the Scriptures we usually call this the righteousness or the merits of Christ, which faith embraces and makes the believer's own. This faith is imputed for righteousness, because it appropriates the whole obedience of our Savior in His holy life and innocent suffering and death on our behalf. The believer, only the believer, has thus a righteousness, which is not his own, but which faith embraces as the Gospel offers it. Faith appropriates the perfect righteousness of our Savior, and being justified by this faith the believer has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Article V. Of The Ministry Of The Church

That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.

For by the Word and Sacraments, as by instruments, the Holy Spirit is given; who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel. to wit, that God, not for the sake of our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that for Christ's sake they are received into favor.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others. who imagine that the Holy Spirit is given to men without the outward Word, through their own preparation and works.

THE FAITH WHICH APPROPRIATES the merits of Christ acquired for us by His perfect fulfillment of the law in our stead and His death for our sins, and which God therefore imputes to the believer for righteousness, is not, as we have seen, a result of our own natural thinking or a product of our own natural exertion, but is the gift of God the Holy Spirit. There is no light nor life in us to devise such a plan of salvation as the Gospel reveals. There is not in the intelligence of our nature, darkened by sin and alienated from God, even the power of understanding it when the Gospel as a supernatural revelation presents it to our minds, which since the fall move in a sphere entirely foreign to such a revelation. How then shall our benighted souls ever be so enlightened as to behold the gracious and glorious things which the truth in Jesus contains and conveys? This is the point to which the fifth article of our Confession directs our attention, and the question to which our evangelical faith gives a ready answer. For the things of our salvation which are impossible with man, God, with whom all things are possible, has made gracious and wise and ample provision.

For the clear understanding of our article it seems necessary to point out that its purpose is not to elucidate the law of order in the Church which lim-

its the public ministration of the means of grace to the pastoral office, or to those who are called by the Church to the performance of such public functions. That subject is treated later, in the fourteenth article. What is here set forth is the divine institution by which God provides for the creation of faith in human hearts, which sin has rendered incapable of believing the good tidings of the Gospel. This is manifest from the connection of this with the preceding article, from its contents, and from the antithesis expressed. To obtain this justifying faith the ministration of the Word and Sacraments is necessary because these are means divinely appointed for this end, to which the divine promises which give assurance to the believer are attached.

The pastoral office of the Church, which God has instituted for the orderly administration of these means and which our confessors regarded as of so much importance that they devoted a special article to it, is not the essential factor in the Holy Spirit's working of faith. Ordinarily faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of 'God, because the Lord sends out preachers of the everlasting Gospel into all the world. But we would miss the main point in the matter if we imputed to the preacher what belongs to the Gospel which is preached. It would not of necessity be a false doctrine, if we supposed the Confession to say that, in order that men might obtain the faith which apprehends the merits of Christ and is therefore imputed for righteousness before God, the special office of an ordained ministry in the Church was instituted, because there is such an office and it was instituted for this purpose. But while this is admitted, we cannot connive at the false opinion, which is entirely foreign to the faith and the thought and feeling of our confessors, that they meant to confine the operations of the Holy Spirit to the functions of a special ministerial order in the Church. They not only had laid off in disgust the tattered and unclean garments of popery with all its priestly pretensions, but were too intent on preserving the pure raiment of the Gospel, in which they could rejoicingly appear before God as sinners graciously accepted in the Beloved, to think for a moment of making their precious treasure dependent on the will of men.

If the Roman officials would not preach the Gospel, or if they insisted on preaching another gospel which is not the Gospel, that was a thing of grief and sorrow, but not a cause of despair. If the bishops and priests would not preach the truth unto salvation, that truth by the gracious revelation from heaven still existed in the world. and the wicked withholding of it by those whose office it was to proclaim it could not destroy its power to save. Oth-

ers would read it, others would proclaim it, and some who read it or heard the proclamation would tell it to their neighbors and friends, and it was always the power of God unto salvation to all them that believed it.

Does any sane Christian imagine that the very Gospel of Christ was not the Gospel when Luther preached it, because the pope, in his human unholiness and impotence disallowed it?

The point which we desire to impress upon the reader is that our Confession speaks of the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments as the means by which God works and maintains the faith through which sinners are justified, not of the order in the Church by which this ministration is committed for public use to special ministers publicly called for the purpose. The validity of the Word and Sacraments is not dependent on the ministers, but on the divine institution, and they effect that whereunto God has instituted them, independently of the fidelity or infidelity of the persons administering them. That this is the meaning of our article is rendered incontrovertible by the antithesis stated, which is not that these means are in effectual when administered by others than regularly called ministers of the Church, but that “the Holy Spirit is given without the outward Word.” A person may obtain faith without the mediation of an ordained minister, but he cannot obtain faith without the Word and Sacrament which God has instituted as the means for obtaining it and which must therefore be administered for the purpose.

Our article contains especially four topics that solicit our attention. They are 1. That to execute His saving purpose on earth God has instituted means of grace and given His disciples the commission to administer them; 2. That these means are the Word and the Holy Sacraments; 3. That by these, as by instruments, the Holy Spirit is given; and 4. That the errors of the Anabaptists and others who reject these means as needless are condemned.

1. God Has Instituted Means of Grace To Execute His Saving Purpose On Earth

Man has fallen away from God by the sin of our first parents, which is inherited by all their descendants. The communion with God for which he was created was thus broken, and the holiness and happiness which the Creator’s love designed him to possess was lost. But God did not abandon His

unwise and now miserable creature. He pitied our ruined race and devised a way by which another opportunity for blessedness might be given to the guilty souls of men. and by which Paradise might be regained. To execute His gracious will He sent His Son into the world to fulfill all righteousness instead of all man kind that had been under probation and had signally failed. The Son of God was made flesh and made under the law, and as our Substitute fulfilled all its holy demands; and as man, whose place He came to take under the law, had already transgressed and was under its curse. He was made a curse for us, being obedient unto death. which is the wages of sin, even the ignominious death of the cross. It is finished. Our Lord was crucified, but triumphed over every foe, and rose again and ascended into heaven. What God could do to save our lost and miserable race of guilty offenders against His divine Majesty and His loving plan for our eternal happiness was done. View it as we will and explain it as we may, the glorious fact stands out in the clear light of the Gospel that our fallen race is redeemed.

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” 2 Cor. 5:19.

These trespasses were all imputed to the Lamb of God, who was made a curse for us, that we might escape that curse and share His righteousness. Now what can be needed yet for the condemned sinner’s salvation? Nothing to satisfy the requirements of divine justice. God can be just now and still a justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. And yet according to the Scriptures not all men are actually saved.

“Many are called, but few are chosen.”

“Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life. and few there be that find it.” Matt. 7:13, 14.

Alas, that there are so many false prophets and that so many refuse to heed the Lord’s warning against them. These false prophets are not all of the radically Antichristian sort, who openly deny Christ to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world. and who reject the Holy Scriptures, which are writ-

ten by the Holy Spirit for our learning and which testify of this Savior and lead poor souls to Him and enrich them by the treasures of His grace. The Savior warns especially against those who come to us in sheep's clothing that, as ravening wolves, they may catch the unsuspecting sheep of Christ's fold. It is one of the wiles and tricks to which the devil resorts to entrap the unwary, to let Christianity pass as a noble system of morals in order to seduce its adherents to become indifferent to its saving doctrine of redemption through the sacrifice of Christ and justification by faith in His atoning work. Nay, many are willing to let even the doctrine of the atonement stand, if they can only instill the human figment in connection with it, that salvation is now secure for every man, and no one need give the matter any further thought or in any serious way concern himself about it.

There are many, and they are not all found in the ranks of the heretical sect of the Universalists, who make little or no account of the essential element of faith which the Lutherans so lucidly and emphatically set forth in the fourth article of our Confession. Not all do this in a spirit consciously hostile to the Gospel. There is no ground whatever for assuming that every false prophet is such intentionally and by malice aforethought. Some are themselves among the deceived and join the deceivers without knowing what they do. But whether they are conscious of it or not, those who pay no regard to the necessity of faith for justification are disregarding what the Scriptures present as indispensable. The plan of salvation through Christ is always set forth by the Holy Spirit in His inspired Word as salvation by faith.

“God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

“He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

That is the counsel of God as revealed from the beginning. Nowhere is that plan of God set forth otherwise in the Scriptures. It is the original decree of the Lord. Accordingly, when the Son of God came into the world as our Savior, “as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12. There is salvation for all men through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, but only by faith. We “are justified freely by His grace through the redemption

which is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood.” Rom. 3:24, 25. It is only thus that He could “declare His righteousness,” that “He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Rom. 3:26. The sinner is justified by faith in the Savior of sinners. There is no other way of justification or salvation.

But:

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.”

That is the conviction that abides in the hearts of all who have by the grace of God come to the true faith of the Gospel. How can any soul be brought to partake of the blessedness offered freely in Christ Jesus when it can just as little believe in the great salvation effected by our mighty Savior as it can itself effect it? So miserably poor and blind and helpless has our humanity become by the sin which brought death into the world and all the woe which is its precursor and concomitant, that man cannot extend his hand to accept the salvation provided for all and graciously held out to all for their acceptance. The Savior of the world has surely come, “and as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” But who can receive Him? Seemingly the whole plan of salvation is, after all, a failure, and that by an oversight of the divine wisdom that devised it, but made no account of poor, forlorn, condemned man’s deadness in trespasses and sins. But the oversight is on the part of man, who fails to note the provision which God has made for the application to helpless sinners of the help afforded in Christ.

Under the impulse of this human blindness in sin, which has not totally departed from even Christian eyes as long as sin exerts its power in their flesh, Romanists have devised many a scheme to make the divine plan effective, and in their efforts by human wisdom to eke out the supposed defects in the divine plan have wrought desolation in the Church. Ostensibly they merely strive to render efficacious the redemption in Christ: really, whether in ignorance or in the malice of unbelief, they strive to supplant it. In this pretended zeal for the salvation divinely offered they unhappily overlook the extent of the evil to be remedied. and in their humanly devised remedy render that which God has provided and which alone can heal, entirely superfluous. The result is that while Rome still retains some funda-

mental truths of revelation. salvation is difficult to secure in the Roman Church because of the human traditions and ordinances which obscure it and supplant it.

Nor is the condition in the Protestant Churches which thought it right to reject the Augsburg Confession and substitute another creed as the banner around which they thought it better to rally, much better as regards the import of this fifth article. The question at this point was not and is not whether Christ is the Savior of men. That, though with various modifications and variations, is granted. But how shall sinful man become partaker of the great salvation?

Some think, like the Universalists and sects and individuals of kindred opinions, that as the redemption embraces all men, nothing more is needed for the salvation of all men: all are saved and there is no more hell or damnation. Others think, like the Calvinists, that only a select portion of our sinful race is included in the redemption, and that these are saved by the absolute decree of God, the faith spoken of in the Scriptures being irresistibly wrought in their hearts as the fulfillment of the divine purpose in their regard. Some, like the Arminians and all Pelagians and Semi-pelagians, floating in the wake of the Romanists, imagine that man has a part to discharge in the realization of salvation, as it were to eke out the salvation in Christ and make it perfect by their performances. The misery of it all is the distrust of God's gracious plan to save our lost souls without any merit or worthiness on our part, through Christ alone, by faith alone, without the deeds of the law.

The outcome of it all is the theory that God arbitrarily gives eternal life either to all men or to a select few, or that He leaves the Scriptural conditions of participation in the redemption to the sinner, who may, either by his natural power or by the operation of the Holy Spirit, supply what may be needed for his deliverance from death and damnation. Therefore when the work of the Holy Spirit as part of the divine economy of salvation is recognized' at all, this work is assumed to be by ways and means unknown to us and without any revealed rule or order, to which the poor sinner could refer for his assurance and comfort. Accordingly no one can know whether or not he has part in the salvation which God designed His lost creatures to possess.

If one supposes that he must do something yet, besides what Christ has done for him, in order to render him acceptable to God and secure His fa-

vor, he cannot know whether he has rendered enough to satisfy the demand, and his soul is not at rest. If he supposes that God distributes His gifts arbitrarily, bestowing salvation on some and not on others, he cannot know whether he is one of the favored ones or not, whatever his reasonings and his feelings may be. It is therefore no wonder that assurance of salvation in Christ is so rare among Christians, to say nothing of the fanatical pretension to such assurance which is found among many who, having no Scriptural ground for their pretensions, waver or fall when the trial comes.

Our Confession was made by men of knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and of experience in the ways of God their Savior. They knew that the Son of God had become man to fulfill all righteousness by His obedience to the law, and to bear all the penalties of its transgression in our stead. They knew that the satisfaction rendered by the Savior was complete and perfect, that it was accepted as such by the Father, and that it availed for all people. But they knew also that only he that believeth shall be saved, and that only when we are justified by faith can we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; and they knew that not all men have faith, and that by his own reason or strength no man can have it. To them there was nothing discouraging in this total disability of the sinner to help himself; on the contrary, the whole plan of salvation which is clearly revealed in Holy Scripture gave them the joyful assurance that everything was wisely and graciously ordered for man's rescue from death and damnation, and led them to give all the glory of our salvation to God alone and to praise Him for His infinite mercy. The gap which so many discover in the economy of grace, by reason of which the individual can never in this life be sure of his salvation, does not exist in the Scriptures, and they knew its alleged existence is but a dream of unbelief. The salvation is complete in Christ, and the Holy Spirit works the faith in the heart to embrace it and possess it and enjoy it. Not as though among the benighted wanderers in this wilderness of sin the Spirit of God came upon an individual here and another there and gave him light and guidance into pleasant places in Christ Jesus, without anyone's knowing when and where and how that heavenly light would come and who should be its recipient. Faith is indispensable for the apprehension of Christ's righteousness, and this faith we do not have by nature and cannot produce by any exertion of our natural powers, but "that we may obtain this faith the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted." That is the gist of our article, and it is precious.

The Holy Spirit does indeed work faith; not where and when men please, but when and where He pleases. To the schemes of worldly wise workers in the cause of Christianity, who neglect to search the Scriptures and from them learn the will and way of God, He pays no attention. God binds men to the ordinances of His wisdom and love, but He declines to be bound by men's unwisdom and zeal when they think it good to depart from His instructions. How pitiful it is to see poor souls, who have heard something of the grace of God and the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, seeking refuge from the damnation that is upon them because of sin and finding no comfort at the hands of the pastors called to show them the way of peace, who can only tell them of something which the Church has required them to perform, or of the need for patient waiting until it may please God, in some miraculous way, to relieve them of the burden that is crushing them! Romanists, and all enthusiasts who discard the divinely appointed means by which the Holy Spirit, according to the inspired Scriptures, has chosen to do His saving work, do not know, or do not recognize the divine way of peace, and miserable comforters are they all.

There is nothing in our Lutheran Confession which has met with more opposition among the sects than its doctrine of the means of grace, and there is nothing, next to the Savior and the salvation in Him which they communicate, that attaches a true Lutheran believer more to his Confession than this truth concerning the means of grace that is so much vilified. Our Augsburg Confession is glorious throughout as the plain statement of the Christian faith, which must stand though heaven and earth pass away, but it is especially glorious, as we view it in the light of Scripture, combined with the experience of the past and the present, and, we may add, with our own personal experience. Lutherans are unwise in the extreme if they allow themselves to become intimidated by the hue and cry of sectarians against their doctrine of the means of grace, which is so essential for the peace and joy of individual souls in their faithful adherence to the Gospel of grace in Christ unto salvation. We are redeemed; the Holy Spirit comes to us in Word and Sacrament to apply the redemption. What the Spirit thus testifies is true, and His testimony carries with it the power of God to make us sure that it is true. The ministry presents the divine proclamation which cannot err and cannot fail.

“All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ. reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor. 5:18-21.

If anyone should ask how all this can be, our answer is that, although we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him, He has seen to it that the needful power is communicated in the Gospel.

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Rom. 1:16.

“For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” 1 Thess. 1:9.

It is this that is made known in the great commission given to the Church by her Lord:

“Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Matt. 28:18-20.

“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when He had said this He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” John 20:21-23.

The Savior of the world, after His redeeming work was finished. took up again the life which He laid down for our offenses and ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high. They do err, not knowing the Scriptures, who presume that this means His withdrawal from the affairs of His kingdom on earth.

“When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.” Eph. 4:8.

Sharing now in His exalted humanity in the exercise of the divine dominion which He had abnegated for a while that He might suffer and die for our sins, "He gave some. apostles; some, prophets; and some. evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints. for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body" of Christ." Eph. 4:11, 12. It is a marvelous thing, this prosecution of our Redeemer's work until the end of time and the final judgment. Divine wisdom works in divine ways, which are too high for our poor human reason to attain. We believe what the Word says, and therefore we speak. Our Savior assured His disciples:

"It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you."

"Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak, and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine. Therefore said I that He shall take of mine and show it unto you." John 16:7, 13-15.

Learned theologians have spoken of different periods in the history of our salvation, as times of its preparation by the Father, and execution by the Son. and application by the Holy Ghost. Perhaps for the purpose of theological science this may be expedient. But it was not the science of theology, the importance of which is not to be disparaged, that was first and foremost in the hearts of our Augsburg confessors. They were learned men, well versed in science, but they were poor sinners, like the most illiterate of their brethren, and like the lowliest of them sought salvation in the righteousness of Christ by faith. What concerned them first of all and most of all was the great salvation provided by the one true God and Maker of all for them and for all men. In this the love of the Father and the sacrifice of the Son and the work of the Holy Ghost all coincided. The Father's love was displayed in the mission of His own dear Son to die for our sins. The love of the Only begotten Son was displayed in the unspeakable sacrifice of His life for the people who mostly met Him with scorn and insult and contumely, and finally crucified Him. The love of the Holy Spirit is displayed in the offer of grace and life and peace on the basis of the Father's love and the Son's sacrifice and intercession, to all men in Word and Sacrament, and His unceasing appeal to sinners: why will ye die, when free and perfect deliverance

from death is offered and full and complete life and blessedness is ready for all in Christ, offered without money and without price? It is all one glorious plan of salvation, the work of the Holy Spirit being only the gracious application of the Father's love and the Son's execution of the wonderful plan of divine love and wisdom. When now the Gospel is preached and the Holy Sacraments are administered by divine appointment, with the divine promise of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, how can any believer in Christ our Savior doubt about the salvation offered? Certainly there can be reasonable doubts of our fitness and worthiness, and all the considerations resulting from our sinful nature may confirm these doubts; but when the Holy Ghost testifies to the truth in Jesus, how can a person be a believer and still not only entertain but justify these doubts? The ministry of the Word and Sacraments was instituted that the truth in Jesus might be proclaimed and sealed. God works in them and by them. How can ye escape if ye neglect so great salvation?

2. These Means Of Grace Are The Word Of God And The Holy Sacraments

There are no others by which the grace of God in Christ is communicated to men. because there is nothing beside these that has any promise to which faith could cling and find assurance and comfort. God has appointed instrumentalities to execute His gracious will. These He has made known in His Word. These He has commanded His people to employ. To these He has annexed His promises. They are God's instruments to effect God's will, and the Church has the commission to administer them. Nothing else can convey the divine grace and effect the divine will unto salvation. We are saved by faith alone in Christ, our Redeemer; but

“...that we may obtain this faith the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For by the Word and Sacraments, as by instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. who works faith. when and where it pleases God, in those that hear the Gospel.”

This ministry is committed to the Church in the great commission given to her to preach the Gospel to all creatures, with the glorious promise that “he

that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Not the Church and the ministry are the means of grace, but the Word and the Sacraments, which God has instituted for the communication of His grace unto salvation through faith in the mighty Savior, “who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.” But these divinely appointed means must be used. The Gospel must be preached, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper must be administered in order to accomplish the divine purpose of their institution. The Lord has committed these means to His Church, giving His people the Holy Spirit to direct them and issuing His command to use them for the salvation of men. He has ordained a special public office of the ministry to this end. that everything might be done in His Church decently and in order. This is of course included in the general commission given to believers, of which we shall have occasion to speak further in a subsequent article. But it is the Word and Sacraments as the means by which the Holy Spirit does His saving work, that here challenge special attention. God has instituted means to do what man cannot do, and He has ordained that His disciples shall faithfully administer these means of Word and Sacrament, that He may work faith in the souls of men. He expects His disciples to trust Him, and not to doubt that this ministry will be effective in accomplishing His gracious will. To the reason of man the divine institution of Word and Sacrament for the accomplishment of the results claimed seems entirely inadequate: all the more reason have believers to cling to their confession of faith, which judges by other standards than those of human wisdom.

Luther’s confidence in the power of the Word seemed to many a learned man of his time childish and silly. It was child like. He had faith. That made him a terror to his foes and a tower of strength to his friends. Strange that we Christians, with the same Word of God before our eyes, should so often tremble when he stood calm and defiant, and even smiling at the impotent rage of opposing hosts. This faith our fathers possessed and expressed in the fifth article of our Confession. It is fundamental, and Lutherans will never attain to the heights of the Lutheran Reformation while they hesitate and reason, reason and vacillate, hesitate and reason and conciliate, respecting the divinely appointed means of grace and the gracious promises of God connected with their use. God has promised to do His saving work through their instrumentality, and where is our faith, or what is that which we call faith, if we do not trust Him?

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Isa. 55:8-11.

What is the trouble with Christians who oppose our Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace, so precious in itself and so fundamental in the economy of grace? If they can trust the promises of God in regard to sunshine and rain, seed-time and harvest, what hinders their trust in these divine promises regarding the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe it? The thought lies near that people “do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God,” and that their reliance is upon nature and reason in the government of the world as well as of the kingdom of God. It would be lamentable if this were the explanation. But be this as it may, we are quite sure, whether men think it possible or not, or whether they like it or not, that “it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” 1 Cor. 1:18-21.

Our Lord sent forth His disciples to win the world with the simple weapon of the Gospel and to prepare them for the toil and the tribulation endured them with faith, which is “the victory that overcometh the world.” This Gospel still seems foolishness to them that perish, and to all proud reason inadequate for the work assigned it; but all Christians whom the Spirit of God has enlightened and led to the appreciation of the truth in Jesus will still with one accord say with the apostle:

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” Rom. 1:16.

To those who are not fully subject to the enlightening and sanctifying power of the Gospel the teaching of salvation through the Sacraments seems even less acceptable than salvation through the Word of the Gospel. If human

reason can construct a plausible argument against salvation by the Word of the Gospel, it seems more potent still in its argument against the saving power exerted in the Sacraments. How reasonable it seems when Christians unfriendly to the Lutheran Church put the question to us, whether we really think that a little water in Baptism can regenerate a sinful soul. and a bit of bread and sup of wine can cause forgiveness of sin. On the ground of mere nature we must as honest people confess ourselves to be beaten. A little water cannot cleanse the soul, and a bit of bread in the communion cannot relieve our souls of the burden of sin. So far the argument is against us. But it is the argument of nature against grace, which is at bottom the argument of man against his Maker. Man cannot save himself: that is certain to every mind that accepts at all the heavenly truth given by revelation in Holy Scripture. No means can be adequate where the power applying it is inadequate. The greatest forces and feats of humanity are just as impotent to save the soul from sin and death as the most trivial exertions and performances of his puny powers. We concede all that opponents claim on the basis of nature and reason, but we concede nothing to the claim that nature and reason must decide in a question that lies entirely beyond their province and their power.

If those who object to the doctrine of our Confession concerning the means of grace are ready to declare that they stand on the ground of reason against revelation, we are ready to admit that on that basis they have the better of the argument, and between them and us the controversy will henceforth be between the Holy Bible and their unholy reason. But with those who reverence the Scriptures and recognize the gracious will and power of God to save His fallen creatures from their guilt and misery we must reason on the basis of faith. On this ground our Confession stands. It is a confession of faith resting on the Word of God, which shall stand when heaven and earth pass away, and according to which all men shall be judged in the final account.

If it is admitted that man cannot save himself, though he exert his inadequate powers to the utmost and perform feats that are wonderful within their limitations, it will no doubt be admitted also that, if God is willing to save, any means which He may choose will be effective because His power is adequate for the accomplishment of His purpose. When it is once believed that the infinite goodness of God comes to our rescue from the damnation of hell, all arguments against the adequacy of the means which

His omnipotence employs in the service of His in finite mercy must seem unutterably little. Does not God know how to accomplish His gracious and glorious work? Is it possible that souls should be led by the grace of the Holy Spirit to the acknowledgment of Christ as their Savior and still put querulous and quarrelsome questions about the means which His wisdom and mercy see fit to employ in order to bring us to Christ and save us from the curse of sin? God pity us poor mortals in our waywardness! O Lord, increase our faith!

The Holy Sacraments belong to the Gospel dispensation. Baptism saves us, not because the action of a minister or the nature of water can avail for our righteousness or be efficacious for our cleansing from sin, but because God so ordains. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Mark 16:16. That is the divine decree, and it stands as the will of God, who alone can save, whatever our querulous reason in its incompetency to judge of God's thoughts and ways, may argue to and fro about it. God knows, and God is good; above all that we know or think His goodness attains beneficent results for our salvation. But we must learn His ways and by the power of the Holy Spirit trust His ways. They are the ways of peace and blessedness. Distrust always works disaster. Peace cannot come to those who have no confidence in the Word and work of the Lord.

If Christian people will not trust in His Word, they have no assurance; and as a necessary consequence they will "be tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Eph. 4:14. God wills to exercise His grace, which effected an atonement through the life and death of His Son, by the application of the Savior's merits through the Sacrament of Baptism, that whosoever believeth and is baptized might be saved. Therefore our Savior says:

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again." John 3:5-8.

Hence it is said in the Scriptures:

“After that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Tit. 3:4-7.

And in accordance with this divine plan the direction was given to the subsequent apostle:

“Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Acts 22:16.

Hence it is too that this apostle declares:

“As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal. 3:27.

In Baptism the Holy Spirit applies the redemption which is in Christ Jesus and accomplishes the work of salvation which was devised in the counsel of the Holy Trinity, according to which the Father sent His Son into the world of sinners, the Son became ‘man to live and die under the law in the sinners’ stead, and the Holy Spirit applies through Word and Sacrament the righteousness acquired by the Savior’s merits. The means of grace are only the means chosen by divine grace to apply the salvation which the Lamb of God has secured. We are baptized into Christ, that the salvation which He has acquired for all men may by faith be ours.

It is the same purpose of grace that is expressed and executed in the Holy Supper. The body of our Lord crucified and the blood shed for us on the cross are communicated to the disciples that they might have part in the merit and righteousness which His vicarious obedience unto death secured for all men and which are now offered to all men for their reception by faith. “Given and shed for you for the remission of sins,” is the assurance which the Lord gives to those who are invited to His Holy Supper. What trouble could Christians have about believing it? Of course our intellect, benighted by sin and rendered utterly incompetent to apprehend and judge spiritual things, which lie wholly beyond the depths into which our nature has fallen, has no end of difficulties about the holy Sacrament of the Altar, and in the best case can make nothing of it but a symbol. That is natural. So much we can understand by nature that flesh can profit nothing in things of

the soul, and this is presumed to apply as well to the flesh of our Lord as to any other flesh. Hence reason insists that some mistake is made when our Lord declares that what He communicates, when He administers the bread and wine of the Sacrament, is His body and blood.

It is suggested that to make it intelligible to human minds He should have said, This is an emblem of my body. this is a symbol of my blood. And then further cogitations set in. What is all this for? What use can there be in such a solemn play of the imagination in surroundings so evidently meant to be sacred? “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” — what can this mean? How can bread and wine convey forgiveness of sins? How can a symbol be effectual for the sinful soul’s salvation? How can an emblem be shed for the remission of sins? The more our reason pursues its investigations, the more the difficulties multiply. No wonder that some give up in despair and reject the Lord’s Supper entirely. Christians should learn the lesson that giving heed to the reasonings of men in matters of divine revelation is the road to ruin.

Again we repeat, that ours is a Confession of Christian faith, which knows no difficulty when the Lord speaks. What is beyond our ken He fully understands, and He will provide, that the assurances of His Word shall not fail. He will do what He says. Therefore the Lutheran Church humbly trusts the Lord’s Word, in child-like faith believing not only that the Lord’s body and blood are communicated in the Holy Supper, but, what is more, that this is for the remission of sins.

God can save us, and according to His teaching and promise He means to save us by the Holy Spirit’s application of the redemption in Christ Jesus through the Word and the Sacraments instituted for the purpose. Instead of rationalistic quibblings and ever increasing doubts and difficulties about it as the quibblings proceed, the believer simply accepts the Word and is glad. God does for us above all that we are able to ask or think, and by His Word we know it. The complete realization of it all in the Christian’s experience is a different matter, and the souls, regardless of the Holy Scriptures and therefore unversed in the ways of God, who assume that now the flesh no longer lusts against the Spirit and are therefore discouraged when the fact of such lusting makes its appearance in their consciousness, leading some to deny the sinfulness of the sin that is in them, some to despair of their salvation, and some to pronounce the whole divine work of redemption a myth, are all astray. If men loved the Lord Jesus and the souls that He purchased

with His blood, their study of this subject alone would suffice to show the utter fallacy of their contention against the Lutheran stress laid upon sound doctrine and would enable them to see that thousands even of those who profess to love the Lord Jesus are perishing for lack of knowledge, though their good intentions are not impeached. But this merely by the way. What is here impressed is the precious truth that God has instituted means which really communicate grace unto salvation, and that the believer really apprehends the grace by the faith which lays hold of the divine promise, though his intellect may fail to realize in its fullness the gladness and the glory of it all. We live by faith, not by sight.

3. The Holy Spirit Works The Faith Which Embraces Salvation in Christ Through Means

Our Confession further sets forth the faith of Lutheran Christians, that by the means of God's institution the Holy Spirit works the faith which embraces the salvation in Christ. To the unsteady faith and superficial thinking of many Christians this seems to cut the Gordian knot that cannot be untied. It does not: it sets forth God's easy way of solving a problem which to our natural reason is incapable of solution. Faith receives on solid grounds what to benighted reason must ever seem groundless and improbable.

“The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” Ps. 119:1:30.

The problem is apparently one that might easily drive the thinker to despair of any reasonable solution. Man by reason of the fall is dead in trespasses and sins. The whole spiritual world is shut off from his vision and he sits in utter darkness. God sent His Son to redeem our race. Our natural blindness is no obstacle in the way of that manifestation of divine love. Its purpose was executed in the Savior's life and death. The Redeemer's work was finished with its terrible end upon the cross, and was approved and accepted and confirmed by His glorious resurrection and ascension. This finished work was announced to the world in the Gospel, and a universal amnesty

was thus declared for reception by faith. But the people who hear the gracious news are spiritually dead in their sin. The whole proclamation of good tidings is foolishness to them, and an insult to their intelligence. Naturally they do not believe it, and naturally they cannot believe it. It does not accord with their reason, and there is no power within them to bring about the accord necessary for its acceptance. So faith seems impossible, and many lay great stress on the natural inability of man to believe the Gospel and find in it incontrovertible proof that Christianity is unreasonable, while others in their folly proceed to reduce Christianity to an alleged rational basis by eliminating the Gospel and rendering all preaching acceptable by its rationalism. It is no wonder that under existing conditions such a result should be reached. But Rationalism is not the revealed way of salvation, any more than is the Sentimentalism which assumes that our natural instincts, including those of our human conscience, are the proper expression of our human nature according to our original endowment as created in the image of God. All that is holy and highest in that endowment was lost by the fall into sin, which means a fall away from God and our divine destiny. Our help is alone in God. If He does not help us, all is lost, and our everlasting ruin is complete. He has come to our rescue. In His infinite love He sent His Son to save us. The Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, became one of us and lived and died to fulfill all righteousness in our stead. Shall we not believe the good tidings and be glad?

But how can we? "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." To that conclusion all sincere people must come before they can enter into the kingdom of God. The help needed for souls lost through sin is provided in Christ, who is the way and the truth and the life. But man has no ability to grasp the hand extended to help him. Is then the whole divine plan for his rescue a failure for lack of the necessary provision for conveying the life to the dead? Not so.

"That we may obtain this faith the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For by the Word and Sacraments, as by instruments, the Holy Spirit is given; who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in those that hear the Gospel."

The main point thus presented is that God has left no chasm in His gracious arrangement for the salvation of sinners, but has instituted the means of grace to apply the redemption through Jesus' blood, and thus to complete

the divine plan of salvation by grace alone, through Christ alone, by the means of grace alone, through faith alone, that all the glory of our condemned humanity's rescue from its just doom of perdition might be God's alone.

Of course this whole plan of salvation has been criticized and will in all time be criticized by the reason with which God has for good purposes endowed us, but which has been blinded by sin and become incompetent to fulfill the purpose of our Creator and has thus become an enemy of our Redeemer. This criticism begins with the proclamation of the good tidings of our redemption and follows step by step the history of that glorious achievement. It quibbles at the incarnation of the Son of God, at His birth of a virgin, at His death and resurrection, at His ascension into heaven and session on the right hand of God, at His mission of the Holy Spirit, at His institution of the means of grace, at His requirement of faith at all, and then especially at His emphasis upon the fact that without Him we can do nothing. Thus the entire Gospel revelation must seem a product of frenzied brains. Not only at some point here and there does reason raise its objections, but to it the Gospel in all its essential features is foolishness. Under such circumstances we Christians of the Augsburg Confession have a vocation that is as full of tribulation to the flesh as it is of glory to the Spirit; and our disadvantage, in the 'world's estimate, is apparent. All reason, contracted by sin within the narrow compass of the flesh, is against us; and all Christendom, outside of our communion of faith, is against us. This seems strange, and we do not wonder that the situation constitutes a confirmatory argument of the flesh against us. Even many Christians, whose sincerity we are under the law of charity not privileged to doubt, are against us. Must we not admire and adore the grace of God that enables the Church of the Augsburg Confession, under such troubles and trials, to stand fast still in the simple faith of the Gospel, that Christ redeemed us and the Holy Spirit applies the redemption through the Word and the Sacraments, and that faith appropriates the merits of Christ conveyed to us in the means of grace, and rejoices in the great salvation? Reason may rail against the children of the Reformation in their childlike faith, and charge them with all manner of ignorance and superstition. But we abide by the Word of the Lord, which is sure, and which shall stand when all the schemes and speculations of reason have been swept away in the final crash.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.” Ps. 46:1-5.

Difficulties of various kinds have been started regarding our Confession touching the means of grace. Reason in its blindness cannot be reconciled to the truth imparted by revelation. How can the preaching of the Gospel, which is to the natural man foolishness, convert a soul? How can Baptism, with the application of the natural element of water, be the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost? How can the reception of a bit of bread and the reception of a sip of wine be the assurance of the forgiveness of sins? Apparently we might as well abandon the argument. But for this believers are by no means ready. They believe, and that means as far as they are concerned the Word] of God shall stand, what ever else may fall. They know that, when heaven and earth shall have passed away, that shall be the rule according to which all earthly things shall be judged. They are sure, for the Word of the Lord endureth forever. When all human science and philosophy shall have lost its footing, that shall stand. In our temporal limitations, all the more because these limitations have been rendered wholly incompetent by sin to judge things spiritual, we seek light in the revelation given us in Holy Scripture. The entrance of God’s Word giveth light. That removes all difficulties by referring us to the infinite love and wisdom and power of God, who is over all. God works all in all; that is the Christian’s assurance in all the opposition of the world and all the quibbles that it may suggest to those who are not of the world.

In our times the simple faith of Christians has been tried by the suggestion of men who profess adherence to our Scriptural Confession, that the Calvinistic departure from the Church of the Reformation was substantially right. They are substantially wrong. God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, and with Him there is no respect of persons. Some are saved, and some, notwithstanding the salvation provided for all alike, are lost. Calvinism is a logical deduction that is all astray from the Scriptures, notwithstanding the incidental statements that seem to favor the speculation. It explains nothing; it works upon a theory different from that of the Gospel; it undermines the Gospel and seeks to set up a human system

of salvation in its stead. This rational system is based indeed on statements that seem to justify it, but are only subordinate parts of God's large plan of salvation and are therefore wholly misinterpreted when separated from that plan and made the ground work of their human system. Under Satan's management the very Word of God is made a substratum for his satanic devices, and many an unsuspecting Christian is thus caught in his snare and brought to destruction. The Gospel and the Sacraments are the divine way and means of bringing to lost souls the salvation which infinite love has prepared for all lost souls. We are all lost in sin, and Christ died for all that He might redeem us all. There is nothing that man can do or devise that can help him. He is lost, and only God can save him. The simplest way out of the difficulty is the rational assumption that God elects the persons whom He will save and accordingly saves them by His Almighty power, or that He elects those who by their virtue show themselves worthy of election. The one scheme of thought is Calvinism, the other is Pelagianism. No doubt one is as wise as the other, for both are the products of the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God. We gain nothing, we lose much, by such philosophical speculations about righteousness and salvation. Let us humbly submit to the grace of God, which leads us to see our own unworthiness and our utter helplessness, but opens our eyes to behold the wonders of divine grace which saves us. This is the way of our Confession. We do not understand it all, but we do by the power of the Holy Spirit believe that we have salvation in Christ through faith in His name. That is enough for our comfort and for our worship.

Meantime we do not deny that when men think about the matter there are difficulties to be encountered. How could it be otherwise when our human thought is brought face to face with the divine thought that is not ours, and that by our nature and the conditions presented never could be ours? Our thoughts are not God's thoughts, and our ways are not God's ways. He saves us in His own way, which is the only way that is effectual. He saves us by grace, He saves us through Christ, He saves us by the Word and Sacraments, He saves us by faith. The divine way is effectual, and there is no other way. Lutheran Christians by the power of the Holy Spirit accept that way, and in humble faith rejoice in the great salvation which that faith embraces.

That faith is not disturbed by their confessional statement that the Holy Spirit "works faith, where and when it pleases God, in those that hear the

Gospel.” On the contrary, it is the expression of their faith. They know that God does all the work and that He does it according to His good pleasure. We can do nothing, and accordingly contribute nothing to the great consummation of our salvation. God does it all. Our Confession excludes all thought of man’s cooperation in the work of grace. He has only his sin to bring to God, and God’s grace alone can save him from the curse and the burden of that sin. But by the grace of God he believes. That is the blessed result of the Holy Spirit’s work in His soul, and in that the ministry of the Word and Sacrament fulfills its mission. That this is done “where and when God pleases in those that hear the Gospel,” ought to present itself to the minds of all believers as a matter of course. God does it all according to His own good and gracious will, not according to the reasonings and feelings and vagaries of His creatures. And He pleases to do it “in those that hear the Gospel,” not according to the devices of men who think that He ought to do it here and there, and now and then, as they have made their preparations for it and calculations on it. He pays no regard to the supposed rational schemes of men, though they be professed believers, who lay their plans for conversions in startling numbers at this convenient place or that, at this convenient time or that. He chooses His own place and time, but always does His work through the means of grace and therefore always and only “in those that hear the Gospel.” The speculation of reason, that He has chosen a certain number from the mass of perdition and now pleases to do His saving work only in those select and preferred persons, is an insult to our fathers who made their good confession at Augsburg with its joyful proclamation of grace and salvation for all men through faith in the Lamb of God who tasted death for every man and taketh away the sins of the world. On the part of God ample provision is made for the salvation of all men. The love of God embraces the world, the Savior has borne the sins of the world, the good tidings of salvation are to be proclaimed to all the world. If any are not saved it is not because there is some secret will or some unfortunate oversight on the part of God by which they were passed by and left hopelessly to perish in their sin. The means of grace are effectual for all, and only where and when the creature obstinately resists the way of God, presuming to choose his own way. is the will of God thwarted and the effect not produced. The explanation of this unhappy case is found in the manifest fact, that man was created after the image of God and therefore endowed with intelligence and will, and that in His dealings with His fallen creature

He was not pleased to treat him otherwise than as He had made him. He would not force a soul into the glory of heaven. We will not say that He could not: that opens too wide a field for our present purpose and would help us little. God pursues His ways of mercy and goodness, and in His infinite wisdom does not consult our puny reason, which even in its original greatness never reached the heights of redemption through the incarnation of the Son of God. He saves us by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. If many resent this grace, as it humiliates the human intelligence and denies its power of recuperation, the Lord pities them, but if they persist in their sin they are lost. The whole plan of salvation through Christ admits no factor of human reason that would seemingly modify its conditions. God alone can save us. He saves us by the means of grace. If any reject the grace thus offered to all, that is their concern, and the responsibility rests upon them. God gives all the power necessary to overcome the natural hostility of our sinful souls to the gift of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, but will not coerce it to the acceptance of the grace offered in Christ. God is good to all, and offers salvation to all in the means of grace where and when He pleases, but never bends His will to the proud and presumptuous will of His impenitent creatures, who will not accept the truth of God, that He, “not for the sake of our merits, but for Christ’s sake, justifies those who believe that they for Christ’s sake are received into favor.” Nature can subject itself to no such humiliation. and therefore those who persist in their own powers, and in their utter helplessness ignorantly or maliciously persist in their own ability, are lost in their self-conceited inability and miserable imagination of ability to help themselves and work out their own salvation. It is a pitiable case, but there is no help for it.

4. The Answer To Those Who Believe The Holy Spirit Is Given Apart From The Word

One more point of our article demands attention. It is the antithesis of the evangelical truth set forth in our Confession.

“Our churches condemn the Anabaptists and others, who imagine that the Holy Spirit is given to men without the outward Word. through their own preparations and works.”

There is great reason in Scripture and experience for the warning which the concluding sentence of the article contains.

It is one of the striking weaknesses of the Protestant Churches which refuse the great Augsburg Confession, that they declined to accept the Gospel teaching concerning the means of grace and thus left a yawning and disheartening gap in their presentation of God’s plan of salvation. It is a weakness that runs through the whole Reformed system in its distinction from the Evangelical Lutheran. Not only the fanatical Anabaptists, allowing the plain words of Scripture to be swept away by the floods of human reason and feeling and fancy, but even the more sober-minded among the opponents of the pure doctrine confessed by the Lutherans were converts to a human theory respecting the operations of the Holy Spirit, which is historically known as the Reformed type of Protestantism, and which, whether Zwinglian or Calvinistic, Methodist or Baptist, Episcopal or Presbyterian, has no place in its faith for the means of grace and therefore no room in its thinking and experience for the teaching of Scripture concerning them. It is a vital defect, and it is no harsh judgment when Lutherans pronounce it in excusable. All believers must eventually come to see, although it should be only in the beatific vision of the future glory, that not our thoughts, but only God’s thoughts and ways are effectual in the final outcome.

Reformed parties, Pelagians of various grades and Predestinarians of various types. argue that we are saved without such means. The former assume that we attain the end by the strenuous exertion of our own powers. With them the means of grace are their own preparations and works, and they can see the need of nothing more to save their sinful souls, which in their estimation are not so sinful after all. The Predestinarians, or Calvinists,

can see no need for the divine appointment of means to produce justifying faith in those that hear the Gospel, because they assume that God has selected a favored few who shall be saved, and that by His almighty power He saves these and these alone, so that no means could save the others, and any and all means would be practically useless, because they could save no one but those who would be saved anyhow and in any event.

Accordingly the Reformed Churches with one accord raise their voices against the simple faith of the Gospel declared in our Confession. It may seem harsh to say it, but we could not be faithful to our Lord and His Gospel if we did not say it, that the Reformed Churches hearken to the voice of fallen humanity in its various forms of Rationalism and Sentimentalism. Evolutionism and Spiritism, Estheticism and Moralism. while the Lutheran Church abides by the truth in Jesus as written for our learning in Holy Scripture. Reformed parties cannot understand how the Word of God, without our human wisdom and power, could accomplish the great things recorded in the Gospel. and promised for all time until the Lord shall return to judge the earth according to that Gospel, which all the earth should hear; and least of all can they understand how such great things should be brought about by the administration of the Sacraments. And therefore they oppose the Evangelical doctrine of the means of grace which our Confession sets forth. On the basis of our natural knowledge they are right. If faith is to be left out of the account we have no satisfactory answer to their reasoning. How can water cleanse the soul from sin? How can bread and wine sanctify the soul and give it the blissful assurance that it is cleansed from sin and inherits by grace through faith the blessedness of the redemption through Jesus' blood? We have no reply that could satisfy our own reason, much less the reason of our opponents. But we must remind these opponents that our Augsburg Confession is a declaration of our Christian faith, which rests on the supernatural revelation given in the Gospel, and that if they mean to defend their opposition to our faith on other grounds, the controversy resolves itself into a contest between the Bible, on the one hand with its supernatural revelation, and the reason of man, the creature fallen from God and whom God desires to save, on the other hand. It is a controversy between God and His saving grace and man in his perversity.

The Lutheran doctrine of salvation through the means divinely appointed for the communication of this salvation in Word and Sacrament is fundamental. To superficial thinking it may seem a small thing. But it is a ques-

tion of faith. Shall God's Word prevail, or shall we hearken to the voice of our nature against the grace of God which alone can help? God alone can save us. He saves us by His grace. He saves us through Christ. He saves us by His appointed means. He saves us through faith, which He works by these means. All is well with them that believe.

Article VI. Of New Obedience.

Also they teach that this faith should bring forth good fruits, and that men ought to do good works commanded of God, because it is God's will, and not on any confidence of meriting justification before God by their works. For remission of sins and justification is apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ witnesses: "When ye have done all these things say, We are unprofitable servants." Luke 17:10. The same also the ancient writers of the Church teach. For Ambrose says: "This is ordained of God, that he who believes in Christ shall be saved without works, by faith alone, freely receiving remission of sins."

ARTICLE VI. stands closely related to the two preceding articles. God has redeemed us through the mission of His Son and has provided for the application of the great salvation to all men by the power of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. So great is the import of this salvation that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the three Persons of the one Triune God, are equally concerned in its accomplishment.

God is love. The Father so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son to be born of a woman and made under the law for our rescue as our Substitute under its righteous condemnation. The Son so loved the world that He freely offered His sinless life as a sacrifice and ransom for its sins. The Holy Spirit so loved the world that He applied and still applies the merits of the Savior to the souls of men that they might believe and rejoice forever in the great salvation. The three Persons of the Godhead, who are one in essence, are in absolute accord in divine love which seeks our salvation. They are the one God who is love. But they are the one God who is holiness and righteousness as well as love, and who therefore in His wisdom devised the way of salvation according to which, by the cooperation of the three divine Persons in its execution, He could be just and still the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. The love of the Father sends the Son to save us by faith. The love of the Son offers himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, that to as many as received Him He might give power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name. The love

of the Holy Spirit works effectually through the appointed means of Word and Sacrament that whosoever will may come and drink of the waters of life freely and by His gracious power be led to believe and enjoy the merits of Christ unto their salvation, without money and without price, by faith alone. It is a wonderful plan of incomprehensible love. We are saved by grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, applied by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, and appropriated by faith alone, without the deeds of the law.

But that is the stone at which our fallen human nature in the pride of its reason stumbles. It claims some power of its own and some merit for the exercise of that power. This will not astonish believers any more than it will unbelievers. It is the natural expression of the human heart in its misery and blindness of sin. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and have found peace in believing know how it is. They know it even better than those who have rejected the Gospel of peace, because they are fully assured of the utter hopelessness of human help when God is against us. We are condemned sinners, and our condemnation is just. How shall we be justified? We know how deluded human nature answers. The answer is always to the effect that we must gather all our energies to do right and buckle on our armor to fight against the wrong. The answer is commendable, if it is not promising to minds that are alert. It is a good thing that human souls are aroused to a sense of right and to a determination to do the right. It is not a good thing when in their sinful self-conceit they suppose themselves capable in their condition of estrangement from God and rebellion against His government, of doing the right, which is always doing His holy will. That will is not our will. The will of the rebel is not the will of the Lord. The will of the flesh and the will of the Spirit are not the same, but contrary, the one to the other. The conflict is inevitable. The Gospel declares the fulfillment in our stead of all righteousness by the Savior, and offers that as a gift of grace to be received with gratitude by helpless souls, who cannot fulfill the required righteousness themselves. The sinner braces himself in his fancied dignity and refuses to acknowledge his indebtedness to another for what he imagines himself capable of doing himself. It is humiliating to human pride that salvation should be regarded by grace rather than personal merit, and that another should pay the debt which it regards itself amply sufficient to pay by its own effort. It is hard for man to acknowledge his spiritual bankruptcy and to confess his dependence on divine grace. But that is our real condition

by nature, and the fact must be recognized before we can flee for refuge to the hope set before us in Christ. We are lost, and only God can save us. This the soul must recognize before it can have joyous part and peace in the great salvation in Christ by faith in His name. Hence the great difficulty which man finds in being reconciled to the way of the Gospel. Naturally no man believes it.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” Eph. 2:8, 9.

Hence reason continually seeks some way to save the honor of humanity by imputing to man some share at least in the work of salvation, if he cannot make good his title to the glory of it all. This accounts for the need which our fathers felt for the introduction into our Confession of an article on the new obedience which faith establishes, as against the self-righteousness which reason claims.

1. Of Course Good Works Ought To Be Done

“They teach that this faith should bring forth good fruits, and that men ought to do good works commanded of God because it is God’s will, and not on any confidence of meriting justification before God by their works.”

The Lutheran Church never questioned whether good works, which God commands, ought to be done or not. How could those who accept the Holy Scriptures as God’s Word raise or entertain any such question? Who are we that we should start or harbor a doubt about the obligation of God’s commandments? Lutheran Christians are people who know the Lord and hearken when the Lord speaks. As such people they can not for a moment give place to the rebellious thought that God may command what He pleases and they can do what they please. Such thoughts are far from the minds of Christian believers, to whom the Holy Spirit gives the same mind which was also in Christ.

Men ought to do good works commanded of God. The obligation is laid upon them as His creatures. And when they become Christians the obligation is doubly laid upon them as the redeemed of the Lord. Whether they

recognize it or not, all men are bound to do the Lord's will and will be required to give an account of their deeds.

On the judgment day no disobedience can be excused. But Christians are not only conscious of their accountability to their Maker and Preserver, but have the additional incentive to abound in good works in the faith in their Redeemer, which the Holy Spirit has wrought in their hearts.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10.

When adversaries point to our evangelical doctrine of justification by faith in Christ, without the deeds of the law, in proof of their contention that we discourage good works and have no place for them in the order of salvation, they only manifest their inability to appreciate the Gospel while they persist in urging the dictates of reason against the grace and truth of revelation. In accordance with the wisdom of God set forth in the Scriptures, which to our fallen nature seems foolishness, our Confession asserts its unwavering adherence to the Word of God in this as in every other respect.

The words in which the truth concerning good works is expressed merit thoughtful attention. In the face of the persistent hostility to the doctrine of justification confessed by the Lutheran Church and the specious arguments of reason with which she is assailed on the Romish assumption that it undermines all motive to sanctification, the Confession, so far from showing any signs of weakness or making any concessions to the enemy, again puts faith in the foreground. It is the indispensable condition of justification because it alone appropriates the righteousness acquired for us by our Savior as the only righteousness which avails before God; but it is also the one thing needful to bring forth truly good works. Natural religion, and interpretations of the Christian religion which disregard the cardinal truth of the Gospel with its message of salvation by grace in Christ through faith alone, while they bring a strong pressure to bear on the soul in their appeal to our inborn selfishness and thus spur on to manifold works, lack every thing necessary to render these works good. This is a matter in regard to which men are always and everywhere deceiving themselves, and must continue to do so as long as they shut out the light of evangelical truth. In virtue of that mysterious element in his nature which we call conscience man approves the right as against the wrong, and commends as good what is right and condemns as

not good what is wrong. This is not the place to explain how it is possible for a power to exist as a witness for the good in a soul that by reason of the fall is only evil. It is the fact that is of vital import in this connection, and the fact, as the Bible exhibits it, is a matter of universal experience. The universe is built and conducted on the principle of righteousness, and every departure from it in the volitions and actions of creatures endowed with will, in whom and through whom alone such aberrations from the will of the Creator and Ruler of the universe are possible, produces a discord that means disaster and distress, whether we see it or not, or rightly or wrongly interpret it when we see it. And to this righteousness conscience is attuned, although our fallen nature is out of harmony with it.

Accordingly mankind theoretically approves the right, and continues to approve it even when practically it prefers the wrong. The possibilities of degradation are great in our humanity fallen from the height of its original endowment and destiny, but while the cases of brutishness in the depths of sin are many, the cases of the devilishness, in which wrong is thought preferable to right, are comparatively rare. We can therefore count on the approval of men generally when we advocate good works. Even those who, held captive by the sin that enslaves them, are not in sympathy with them, as a rule do not condemn them. The exception lies only in the domain of the spiritual, for which the natural man has no understanding. While his judgment in regard to the law of righteousness will be one of approval, his judgment of the Gospel and therefore in regard to all subjects determined by it, will be that it is all foolishness. Accordingly the whole weight of human power and influence favors good works. Seemingly it does this with the same zeal and earnestness with which the Gospel and the Lutheran Church urges them. Nay, it even seems to surpass us in compass because it includes the appeals to the interests of the natural man, which we must on our evangelical ground exclude as a motive to good works. Indeed the Lutheran Church in this respect appears to labor under a great disadvantage. Is it not charged upon her that she depreciates good works? And do not all orders and societies which seek to reform this wicked world charge her, and with her all the Christian churches, with failure to put in effect among men the great principles of charity rooting in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men? It is a sorrowful subject, indicating with painful perspicuity the world's attitude towards the Gospel revelation of man's estrangement from God the Father, and the only possible reconciliation through the medi-

ation of His Only-begotten Son, through whom alone, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the prodigal can come back to the bosom of the Father and a brotherhood can be formed in Christ that can take the place of the world that has renounced God and lieth in wickedness. Of the introduction of a new life with a new light for the restoration of a lost race through the Gospel, and the establishment of a kingdom of God by the Holy Spirit's regenerating power wherein dwelleth righteousness, even the righteousness of Christ by faith, the benighted world knows nothing and, though the truth be proclaimed to it by the inspiration of God, it desires to know nothing. It is utterly lost in sin, and there is no help for it and no hope for it but in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Meantime the approval of right as against wrong continues, and good works are esteemed and applauded. But, alas! the ability to discriminate between works that seem good and works that are good is, entirely lacking. Our benighted nature cannot rise above the level of sin into which it has fallen, and can apply only such tests as remain in its condition of sin. In that low sphere it can still discriminate. The will and command of the Creator is of course the only reasonable rule for the creature. He made us for a purpose, and to accomplish that purpose is our destiny and duty. Hence our Confession says "that men ought to do good works commanded of God, because it is God's will." But man in his fallen nature has only a limited knowledge of God's will for his conscience to work upon, and no inclination at all to do-that will even so far as he knows it. In his defection from God he has taken refuge in self, and self has of course become the center of his being and the spring and criterion of his judgments. In consequence of this he places many things into the category of right that are contrary to the will of God, and the sanction of conscience is secured by the false judgment of his depraved heart.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jer. 17:9.

The zeal for good works manifesting itself in the world, whether in its public or private professions and performances, whether in its secular or religious organizations, is therefore no evidence that Christianity has pervaded the persons and organizations manifesting such zeal; and making the paramount importance attached to the profession and practice of good works the

fundamental and final test of pure Christianity is therefore, in the light of Holy Scripture, a wicked and dangerous delusion. It is a delusion, because the Christian revelation is not at all the communication of a new law to supplant that given through Moses, as if this were essentially defective and quite inadequate for the purpose of making known the righteous demands which God makes upon His intelligent creatures. Those who think of the Gospel as only an addition to the law, under whose condemnation the whole sinful world already lies, have no conception of what the Gospel means and of the mercy for man which it reveals in Christ. It is a wicked delusion, because it substitutes for the great salvation by faith in a crucified Savior and the sinner's justification through the merits of our mighty and merciful Savior the poor and impotent product of human wisdom which leaves the soul helpless in its death and damnation. And it is a dangerous delusion, because many a soul that might be led by the Gospel to the peace which comes by the faith of the operation of God is lost by hearkening to the seductive voice of the siren that sings of man's own righteousness and dignity and glory. The natural man prides himself upon his imaginary powers; human societies boast of their beneficence and the wonderful deeds which they have done for the amelioration of human suffering; and the Romanists and kindred sects exhaust their vocabularies in praise of good works. Is it not all right?

Well, it might be all right; for "men ought to do good works." But it has so many radical faults that the question is rightfully raised whether, after all, it is not all wrong. Surely this is not all wrong, that "men ought to do good works." It is wrong in no particular. Without all controversy and without any modification, "men ought to do good works commanded of God, because it is God's will." What God wills is also the will of all God's true children, however far they may come short of fulfilling it. They will what God wills, and are always penitent confessors of their sin when they see that they have come short of it, or have transgressed it. For that reason the life of evangelical believers is always a life of daily sorrow and repentance on account of their sin as well as of daily triumph in the assurance of the forgiveness of sin by faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. This is all clear and consolatory and glorious. But it is all this on the foundation of the Gospel: And not all glorification of good works rests on this foundation. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, and much of this zeal for good works and boasting of its achievements

proceed from the natural man. That admonishes us to distinguish, that we may not fall into a delusion and a snare of the devil. Our Confession sets forth the plain truth when it declares the teaching of our churches to be “that this faith should bring forth good fruits, and that men ought to do good works commanded of God, because it is God’s will.”

That brings to the notice of Christians two things that are important for all men, but which can appeal effectually only to Christian believers. One is that the test of good works is the commandment of God. The other is that faith brings forth the good fruits which the commandment of God requires.

God’s Commandments Are The Test of Good Works

The works of the natural man, though dictated by a sentiment of benevolence which favorably distinguishes it from the more brutish sentiment of indifference to all human welfare except our own, are not for that reason good. The sentiment of man under rational culture is morally superior to the sentiment of man in his savage state. Relatively one man is better than another, and one people is better than another, although all are still in the condition of our fallen and selfish and sinful nature. Whether a work is good in God’s sight does not depend on the higher or lower degree of man’s conformity to the natural sentiment of benevolence which exists in our corrupt nature. Socrates is better than a Nero; an upright worldling is better than a brutish sot. But they all move in the sphere of the natural man in his spiritual, death, great as the difference must be recognized to be in their moral worth within that sphere. But the Christian test lies beyond that domain. The works which alone can be recognized as good by Christians are those which God has commanded. The reason is obvious. Since the catastrophe in Eden, God and man are opposite. This lies not in any divine necessity. The creature and the Creator can of course not be coordinate. The Maker must of necessity be greater than the thing made. But the Creator did not call other beings into existence that they might vex Him with war. Neither in the constitution of man, nor in the place and purpose assigned to him in the universe, were there appointments that would of necessity bring about rebellion against the Lord of all and therefore end in unspeakable disaster upon those who attempted His dethronement.

The mystery of iniquity is beyond human solution; but the fact is clearly set forth in the revelation which the Maker and Lord of all has given us in

the Bible, that man was constituted in complete harmony with the Lord's will, created after His own image, and designed to be happy in his service of God and the accomplishment of His good will. Other creatures were made subject to man, that the harmony throughout the universe might be perfect. There could be no discord while the holy will of God was done throughout the universe. But the inscrutable plan of divine wisdom and love involved the possibility of insubordination to this holy and happy will in the creation of man as a creature endowed with a will also, that he might be an intelligent coworker with God and have the blessedness of walking and working with Him by his own choice. The possibility became a reality when sin entered. Man exercised his glorious freedom in an inglorious choice. He willed against the will of God. Instead of pursuing the goal which his Maker set for him, and in the pursuit and attainment of which his created nature could alone be satisfied and upon which therefore his happiness depended, he presumed to determine his own goal and choose his own destiny in the accomplishment of his own will. He fell. He disregarded the will of his Maker and made his own will his law. Of course discord entered: the original harmony was broken. Man refused to be led by the Spirit of God and declared himself independent. He became carnal.

“The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Rom. 8:7.

And as the intelligent creature, that was made for blessedness in communion with his Maker and designed to share in the pleasure which God had in the holy harmony of creation, decided to set up an empire for himself and declare against the sovereignty of the Lord of all, how could it be otherwise than that God should in His righteousness declare against him? The thought is stupid that God would abdicate His throne in favor of a misguided creature that presumed to set up his own will against that of God; and the thought is unutterably stupid that the Maker of all should be terrified by the defiance of a creature that lives only by His sufferance and is utterly devoid of power except such as He is pleased to bestow. He neither resigns His sovereignty nor shrinks from the conflict, but

“...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Rom. 1:18.

Man has set up a dominion of his own and will not be subject to the law of God. Who now shall reign? The natural man, ignorant of all spiritual truth and power, naturally presumes that human reason and sentiment must reign. He knows of nothing higher and better. But Christians do. With us therefore the question must always be whether God's Word or man's wisdom shall rule. Alas, that so many professing Christians fail to see the point which is fundamental in the whole subject: God alone must reign, or all is lost. He will not submit to man; man must submit to Him. Hence the admonition, whose importance cannot be overestimated:

"In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matt. 15:9.

Individuals and societies and churches have flooded the world with precepts and rules and ordinances, compliance with which are accounted good works. Are they such? The test which Lutherans apply, and which all Christians must apply according to the Scriptures, is the question whether God has commanded them in the revelation given us of His will.

"To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." Isa. 8:20.

Not those are good works which men devise and ordain, but those which God has commanded. If this is kept in mind, as Christian believers may rightfully be expected to know it and keep it in mind, it will be observed that a large portion of the good works lauded by the world as great and glorious are not good works at all in the light of Holy Scripture, and that the charges against the Lutheran Church of indifference to good works are merely ignorant or malicious railings against her, because she is steadfast in her faith that God alone is Lord of His created universe, and that they worship Him in vain who teach for doctrines the commandments of men. Lutheran Christians are free servants of the Lord, and therefore can be induced neither by menaces nor allurements to become the slaves of men by subjecting themselves to any authority that would supplant that of God and His Word.

Faith Brings Forth The Good Fruits Required

The second point to be noted is that the faith which alone appropriates the righteousness acquired by our Savior and thus alone justifies before God, “should bring forth good fruits.” Not only is the doctrine of justification by faith alone not inconsistent with the doctrine that “men ought to do good works commanded of God,” but it is indispensable for the accomplishment of the divine will in this regard.

“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.”
Rom. 3:31.

This applies to the sinner’s sanctification as well as to his justification, because it is the apostolic vindication of the divine order of salvation. We do not make void the law when we preach the righteousness of God by faith, because all righteousness of the law was fulfilled in the obedience of our Substitute and Savior even unto death. He did all that in righteousness was required of us as God’s intelligent creatures; He suffered all that righteousness required as our penalty when we failed in fulfilling this requirement. We do not make void the law when we preach that its fulfillment is no longer demanded of those who believe, because the grace which makes them partakers of the righteousness of Christ by faith makes them humble servants of the Lord, whose delight it is to do His will. All legal constraint from without ceases, but the will of the Lord remains the same, and the soul of the believer is brought into harmony with that will. Therefore Christians do good works which are commanded of God, not because they must, but because by grace they desire to do them. They are made free by grace to do God’s will. The will that by nature was in the service of sin, is now by grace made the servant of righteousness, because it is brought into happy harmony with the will of the Savior, who has fulfilled all righteousness for us and now leads us in ways of pleasantness and paths of peace.

We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called us by the Gospel, and enlightened us with His gifts, so that we are led to believe in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, and being justified by this faith we have peace with God. But thus a heavenly power has entered our souls which is not in our fallen nature and which this nature is incapable of producing. What this means is expressed in the words of Scripture:

“Peter rose up and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare witness, giving them them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” Acts 15:7-9.

The Holy Spirit’s way of purifying our corrupt hearts is by working faith through His Word and Sacrament, and thus enabling us to love and do His will. Thus really good works are produced.

“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10.

The gracious design of God to save lost sinners by grace is in perfect accord with the wonderful economy of divine wisdom which created man in righteousness, holds him to righteousness, and creates him anew for righteousness when sin has apparently foiled the whole purpose and plan. Neither is the divine process by which this is accomplished, great as is the mystery of our regeneration, unintelligible in a psychological point of view. When by the grace of God we are enabled to believe in Jesus as our Savior, which our natural reason cannot attain and cannot comprehend, the rest is comparatively easy. It is in accord with the created constitution of the soul.

“We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.” 1 John 4:16.

“We love Him because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19.

To believers this explains the way and work of the Spirit in the hearts of men. They can do nothing of themselves, but the power of God can work faith in them, and then all their natural endowments are set in motion accordingly. Naturally we are enemies of God and have no love for the righteousness in which and for which He created us, because sin has corrupted all our faculties and rendered them incompetent to fulfill their mission. But grace changes all this when souls are brought to faith in Christ. The sinner runs away from God, who demands righteousness and reveals His wrath against all unrighteousness; but when he once knows and believes the love which God hath to him in Christ, his Savior from the curse of sin, he learns to love Him who first loved us, and instead of fleeing from Him as a tyrant

who pursues him with His vengeance, he flees to Him as his powerful protector against the curse that lies upon his sin. The righteousness of God as a demand upon unrighteous man is terrible; the righteousness of God as an acquirement of Christ offered in the Gospel, by which the righteous demand of God is fully satisfied and all accounts are settled, is comforting and glorious above all power of language, to express. God stands revealed to our hearts as our loving Father when we believe the Gospel tidings of His gift of His own dear Son, who while we were yet enemies died for us. We love Him because He first loved us, and of this love to us we are assured by the faith which appropriates the truth of our salvation through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Faith brings forth good fruits. Good works flow from it as the waters flow from their spring.

2. Doing Good Works Is God's Will

Our churches “teach that men ought to do good works commanded of God because it is God's will, and not on any confidence of meriting justification before God by their works.” It is just as important to know what works are to be regarded by the Christian as good in regard to the motive as in regard to the authority of the demand. In both respects our Evangelical Confession stands in opposition to the usurpations of Rome, and in both respects it still requires of its adherents a campaign of education among Protestants and a warfare of Gospel truth against Romish perversions which find adherents as well among professed adversaries as among avowed advocates of Romanism. Our Confession declares that man ought to do good works, that he ought to do the good works commanded because it is the will of God, and that he ought not to do them with any confidence of meriting justification before God.

This sets forth, in the first place, the wide proposition that good works ought to be done. Not only the disciples of Christ. but men generally ought to do good works. That is the original commission of man made in the image of God.

“He hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10.

The creation of man in the divine image implied this. Only thus could his mission be fulfilled and his happiness be attained. When sin came and he failed in the fulfillment of his mission, the divine purpose was not changed. God does not change, and man has no power to change His will. He made man for righteousness in His service; He endowed him with the will to pursue that righteousness and in it enjoy the blissful communion with his Maker: He demands that righteousness still, after sin had changed man's will and perverted it to unrighteousness. God is always the same Holy One, whatever changes may be effected in His creature or by His creature. He will bring all to a reckoning, and righteousness must everlastingly prevail, though for a time it be trodden under foot by a race that forgets God in the possession of a will of its own.

“The law of God is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” Ps. 19:7-9.

Amid all the changes of created things God, the Creator of all, remains unalterably the same. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His Word shall not pass away. The notion that man's fall from righteousness, and thus from his original endowment and mission, necessitates a change in the divine demand of righteousness, seeing that man by his sin has incapacitated himself to fulfill it, only manifests the blindness of human reason after the fall, and its utter incompetency to judge in spiritual matters. God is ever the same righteous God and holds men to righteousness, whether they will hear or forbear.

“Men ought to do good works commanded of God.”

Under no circumstances can there be any abatement of this command. The creature owes absolute allegiance and obedience to his Creator. But the little word “ought” suggests a point that must not be overlooked. Men ought to do good works. The obligation is upon them. That remains upon them whatever attitude they may assume toward the will of God. They may reject the supremacy of God's will and prefer their own. Mankind has done this in the fall that ruined our race and brought our woe upon us. In sundering the

ties which originally bound us in blessed fellowship with God and declaring himself independent of his Maker, he imagines that he has absolutely become his own master and that he has broken loose from all authority save that of his own will.

“The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.”

And the fool now in all lands shrieks himself hoarse in the wild cry for liberty. But though he departs from God and refuses to hear his Creator’s call and command, God does not leave him. He still holds him to the good works which He has commanded, and will not accept as a substitute the imaginary good works which human wisdom has devised. There is a day of reckoning coming, when all shall be called to account, and the judgment will be according to the Word in which the will of the Lord is revealed, not according to human inventions which men in their folly have found out. Our Confession rightly gives utterance to the truth that “men ought to do good works commanded of God.” The obligation is still binding, though they rebel against God; and not by their fancies, but by the law of God will all eventually be judged in righteousness.

It is not, however, the people who in their hardness and impenitent hearts are treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, that are here principally had in mind. The men referred to include Christians as well as all other men.

Believers who are justified by faith, without the deeds of the law, are not exempt from the universal obligation laid upon men to do the will of their Maker. Seemingly there is no reason for making special mention of this or of laying special stress upon it. It is a mere matter of course. Men ought to do good works, and of course Christians ought to do them, and they pre-eminently, because they above all others have the needful light to see the obligation and the needful grace to observe it. But that does not set forth all that is involved in the situation as it presents itself to the Church of the Reformation. Our fathers were charged by their Romish adversaries, and their children are still confronted by the same charge, that their doctrine of justification by faith alone removes all necessity for good works in the plan of salvation and destroys all effectual motives for performing them. The charge has some appearance of truth. The Scriptures teach, and the Church which adheres to the Scriptures as its only guide confesses, that the sinner is

justified by faith alone and therefore has no need for any good works of his own to effect this justification. That charge is true.

“We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Rom. 3:28.

We not only plead guilty to the charge, but we emphasize the truth upon which it is based, and urge it upon the souls of men as a treasure precious beyond all price. But when men in their ignorance and blindness draw a conclusion wholly unwarranted by the premises and charge that upon us, the matter assumes a different aspect. We can pity the poor people who have not the spiritual insight necessary to detect the sophistry of their reasoning, but we cannot excuse the refusal to hear the Word of God which would give them such insight and make them ashamed of charges so damaging to their own claims of discipleship with Christ. It is true that we need no good works of ours to eke out any supposed defects in the righteousness acquired for us by our Savior and appropriated by faith; it is not true that therefore we disparage good works.

“Men ought to do good works commanded of God.”

Christians feel this obligation, “because it is God’s will,” though many who are not Christians renounce the obligation and think themselves entitled to do as they please, especially when, in the exercise of their natural powers, they have devised works that seem to them very good, and are blazoned forth as superlatively and eminently good, although they are not commanded of God. But the Christian does not feel the obligation as the craven creature of the law feels it. He is free from the constraint and the curse of the law. The “ought” has to him a different meaning. The grace of God through faith in Christ has restored the harmony in his heart with the will of his Maker, who is loved because He first loved us and gave His own dear Son to save us. The believer does good works because he loves them. He has been led to know the good and gracious will of his merciful Lord, and his heart’s earnest desire, in gratitude for the blessings enjoyed and in concern for the welfare of man that is in every way dependent on these blessings, is that the good will of God may be done. He therefore does the good works commanded of God, not because the law lashes him to the perfor-

mance of them as disagreeable duties, but because they are now his will and he has pleasure in them. And yet the word “ought” is not out of place as applied to those who are born again through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are a new creation in Him, in conformity with the design of God in the original creation from which man had fallen.

“Ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him.” Col. 3:9, 10.

This new man “after God is created in righteousness and true” holiness.” His will is to do only God’s will, as it was before the fall and sin interfered with God’s loving purpose of holiness and happiness for man. What was lost by Adam is retrieved through Christ, and the lost image of God is restored in the believer. Hence St. John says:

“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot commit sin because he is born of God.” 1 John 3:8, 9.

These are strong and in some respects startling words, especially in this respect, that they arouse in many a soul the inquiry whether it is really in the faith while it trifles so with sin and is so indifferent about “the will of God, even your sanctification.” The question which many a startled Christian puts to himself as he meditates upon the words is perfectly legitimate: Am I then really a believer in Christ unto the saving of my sinful soul, seeing that the motions of sin in my flesh are so manifest in my consciousness? But the Holy Spirit in St. John’s words says the same as the Holy Spirit in St. Paul’s words:

“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10.

When our hearts are purified by faith, the image of God is restored within us, and that means that our selfish and wayward will is again brought into harmony with God’s will. But it does not mean that all our affections and desires are at once removed from the influences of our fallen nature, and

that our sanctification by the Spirit that dwelleth in us is at once completed. On the contrary, it means that now the warfare of the new life has begun, and that the struggle for its ascendancy and dominion over the devil and the world and the flesh has become a struggle for life against the powers of evil enlisted in the cause of sin and death.

“This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary, the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Gal. 5:16, 17.

The sanctifying leaven of God’s grace works out its purpose, but works in a soul that is naturally not akin to its intent and aim and that is only gradually permeated and molded to the divine image. The will that God’s will shall be done is embraced in the acceptance of the Savior by faith, but the will that God’s will shall be done in all our lives, through self-denial and suffering, is realized only amid fierce conflicts and manifold shortcomings and humiliations and failures, so that the Christian life is one of daily repentance as well as of daily struggle. But Christians have no reason to be discouraged on that account. The grace of God, which through faith has assured them of the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation in Christ, is sufficient for them.

“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Rom, 8:32.

The believer in Christ is restored to the love of righteousness, and as such can have no will to commit sin. Such a will would mean falling away from his Lord and Savior. That does not prevent the infirmities of his flesh and its resistance to the perfect holiness which the law demands and to which the Spirit prompts, but it does secure a will to do only the Lord’s will and a daily recurrence to the righteousness of Christ for salvation in repentance for the unrighteousness still manifest in the pardoned sinner. The believer, being justified by faith, has peace with God, and does good works because his will is to do the will of God.

This precludes any thought that believers in Christ could do them “on any confidence of meriting justification before God by their works.” How could they, seeing that all their peace and comfort, as well as all their power for good, rests on the justification secured for them by the Lamb of God

that taketh away the sins of the world? What they believe is that He has fulfilled all righteousness for them. and that therefore His holy law can make no further demands upon them.

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God. it is evident; for the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” Gal. 3:10-13.

The law tells us of the holiness in which God made man after His image and to which He holds us for ever. If we fulfill His holy will and live in perfect purity and righteousness, the blessing, not the curse of the law is upon us. “Do this and thou shalt live.” The way of the law is simple enough. Be ye holy, for God is holy; be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect: that is a plain rule. It would work admirably if sin had not entered into the world and brought death and all our woe. If men were righteous, as God made them to be and meant them to be, they would walk by that rule and all would be well. They would walk with God and be happy in knowing and doing His will, and they would live in their communion with their holy Maker in purity and blessedness forever. Alas, that so many dream romantic dreams in matters of religion as they do in matters of this world, and do not realize that they are dreaming! And so many who call themselves Christians, a goodly number of whom no doubt sincerely desire to be disciples of Christ, indulge in the same revels of the imagination and talk enthusiastically about the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and of the good time coming when all men shall recognize the utopian fancy and embrace each other with the fervor of love that knows no selfishness and has eschewed all knowledge of the flesh. It is an Arcadian dream as radiant as that of the “Gods of Greece.” But it makes no account of the facts as they lie before us in the realities of life on this painful earth.

If there were no sin of course we would have no difficulty with it. If there were no sin we would of course not be hampered so by its ignorance and jealousy and malice, and all the dissensions and strifes which obstruct all the ways of righteousness. If there were no sin we would of course need no Savior. That would change the whole situation. Then the whole record of the Bible would be set aside as an illusion, as many are trying to set it aside,

some professed Christians joining in the raid that is as senseless as it is ungodly. Then the truth would be spurned, that the whole world lieth in wickedness; that the imaginations of the thoughts of human hearts are only evil continually; that we are all dead in trespasses and sins; and that there is no name given among men by which we can be saved, but the name of Jesus, who is the Son of God made flesh to destroy the works of the devil and save us from our sins. Christians are people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, accept the Holy Scriptures as the revelation of heavenly truth for their salvation, and have no confidence in the flesh, which lusteth against the Spirit. And the revelation given in the Scriptures centers in the cross of Christ. The law is good; it requires us to be holy: its demands are righteous altogether. Therefore in the light of Holy Scripture no true believer thinks of rejecting the law because it condemns our unrighteousness. How could it do otherwise? But the law is only part of that gracious plan of salvation that was executed in the mission of the Son of God as the Savior of the world. Surely God holds His creature, whom He created after His own image, to the righteousness by which His creative purpose should be accomplished. But the law that requires righteousness affixes the penalty of death to the transgression. The transgression, which is sin, came into the world by man's disobedience, and the curse of death came in consequence, How is it now? It is marvelous that now there should be any Christian believer who could still advocate justification by man's own works, seeing that all are concluded under sin and that there is none righteous, no, not one. How could we be saved by the deeds of the law, when this demands the perfect holiness and righteousness from which we have fallen, and when its curse is upon us because we have failed to fulfill it and have therefore called down upon us its penalties?

The law is not abolished. It remains forever in force, as the righteousness of God endureth forever. But it encounters human sin, and cannot accomplish its holy purpose in the unholy hearts of fallen creatures. It still remains the will of God, who never changes, and still has its place in the gracious plan of God to save our sinful race through the mission of His Son. Since sin has come and made salvation by the sinner's obedience to the law impossible. the law can still serve the purpose of the divine counsels by giving us a knowledge of sin and thus preparing us for the divine work of our deliverance from its curse.

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Gal. 3:24.

It can drive us to despair of our own powers and thus put us in readiness to hear of a Savior from our forlorn condition. It can give us no hope; it can only give us the knowledge of our sin and condemn us for our unrighteousness: but it can thus serve the saving purpose of God by preparing the way for the proclamation of Christ as the way and the truth and the life, through whom alone lost souls can be saved. The law has no power to rescue us from the damnation which it pronounces. It worketh wrath.

“If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” Gal. 3:21, 22.

The case is so plain that any Christian can understand it, obscure as the whole situation and the argument may appear to the natural man with his incapacity for spiritual things. The law shows us what is right and good. Whoever keeps it pleases God, for it sets forth His will. To such a person there is no condemnation, for the curse which the law declares is upon the transgressor, of course not upon those who keep the law. Our Lord’s “Do this and thou shalt live,” spoken to awaken a self-conceited sinner to a sense of the delusion by which he is ensnared, is forever true and valid. The self-righteous mortals of today are as much entitled to appeal to it as were the Judaists of the first century and the Romanists of the Reformation period. We have no answer to their claim that the law is righteous, and that he that doeth righteousness is righteous. Their argument under the law is valid. But it is not Christian. It is Jewish, and separated from the promise in Christ, unto whom the law was designed to be a schoolmaster, it is heathenish.

“Before faith came we were kept under the law; shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Gal. 3:23, 24.

To those who are willing to learn the truth which the Holy Spirit teaches in the Scriptures, the opposition between the way of righteousness by the law and the way of righteousness by the Gospel is not encumbered by the diffi-

culties which human reason, dominated by the flesh, suggests and urges against salvation by faith alone, without the deeds of the law. The antithesis is real.

“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” John 1:17.

But it is by no means the contradictory opposition between two utterly different plans of salvation. Sin came, and made man’s blessedness in communion with God impossible by destroying it. The rupture took place, and the misery and helplessness followed as the inevitable consequence. If man had retained the integrity in which he was created and in which he was introduced into happy companionship with his Creator, there would have been no discrepancy between his life and the demands which the law makes upon intelligent creatures. Indeed there would have been no need of a law to direct him in the way of righteousness, into which his own impulses would have been a sufficient guide. But he did not continue in his original righteousness. He fell. That changed all the conditions of man’s happiness in time and in eternity. When he no longer loved the righteousness for which he was created and to which his soul was attuned, that righteousness confronted him as an inexorable demand. Then it was plain: Do this and live, or fail to do this and die. That was the only alternative. But God’s thoughts were not man’s thoughts. Man could not fulfill the righteousness required, and so far as his efforts were concerned there was nothing but death and damnation in store for our fallen race. So far as he was capable of doing aught for his salvation man’s case was absolutely hopeless. But what is impossible with man is possible with the almighty and merciful Maker of heaven and earth. In His infinite love He interfered. He so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. The Eternal Son was in accord with the Eternal Father and came to our rescue.

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4:4, 5.

It is marvelous, but it is the very truth of our gracious God. The Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,

“...made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Phil. 2:7, 8.

Why this stupendous sacrifice, into which the angels desire to look? Every earnest reader of the Bible knows the marvelous story of that infinite sacrifice for the sins of the world and its purpose of infinite love for the salvation of a ruined world. The Son of God was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. If man had retained his original state of holiness, or if the law demanding that holiness could have given life to our fallen race, dead in trespasses and sins, this would not have been necessary. But that would mean that the whole revealed plan of salvation by grace through the redemption which is in Christ is a human fancy, and the Bible is a delusive human fabrication.

“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” Gal. 2:21.

Good works ought to be done, but not at all with the vain thought of meriting eternal life by them. Such thoughts renounce the grace by which alone we are saved and reject the righteousness of Christ by faith which alone avails before God, leaving the poor soul in its sin and helplessness and depriving it of the peace which the Gospel offers in the assurance, that by the obedience of Christ all righteousness is fulfilled in our stead and by His vicarious death all the penalty of our unrighteousness is paid. The believer embraces the Savior,

“...who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 1:30, 31.

3. Salvation By Faith Not Works Is The Teaching Of Scripture and Of The Church From The Beginning

This salvation by divine grace — not by human merit; through the righteousness of Christ, not through our own righteousness; by faith, not by the deeds of the law — is the teaching of the Scriptures and the confession of the Church from the beginning. It seemed a new doctrine at the time of the Reformation, because Rome had corrupted the truth of the Bible and the life of the Church. The pure Gospel which Luther preached astonished the world, which had become accustomed to the human inventions offered for centuries as a substitute and widely accepted on the authority of the papal usurpation. But it was the old Gospel now proclaimed anew.

“For remission of sins and justification is apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ witnesses: ‘When ye have done all these things say, we are unprofitable servants.’ Luke 17:10. The same also the ancient writers of the Church teach; for Ambrose says: ‘This is ordained of God, that he who believes in Christ shall be saved without works, by faith alone, freely receiving remission of sins.’”

The chief concern of our fathers was to preserve the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ for man’s salvation, that sinners might flee for refuge to the hope set before them in Christ and find peace in believing, as the Church from apostolic times preached to troubled consciences through the righteousness acquired for us by our Savior. Christ must reign in His kingdom, but to this end His Word must stand as absolute truth and absolute authority. By its power souls must be gathered into His kingdom, and by its power they must be governed when grace has gathered them and made them one through the faith which it produces and which it alone can produce in the hearts of men. Thus God’s glory was maintained and man’s salvation was secured.

The subject of good works is secondary. To Romanists and all unevangelical parties in sympathy with them this will appear a bold and inconsiderate statement, and many a timid child of the Reformation will deem it a deed of unwisdom to confess it, even if it is held to be true. But why be timid about a matter that is so vital in the revealed plan of salvation through Christ alone, by faith alone? If any soul is saved from the damnation which is upon it because of sin, it is saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other name given under heaven by which we could be saved. If we are not saved by faith in Him, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, we are not saved at all. The question of good works is not trivial. It was from eternity ordained that we should walk in them and glorify our Maker. But when man is fallen from his original estate and become sub-

ject to the curse of disobedience to His Maker's righteous law, it is pernicious trifling with holy things to suggest, then to defend, and finally to insist that men dead in trespasses and sins may and can and should bestir themselves to make all right again by doing the good works, as if by a sort of galvanic process, which they are commanded to do, and to square old accounts by refraining from new debts. In such a farce Christians cannot be enlisted.

As long as man remains in the darkness of sin, he may think of the good works of his nature as distinguished from the disgraceful abominations of the flesh, and may even pride himself upon his virtue as against the vices, real or supposed, of his neighbors. But when the light of the Gospel shines upon his soul the scene is changed. He sees that by the law is the knowledge of sin and that he is under the curse. The law can give no comfort. But it can be a schoolmaster to bring him unto Christ, in whom alone is deliverance from the curse. Its work is thus subordinate to the work of grace in the Gospel, and in this respect is not final. And when a person by the Spirit of God in the Gospel is brought to believe in Christ as his Savior, he is made aware that all righteousness which God requires is fulfilled in Him and that by faith he has embraced it all, so that nothing is lacking which he could think of supplying with his own poor works, which are so utterly inadequate to fulfill the divine demand. Of course then also the good works are secondary in his thoughts, as they are secondary in the divine thought of salvation by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. The will of God is our sanctification. That was the law from the beginning. That is His will now. But the intervention of human sin and the purpose of in finite love to rescue the fallen creature from its consequences of death and damnation. though it did not change the holy and loving purpose of God. did change the situation and the conditions under which that purpose could be attained. We are saved by grace without works, through faith. By this faith and by this alone, we are empowered to do good works. Only believers can do them: but believers are the people who know themselves justified by grace without them, and who do them because they have pleasure in them.

Article VII. Of The Church

They likewise teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. But the Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. And unto the true unity of the Church it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by men, should be alike everywhere; as St. Paul says, "There is one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." Eph. 4:4, 5.

THE DOCTRINE CONCERNING THE CHURCH exercised much the minds of Christians in the period of the Reformation, and clearness in this respect was of the highest importance in the controversies which arose. The Church of Rome was a mighty power, and the papacy, which had become identical with the Romish Church, claimed to be the Church of Christ. That would have been less harmful to the promulgation of the Gospel if the powers claimed for the Church had not kept pace with the errors regarding its nature.

1. The Product of Human Reason

In the process of time the product of human reason, that the Church is a visible body of professed Christians under the pope, and that this is endowed with divine power to govern its members, among whom only those are to be recognized who submit to the powers alleged to be placed over them, gained the ascendancy among Christians. At the time of the Reformation the papal usurpation of divine power was generally accepted. The conclusion of reason, that the pope is head of the Church and that to this head must of course be committed the power of the Church. was logically followed by the assumption that, as the spiritual is higher than the temporal power, the pope must be Lord also over all temporal powers, and that kings and emperors must acknowledge his supremacy. The foundation of human

tyranny had been skilfully laid. Every avenue to human liberty had been barricaded. The papacy had universal control. The right of private judgment was denied; the authority of Holy Scripture was made subject to papal revision; even the appeal to the common rights of man was nullified by the pretense that the papal dominion, extending over all the interests and powers of man, must be absolutely decisive against adverse claims of souls and governments. Never was there a warfare less promising in the light of reason than that of Luther against the papal Antichrist. If Luther and his fellow believers had accepted the Roman doctrine of the Church and operated on that basis, their work would surely have ended in defeat, as it would have been begun in error. Nothing seems to us now to indicate more thoroughly the blindness of the Papists than the claim, reason able as it seems to unbelieving souls, that Luther and the Lutherans should have submitted their case to the adjudication of the corrupt Church against whose arrogant pretensions they protested.

In the Reformation the doctrine of the Church was a fundamental article of the faith which nerved our fathers for the conflict and led to victory. All the more must we wonder at the Protestant confusion which nowadays concedes the principal contentions of Romanists and assumes that the Lutheran Reformers were too much occupied with the subject of justification by faith to give the necessary attention to the right apprehension and presentation of the doctrine of the Church, intimately as this is connected with the great salvation which the Gospel proclaims in Christ.

The Reformers, taking their stand upon the Gospel plainly set forth in the Scriptures given by revelation of God, rejected the Romish claims in the totality of their usurpations. They denied that the Romish hierarchy is the Church of Christ, which is the ground and pillar of the truth; they denied that their visible organization has divine authority to dictate what Christians shall believe or not believe and to determine their final state accordingly; they rejected the whole Romish notion of a visible Church that shall give laws to the world and rule over consciences in the congregations and over states in their civil government. They distinguished between the temporal and spiritual, recognizing the rights of rulers, but denying all authority to lord it over the consciences of men, and appealing to the Scriptures as exclusive authority in this domain. The Church has the authority to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. Under this authority it performs its divinely appointed work and administers its discipline. But beyond this it

cannot go. The Church is bound by the Word of God, and has no authority but that which this Word carries with it as the authority of God. To this Word must therefore be our appeal, not to the Church which is called to teach and enforce that Word in its appointed sphere. According to this Word the Church itself, as well as the doctrines which were taught, must be judged.

Necessity was laid upon the evangelical believers to obtain clearness in regard to the nature of the Church. Without this they could not successfully wage their warfare against the corruptions of the papal party, who had usurped all ecclesiastical power, and who had included in this power much that the Lord had never given to the Church even in its best estate. It is marvelous to read in the histories of the Reformation, written by intelligent men, that the Lutherans had no occasion then to study the doctrine of the Church, as the vital points of controversy lay in other fields. Undoubtedly there were vital points of difference aside from those immediately pertaining to the doctrine of the Church. But our Lutheran ancestors were believing Christians, whose hearts were enlarged by the love as their minds were enlightened by the light of God, and they took no contracted view of the situation, and rode no hobbies. The times were earnest, and their faith in Christ and love for the souls He had purchased were thoroughly in earnest. They preached salvation through Christ by faith in His blood. and when Rome opposed and the papal power threatened them with damnation, their faith did not fail them and their love was not quenched. They knew whereof they affirmed, for the Word of God. on which alone they stood, had given them the light of heaven. And in the light and faith of that Word they as confidently declared that the Romish hierarchy is not the Church, as they insisted that salvation is not by works of righteousness which man does, but by faith in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It was the inmost conviction of their ardent souls; and it is a crying wrong to contend or even to insinuate now that they did not fully understand the subject when they declared that the Romish popedom is not the Church, but is rather the Antichrist that was prophesied as its coming foe with all deceivableness of unrighteousness. Our fathers fought with a clear conscience for the true Church of the Gospel against all the abominations of Rome.

And they defied its power, well knowing what they did in their work of faith and labor of love. They not only recognized the Romish Church as a visible Church of Christ, as it still retained the Word and Sacraments as

means by which the Holy Spirit gathers souls into the kingdom of Christ and saves them through the Savior's sacrifice from the curse of sin and death, but they were forced to see how its usurpations had lent it power with which, on the ground which it occupied and with the forces which it had enlisted, they were not able to cope. If they had been as uninformed and as confused in the doctrine of the Church as some modern writers in their utter failure to understand the situation are disposed to allege, they would have abandoned the arduous and unpromising work and submitted themselves to the "powers that be," as Rome then and now claimed and claims that they should have done. But because they were evangelical believers, that thought was far from them. They stood by the Word of God, according to which Christ alone rules in His kingdom and speaks by the Scriptures given by inspiration of God. They did not deny that Rome had power, and had reason to tremble at its menace of torture and death. But they knew right well that the utmost which it could do by its usurped power, though that was terrible, did not reach beyond this present life. In their strenuous endeavor to bring the truth in Jesus to bear, for their comfort in this life and especially for their salvation in the life to come, on the souls of men, they were ready to suffer what in the existing conditions could not be avoided: but they would rather die than suffer the torments of conscience and the endless pains of those who knew the truth but would not maintain it against a superior earthly power that resisted it. The Romish Church had strayed away from the truth of the Gospel, had adopted opinions and instituted practices which were in direct opposition to the truth of the Gospel, and now insisted on obedience to its mandates. What should or could our Lutheran fathers do but maintain the eternal truth revealed in the Gospel and accordingly insist that no power can set aside the decrees of the King of Zion as recorded in Holy Scripture? They could suffer, but they could not as long as the Holy Spirit gave them grace to believe the truth, renounce the Gospel.

The difficulty which thus presents itself to many minds in the doctrine of the Church did not disturb their faith, although it did perplex many in the days of the Reformation, and perplexes many now who are not well grounded in the faith which was the victory that overcame the world in those times that tried men's souls. Is not the Church a divine institution, and must we not hear the Church as the organ of our Lord when it issues its decrees? Must not Luther and his fellow believers in the Gospel submit to the Roman power and renounce the Gospel, on account of which Rome con-

demned them? They were not perplexed and they were not alarmed. They knew the Word of God, and God gave them grace to stand firm in maintaining it. The doctrine of the Church was as clear to them in its essential features as the doctrine of justification by faith. And in this seventh article of their Augsburg Confession they clearly expressed the faith which had guided them in their fierce battles with Roman error.

“The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.”

Christ has founded and continues to build His Church. To this end He sent out His ministers to preach the everlasting Gospel of His grace to every creature and to all the nations. The commission He gave them was, “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature”: the promise annexed to the command was, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”: and the record is, “They went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them.” Mark 16:15-20. They did not go forth in their own name nor operate with any human power. That is the reason that they achieved successes which on natural grounds seem impossible and to natural reason are incredible. The Lord worked with them. For after His glorious resurrection, immediately before He ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on High, Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world.” Matt. 28:18-20. The success of the work is guaranteed by the constant presence of the Lord, whose work it is and by whose power it is done. And any doubts that might arise in human minds on the ground of employing imperfect human agencies to do the divine work are removed by the assurance, that the Gospel committed to His disciples is not dependent for its power upon their devotion or fidelity, but upon His appointment and institution and constant presence until the end of time. For not the man appointed to preach it, but the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Rom. 1:16.

The arrangements of God for the accomplishment of His saving work are perfect. His means effect their purpose, and His people are rejected

when they cease to be loyal to His ordinances, while these ordinances are not dependent on their loyalty and continue to be effective when they cease to be loyal or their professions of loyalty are exposed as hypocrisy. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Rom. 10:17.

When the Word of God is preached among men, it exerts its saving power. Some reject it. That is a matter of common experience that must not disturb us, knowing that men were created with wills, and that it does not lie in the plan of God to coerce these wills. But always some will believe the truth and find peace in believing. They will praise the Lord for the great salvation which has come to them in Christ. These believers are the blessed company who constitute the Church. They are the congregation of saints to whom by faith Christ is “made wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” They are the happy people who, by the power of divine grace exerted in the Gospel, recognize the Lord Jesus as King in Zion and delight to confess their allegiance to Him as their mighty Savior from sin and death. Hence the Scriptures assure us that, when the disciples went out and preached the great Gospel of salvation through Jesus’ blood, “the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.” Acts 2:47. It is this company of believers that is usually meant when the Scriptures speak of the Church, without reference to any further organization than their spiritual union as one body in Christ through faith in His name. Every believer is in virtue of his faith a member of the Lord’s body. In its essence the Church is simply and purely the congregation of saints. So the oldest Creed of the Church has defined it, when it declares it to be “the Communion of Saints,” in the Confession, “I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Christian Church,” which is the work of the Holy Ghost, in the application of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. He that believes the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit has the salvation which Christ purchased for our lost race and is a member of His body and a subject in His kingdom. Nothing more is needed for his salvation and nothing more is needed for membership in the Church of the redeemed who live under Christ in His kingdom.

2. Restoration Occurs Here On Earth

But our Confession does not stop at this. The scene of man’s defection from God and of His redemption from its dreadful consequences was here on

earth, and here the Holy Spirit's work of restoration on the basis of the great salvation effected by our Savior's obedience unto death in our stead must be accomplished. Living men must be reached by the good tidings of deliverance from eternal woe: after death it will be too late. This imposes a mighty task upon the Church to which the commission was given to teach all nations. And it implies that the faith and wisdom bestowed upon the disciples will be freely exercised to carry out the divine purpose. This makes it necessary that these disciples should unite for the work. And the Lord has commanded it. He has not only ordained that properly qualified persons should be called to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, that everything might be done decently and in order, but also that Christian people should not neglect the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is. How could they fail to meet, when their Lord has assured them that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He would be in the midst of them? As believing souls that knew their helplessness without their Divine Master, and found their daily comfort and joy and strength in His presence, they were inwardly constrained to come together without any constraint of the commandment, to worship Him in the beauty of holiness. For to whom should they go but to Him, who alone has the words of eternal life? And what was felt as a need by the early disciples continues to be felt as a need by sincere believers in all time.

The gathering together as a visible Church is a necessity in Christian minds. They continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers. Not merely because the law commands them, but because the Spirit in their heart impels them, do they confess the Lord Jesus, to the glory of His great name, as the Savior of their souls, and with one heart and one mouth show forth His praises. And not because they, by such outward assembling of themselves together for worship and organizing for the work assigned them, think of becoming the disciples of the Lord and members of His Church, but because they are such members through faith in His name, do they feel the necessity of such visible congregation and worship and work.

“Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Pet. 2:9.

These peculiar people who have become conscious of the great salvation which the Holy Spirit has made their possession through the faith which He has wrought, know that there is a great work to be done in order to make the unsearchable riches of Christ known to all the world, and they know too that they are called to do it. They know the will of the Lord, and that has become their will. Hence they not only come together for their own edification in the use of the means of grace and for the realization of their own hearts' longing to give glory to God in the highest, but also to put forth their energies for the extension of the kingdom in which alone lost souls can find salvation. The visible Church is a necessary result of the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth, and becomes the local representative of that kingdom, where two or three are gathered together in His name to worship Him and to administer the means of grace which He has appointed for the founding and continuance of that kingdom unto the eternal salvation of them that believe.

This visible Church is the congregation of saints as it appears on earth, with its admixture of people who are not saints, because they are not believers, although they have managed to be accepted as members of the local congregation of Christians on their profession of faith, and with all the infirmities that still attach even to those who are really believers and thus constitute the congregation of saints in that place. The persons forming this visible organization are not all saints, neither is everything in those who are saints by true faith in Christ such as becometh saints. For this reason the definition of the Christian Church as a congregation of saints appears inadequate. It seems so only to the eye of sense, which can not discern the essential element in its constitution, which is the faith that unites all true believers as one body in Christ. Those who believe constitute the Church, and when a number of them unite for worship and for work in any place and form a visible congregation to employ the means of grace in which the Lord is present and exerts the power of His grace. they are the Church in that locality. The fact that some who are not believers have found their way into such a congregation, and that the believers whom the Lord recognizes as His Church and to whom He has committed all the rights and powers of His Church, are not perfect in holiness and are still subject by reason of the flesh, to error in thought and feeling and action, does not deprive them of the gracious powers and immunities which the Lord has been pleased to confer upon them. Even if a majority of the congregation were hypocrites,

that would not deprive sincere believers of their great endowment as the people of God, and their organization would still be a congregation of saints in spite of the unholy people who have unlawfully gained admittance into the congregation and are not of it. Nor does our merciful Lord withdraw His grace from His believing followers on account of the infirmities which still attach to them and which render them unworthy of His blessing He has redeemed them. While they were yet enemies He died for them. By His grace He wrought faith in their hearts and gathered them to Himself. As long as they sincerely strive to obey His will as revealed in His Word, He will not cease to care for them and in infinite mercy bear with their weaknesses.

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Heb. 4:14, 15.

Our imperfections are great, but the grace of God is greater, else there could be no Church, and no patience with the Church when that grace has gathered a congregation of believers, in whom the flesh still exerts itself against the Spirit. and among whom there are so many who will not even be directed by the Spirit and are therefore not of the Church. into whose visible organization they have been smuggled.

To our Confessors it was manifest, as it must be manifest to every humble and believing student of the Holy Scriptures, that the external organization of the kingdom of Christ could not have all the claims of the kingdom as it really exists in the all-seeing eye of the King, who cannot be deceived by human pretensions. The visible organization of that kingdom is still the congregation of saints. But that does not certify us that the organization will be composed exclusively of saints, and that its creed and conduct will be always such as becometh saints. If is organized under the King in Zion and must be tested by His Word, which alone has authority in His kingdom. When the Reformers, enlightened by the Spirit of God speaking to them through the Holy Scriptures, preached the everlasting Gospel of Christ for the justification of sinners through faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, they were confronted by the Roman Church with its system of work righteousness. which knew little of the Gospel. This Roman Church had all the prestige and all the power that was claimed for the kingdom of Christ on earth, and this mighty human organization, by the

hierarchy which had obtained dominion, demanded obedience to the Church. No people were ever more loyal to the Church than were our Lutheran Confessors at Augsburg. But they believed the Gospel, and they knew that Christ, the great Head of the Church, was greater than the pope and all his satellites. The King rules by His Word, not by the Bishop of Rome, however great may be his arrogance. Therefore they appealed from Rome to the Gospel, which declared the will of the King, to whom the whole Church on earth and also in heaven is subject, and staked their all, in time and in eternity, upon His Word as declared in Holy Scripture. They knew the Gospel and therefore knew whereof they affirmed, and were not dismayed when the mighty power of the Romish usurpation, as the alleged Church of Christ, was arrayed against them. They recognized all the spiritual prerogatives of the Church as the congregation of saints, but denied that the Romish hierarchy, in its apostasy from the Gospel, was that Church. How could they do otherwise in the light of the Word of God which shone upon them and which made them sure that the Church is the congregation of saints, or of true believers who hear the good Shepherd's voice and follow Him?

3. Why "In Which The Gospel Is Rightly Taught and The Sacraments Rightly Administered" Was Added

This explains why to the definition of the Church as "the congregation of saints" was added the qualification, "in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." The existing conditions made such a qualification necessary. The conditions of all time in this world of sin require and confirm the necessity. Our fathers saw that the Romish Church did not proclaim the Gospel which the Church of Christ was commissioned to make known in all lands. When they endeavored to do what the Word of God requires, and when the Roman usurpation denied the right of the Reformers to do this needful work without the authority of Rome, and finally denounced them as disloyal to the Church, what could our fathers do but insist that the Church is "the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." In

their humble obedience to the Word of God they could not be submissive to any word of man in the same domain; and when the Papists threatened to employ all the power of the Church to crush the Reformation, they were met with the firm and defiant declaration, "Ye are not the Church."

How could the Lutherans make such a bold declaration in the face of the fact known to all men, that the Romanists had all the machinery of Church and State under their control? In their usurpation of power and authority they did not confine themselves to that which legitimately belonged to the Church, but had made the papacy lord of the world. From that point of view it no doubt appeared ridiculous that a little flock of evangelical believers should bid defiance to a power which dominated all recognized Christian governments.

What could they do against the forces which the papacy could put into the field to exterminate them root and branch? They could do nothing to counteract physical violence by physical force. They had no desire for that. But they were not dismayed. They were enlisted in a cause which they knew to be the Lord's. To Him they committed their cause, and in their quietness and confidence was their strength. The struggles through which they passed in maintaining their righteous cause found expression in their defiant, "Ye are not the Church." The Papists claimed powers which the Lord never committed to the Church, and which evangelical believers would be constrained to deny them, if they were the Church. Why their claim to be the Church could not be recognized by the Lutherans is expressed, in the simple but confident way of our Confession, in the words added to the definition of the Church as the congregation of saints, "in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." That is the key to the right apprehension of the Church question as the Gospel enabled the Reformers to solve it. With them it was not a subject of merely theoretic interest, but of the most intense practical import. They could not deny that the Romish organization is a Church, but they could not accept the corruptions that had vitiated that Church and made it an antagonist of the Gospel which they preached. They were led by the Spirit of God to stand by the truth, that in the kingdom of God God's Word must rule, and that every departure from that Word as recorded in Holy Scripture must be rejected, if we would be loyal to the King. The light of the Gospel, which had made the way of salvation through faith in the mighty Redeemer clear to them and given them peace in believing, also made clear to them the doc-

trine of the Church. It is one of the greatest achievements of the Reformation. Not those who submit to the pope are Christians, but those who believe in Christ; not those who submit to the pope, but those who believe in Christ are the Church. Hence the test of the Word must be applied whenever the kingdom of God on earth is in question.

The Church in its essential nature is not a visible body. It is the communion of saints, the congregation of believers scattered all over the earth. As such it has its unity only in the faith which makes all believers one in Christ, and He alone governs it, and its constitution and laws are His sovereign will as revealed in Holy Scripture. It needs no visible organization to perfect it, and no human laws to direct it, and no special forms to manifest it. The good Shepherd gathers the wandering sheep into His fold, and they know His voice and follow Him. That is enough. The Savior speaks the Word of salvation, sinners come to Him, and he receives them and gives them rest. That is enough. He comes to them and walks among them, and fills their hearts with joy in His gracious presence. He knows them, and they know Him. Is not that enough? For time and for eternity is not that enough?

Without all controversy it would be enough if the plan of God were to call souls by His Spirit into His kingdom of glory in heaven. But that is not His plan as He has revealed it to us in the Gospel, which He has given us by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. He wants His people, who have been blessed with the peace and joy of faith in the reception of the good tidings of salvation from sin and death through Jesus' blood, to be workers together with Him in proclaiming peace on earth through the good will of God, and thus giving glory to Him in the highest, while sinful souls are wrested from the jaws of death and led as redeemed of the Lord to join the happy chorus of praise and honor and glory to the Triune God. He wants us to be happy in His service, the purpose of which is to make others happy in the great salvation whose extension multiplies the number of those engaged in proclaiming it.

This plan makes every convert to the truth in Jesus a missionary of the cross. The believer confesses Christ before men because the love of His Savior and gratitude for the blessings received constrain him, and the Lord commits to His disciples the Word and Sacraments with His injunction to administer them, and His promise that by such administration He will do His saving work. To this end Christians, becoming known to each other by

their confession, join together and form a congregation for the worship of the God of their salvation and the execution of their Lord's commission. The local congregations thus formed, each of which is the congregation of saints in their respective localities, of course recognize each other as brethren of the same Christian confession and engaged in the same work of saving lost souls by administering the means of grace which the Lord has appointed for the purpose and committed to His disciples. The common confession of the truth revealed in Holy Scripture and the mutual recognition of such confession by the congregations declaring it, unites the local churches as a visible Church on earth, as the faith of the individuals united in these local congregations binds them together in the one Lord and constitutes them the one body of Christ, the one Holy Christian Church of our Apostles' Creed.

The difficulties which human thinking finds in the matter thus presented are many, and some of them are by no means trivial. All the more do we wonder at the crude judgments which we find pronounced upon the doctrine of the Church taught by the Lutherans of the Reformation. Theologians who have not grasped the Gospel truth, as Luther and his coworkers were led by divine grace with the constant cooperation of divine providence to grasp it, have declared our fathers confused on the doctrine and our Confession accordingly lacking in clearness. They certainly would not have found their way through the intricacies which the subject presented, and if we may judge from their crude criticisms of Lutheran doctrine and their impracticable speculations about a mighty visible Church and its exercise of mighty power, they would cravenly have submitted to Romish usurpation and arrogance. The men of the Reformation saw the import of the Gospel and the mind of the Lord more clearly, and their doctrine of the Church not only sustained them in their terrible struggle against the papacy with all its deceptableness of unrighteousness, but still commends itself as the truth of God in all the entanglements and aberrations of a later date until the present hour.

The difficulties are so great that, in our judgment, without the light which the Reformation has shed on the subject they are insuperable. That Reformation is in fact put on trial anew before a later generation. Alas, that so many even of those who are called to be teachers of evangelical truth, do not see, or at least do not see clearly, what the whole controversy is about. If Rome were right in its assumptions respecting the Church, Protestantism

would have no place on earth under the divine government, and the Lutheran Church would have no right to exist. Our fathers thought much on the subject, and they thought profoundly. They believed the Word of God and their thinking was of course in the line of the revelation which that Word gave them. They stood fast in the truth of the Gospel, and by the grace of God they won the victory which will seem more glorious, the more believing Christians contemplate it.

The Church of Christ is the congregation of saints or believers in Christ, unto whom their Savior is made sanctification as well as redemption. These saints, who are such by the faith which God has wrought in their souls, are known alone to Him, and they alone are the true subjects in the Savior's kingdom of grace, because they alone believe on His name. They are the Church. Whether men regard them as such is not of essential moment. They are the people of God who hear the Savior's voice. They are saved by grace, and their external condition is not the main thing. The main thing is that they believe in Jesus as the Savior of the world. They are His people, and where two or three of them are gathered together in His name, He is in the midst of them. The Church is the congregation of saints. It is such without the external assemblage. because it is a spiritual body through faith in Christ Jesus, the Redeemer of the world. But whilst it needs no manifestation in the world of sense to complete its essence, it does need such a manifestation to accomplish the work assigned to it. The believers who constitute the Church are not one by one, as fast as the Holy Spirit joins them by faith to the Savior, transferred to the glory which is prepared for them in heaven. They are called to serve the Lord here until He shall be pleased to take them home. In proportion as they realize the gift of grace imparted and the blessedness of their high calling in Christ, they are inspired with a holy zeal to execute their Master's will, to gather in all who will hear His voice and flee for refuge to the hope which the Gospel sets before men. Thus congregations are collected, pastors and teachers are called, churches and schools are built, missionaries are sent out, institutions of education and mercy are established, and, in short, the work is organized and managed in accordance with the Holy Spirit's impulse directed by the Word which is given by inspiration of God. Thus the Church, which is a spiritual body, comes to be an organization taking its place among the visible institutions of earth. It is still the congregation of believers, the Communion of Saints, the kingdom of Christ, which is not of this world, though it is in the world.

And in its manifestation in the world it takes in some elements which are not of it, but are of the world. How this comes has been made apparent. Even when the watchmen on Zion's walls exercise all the diligence and care which the Lord requires of them, some people who have not the obedience of faith get into the congregations, and some who are believers do not exercise the self-discipline which is requisite to guard against the insidious motions of the flesh in their own hearts, which by urging the claims of reason and feeling and alleging the rights of human nature thus asserting itself, but also by direct appeals to our fallen nature, without even taking the trouble to seek the intervention of reason, depart from the truth of the Gospel. The world thus finds its way into the Church. What may thus come to pass Church history, which is of course the history of the congregation of saints as it appears on earth, painfully shows. The papacy in Luther's day is a glaring instance.

That the Romish Church should regard itself as the one holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, should surprise no one. Those who think merely in the light of nature see what magnitude and influence and power it has secured in the world, and nothing claiming to be the Church is at all comparable to it. Why should it not be recognized as the Church, and all that this imports be conceded to it? Reason must acknowledge its advantage in its forum. It not only has possession of the field, but it has the multitude on its side and the power to maintain its claim. In this domain no argument against the power of the pope and the emperors and kings under his control has any practical force. And those who think in the light of revelation given in Holy Scripture are so often confused by the prestige of the human power that occupies the field, that the article of the old Creed. "I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints," is obliterated and made of no effect in their life. To all appearance it was therefore a losing contest upon which the men of the Reformation entered when they joined battle with the mighty forces of Rome. But they were believers, whose minds had been enlightened by the Gospel and who were determined to stand by it, whatever might betide, assured that whatever might come they would be safe in the fold of the Savior, and that if they should die in the struggle, the Lord and His Gospel would live and be a blessing to all future generations. They adhered to the old Creed of Christendom, in which the Christian Church belonged to the articles of faith, and accordingly declared that the Church of the pope is not the Church of Christ, but is an Antichristian apos-

tasy in its errors and usurpations, the Holy Scriptures, which are the decrees of its Head, being the Judge. It was the triumph of clear evangelical thinking on the basis of the everlasting Gospel against all the sophistries of reason. According to that Gospel, which all true believers recognize as the voice of their Lord and as their infallible guide, "the Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." The papal apostasy is not that Church, and obedience to its human ordinances would be sin. They therefore renounced its authority and stood in defense of the Gospel. And their faith was the victory which overcame the world. But in their terrible struggles of faith and thought and life they settled for all time the tests by which visible churches must be tried according to the Scriptures; Not every organization which professes to be a Church of Christ on earth is such in reality. It may be merely a society, religious perhaps, that lacks everything essential to Christianity, and is in every respect purely human in its origin and purpose and power. Islamic organizations are no more Christian Churches than are Masonic societies, though they may have much that is even religiously and ethically defensible.

It is deplorable that so many Christians fail to use the grace offered them to attain the full age of Christian manhood and thus "by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Heb. 5:14. So few have the faculty to distinguish the evil that accepts some generally recognized elements of good from the good that is of God, though in its human manifestation it is tainted by some generally recognized elements of evil.

The Socinian parties could not be recognized as churches of Christ. How could they in the face of the open fact that they denied Christ? They denied and still deny that He is the Son of God, that by His atonement He is the Savior of the world, that He is to be worshipped together with the Father and the Holy Spirit as God over all, blessed forever.

How could any believing soul that has come to Jesus, and in Him found rest for the present and glorious hope for the future think of recognizing as brethren the people who rejected their blessed Lord and sought to overthrow the foundation of faith on which they had rested their all in time and in eternity?

The Lutheran Reformers believed in the Scriptures, and from these they knew and, as their hearts were in accord with the Spirit that through the Word imparted the knowledge, they felt that associations of persons and

parties who denied Christ as the Savior of men and Lord of all, could not be Christian Churches, whatever merits they might otherwise have. And Christians now, if they have the mind of Christ which our fathers possessed and in which they were so mighty a host, few as they were in numbers compared with the multitude against which they were arrayed in the great battle of the Reformation, can as little recognize Socinians under the name of Unitarians and Universalists and Swedenborgians, or any other of the numerous titles which they assume, as Christian Churches than could our believing fathers. No doubt there are estimable men among them. We have known such, and as neighbors and citizens we have no reason to suppose that they ever found us lacking in our appreciation and recognition of their good qualities. A sensible heathen may be even a better neighbor than a sensitive Christian who suspects all sorts of evil motives and is ready to start a quarrel on all sorts of imaginary grounds. But that is not at all to the purpose, unless it be as a reminder that the Church is not a social club and that it is not to be judged by the amenities of good society. We Christians are not religiously in accord with Jews and Gentiles, and in our churches their good qualities in other respects do not count as titles to fellowship.

But the test laid down in our Confession reaches farther. Rome was not placed in the same category with Socinianism. The Roman Christians, notwithstanding the papal apostasy under whose iron heel they were suffering, was still a Christian Church, because the old Christian Creed was still acknowledged, the principal truths of the Gospel were still taught, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Supper were still administered in a way that preserved their validity. The Romanists were therefore a Church that must be reckoned with, and the Lutheran Church, true to the Gospel, reckoned with it in the days of the Reformation and never ceased to reckon with it since. It had no interests but those of the Gospel to subserve, and therefore whether it should stand or fall, had no difficulty in accepting and declaring the whole counsel of salvation as set forth in Holy Scripture. It had nothing to lose in the maintenance of any and every part of the truth there revealed unto our salvation. Rome had rights as a Christian Church which they never failed to recognize, much as that recognition in some cases appeared to contravene their dearest desires. By the grace of God they knew the truth and that truth made them free. Humble believers of the Gospel of grace in Christ unto their salvation, faithful Christian men as they were, they had no fear to go where that Gospel led them and to acknowl-

edge what the truth which it reveals required, even if its testimony seemed to undermine the ground on which they stood. The Lord would see to that: their calling was to follow the Lord, and they had learned the hard lesson to cast their cares upon Him. May His grace be sufficient for us in this latter day of doubt and quibbling and timidity to assert our faith and leave all results to Him.

There were others besides Romanists who did not go heart in heart and hand in hand with the Lutherans in their conflict and confession. In the great day of Augsburg some thought it necessary to present a different creed. History shows how some of those who joined in the opposition to Rome were led to oppose some of the doctrines which Luther and the Lutherans maintained and which, their consciences being bound by the Gospel, they could not yield. There was a party that resisted the truth, and they would not unite with the Lutherans in their glorious Confession at Augsburg, but were induced to establish a different organization which is historically known as the Reformed Church. While these followers of Zwingli and Calvin were in harmony with Luther and the Lutherans in their opposition to the abominations of the papacy, they departed from the truth of the Gospel in some important respects and published a Confession of their own. But they, too, like the Roman Christians, retained the central truth of Christianity and were therefore recognized as churches. The principle upon which this was done is expressed in our article and is that which has determined the practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church ever since.

The Church is “the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.” That the Church is essentially the company of believers, whom only God can distinguish from the mass of men who are not believers, although some unbelievers profess to be such and pass for such in the eyes of men, is of such prime importance for doctrine and practice, that it is repeated in the next article. “God knoweth them that are His.” As only those who have the Spirit of Christ are His, man cannot infallibly know them. Nor is it of any essential import that he should. “He that believeth shall be saved.” Who these are the Lord who seeth into the depth of the human soul and discerneth all the thoughts of the heart, knows without fail. And that is enough to secure the comfort of the Gospel to each individual believer, and enough to maintain the kingdom of our Lord, which is not of this world.

This kingdom the Savior has established on earth and continues to extend and direct and bless. He does this by the institution of the means of grace, the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments. We know this by the revelation which He has given us in the Gospel. We know that by the administration of these means according to the Lord's commission, a congregation of believers is called into being and will continue to exist. We know this without seeing into the hearts of men and being able to distinguish who among the professed believers are really such, and who are not. God knows, and we do not need to know. For the Lord does not found His Church on the shifting sands of human inference and opinion, but on His unerring Word. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His, and, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Tim. 2:19. Against this Holy Christian Church the gates of hell can never prevail.

It continued to exist in spite of all the usurpations and corruptions of the papacy, and continues to exist in spite of all the pomp and pride of Rome, and all the pretensions of science falsely so called in our day of skepticism and criticism, and all religious indifference and fierce warfare against the exclusiveness of Christianity in its proclamation of the one only name by which we must be saved.

But the Romish Church was not and is not this "congregation of saints." This became clear to our fathers, otherwise the Reformation would never have been the glorious fact which history presents, and the grand Confession of Augsburg would never have been presented. The Church of Rome was, and is still, a visible organization that confesses Christ, though with many a human admixture of error in that confession: that has and uses the means of grace which the Head of the Church has instituted and by which He executes His purpose of salvation, notwithstanding the corruptions which human sin has introduced or permitted to enter: and that is a Christian Church because of the Christian believers which have been gathered into it through the Word and Sacrament which it still efficaciously administers, though reason might suggest that from the premises given man must of necessity conclude that all these means are so vitiated as to render them invalid and utterly powerless to produce the effect claimed.

But our thoughts are not God's thoughts. The Holy Spirit still leads souls to faith through the means of grace, and the Lord still builds His Church in His appointed way notwithstanding the infirmities which attach to the hu-

man ministers and their work of administration. Wherever the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are dispensed some are brought by faith into the kingdom of God, because it is the Lord who does the saving work, not the servant who is appointed to employ the Lord's means; and the Lord works effectually through them notwithstanding the faults of His servants.

But if the Romish organization must be regarded as a Christian Church, notwithstanding all its glaring departures from the truth of the Gospel, there could be no difficulty in perceiving that the Protestant parties which declined to subscribe the Augsburg Confession, but thought it right to organize another Church than the Lutheran, with another Confession, must also be recognized as Christian Churches. Neither had our fathers the presumption to imagine that because they had fought the great fight of the Reformation, they alone should be recognized as the Christian Church. That thought was far from their minds. It would have been in conflict with their whole contention and the whole work of the Reformation if they had harbored the thought of substituting the Church of the Augsburg Confession for the Romish Church as the one holy Christian Church of our Creed.

That Church is an article of our faith; we believe that God has such a Church on earth, though it is impossible to substantiate this by the evidence of sense, which cannot discern the faith in human hearts that renders them members of the congregation of believers. The Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutheran Church of the Reformation, is certainly a Christian Church. But so is the Romish, and so is the Zwinglian. None of them is the one holy church of our Christian Creed. The necessity of laying down a test by which the claims of different visible churches must be examined is thus apparent.

Such a test is laid down in the words appended to the definition of the Church given in our Confession, "in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." For Lutheran readers it is hardly necessary to mention, that this is not meant as criterion by which to determine the essence of the Church and its existence upon earth. It is the congregation of saints and as such is the Lord's kingdom set up in this world of sin, whether men recognize it or not. The Lord knows them that are His. They are the believers who have by the power of the Holy Spirit embraced the great salvation in Christ. In this regard no tests are needed, because the Lord searches the hearts and infallibly knows His disciples who believe in Him as their Savior and, guided by His Word, live under Him in His king-

dom. The Lord knoweth them that are His, and they live, some in heaven but some still on earth, whether men know it or not, and even though men deny their very existence.

Nay, a word more must be said, however provocative of controversy it may seem to be. Unbelievers cannot know that such a congregation of saints exists on earth. The criterion which our Confession announces and applies lies above their horizon. They have not the spiritual qualifications necessary to understand it and have not the prerequisite for its application. The Church of Christ is an article of faith, and the rule set forth in our Confession as a test of visible churches is designed only for believers, as in the nature of the case it must be, because only these believe in a holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, and are at all concerned about the manifestation of this invisible communion in visible congregations. But these believers are deeply concerned in the appearance of this congregation of saints on earth, to whom by the grace of God they are conscious of belonging.

The powers and duties of the Church in this world of sin and sorrow and struggle are committed to believers, and they must work together, that the great salvation which is theirs may be preserved to them and spread to all around them. When souls are rescued from the death and damnation that is upon them because of their sin, and enjoy the peace which the Gospel has brought them through faith in the redemption wrought by the Savior, they must, not only by their Lord's command, but by an inward necessity which their faith in Christ brings with it, tell the good tidings to others and arrange for the perpetuation of the Gospel among them and its promulgation, according to the ability given them, among all nations. For this they must join together and work together. And for this the criterion laid down in our Confession is necessary. If any person still asks for a reason, let him think of the Reformation and its mighty struggle against the abominations of Rome. All argument would be vain against people who can see no reason then for making a distinction between the visible Church that is controlled by the pope and the visible Church that is controlled by the Lord Jesus through the Gospel.

The Church is the congregation of saints, which in its essence needs no tests because it is known to the Lord unerringly by His exclusive prerogative of proving the hearts and knowing all things, and cannot be known by man through the application of any tests, because none can reveal the secrets of the heart which are known to the Lord alone. Men can know only

by the Word of God that there is a congregation of saints on earth. It is an article of our faith. And in the service which believers render to the Lord in their work of faith and labor of love, this Word alone must be their guide.

It is a fundamental error to assume that in prosecuting church work and deciding upon church fellowship we must judge the hearts of men. In no case are we empowered to do that, and in no case are we authorized to attempt to do it or to presume to be able to do it. Possibly a Romanist may be a Christian, notwithstanding the errors dominant in the Romish Church; but our fathers could not fellowship Romanists and work together with them, because the Romish authorities would not accept the Gospel. Whether in their hearts the individuals were believers in the Lord Jesus or not, was not for them to judge, but whether what they professed and taught and did was in accordance with the truth revealed in the Scriptures, it was their duty to judge. And by the grace of God they decided not to follow Rome in its manifest opposition to the Scriptures which were written for our learning and given for our guidance.

Rome rejected the Gospel, and therefore Lutherans rejected Rome.

4. Right Understanding of The Test

A few words may be helpful to the right understanding of the test applied by our fathers and declared in our Confession as part of their faith. It was not an expedient to rid themselves of a trouble. They were ready to suffer even to the sacrifice of their lives for the truth of the Gospel. But that truth made it evident to them that the Church in its manifestation must be tested by that Word which alone sets forth the will and way of the Lord of the Church. In their faith and thought this was inevitable. No claims could be conceded that were in conflict with the Gospel; no power could be recognized that refused recognition of the power of God as supreme.

The holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, must become manifest on earth, but in its manifestation in confession and work and visible organization human sin must be reckoned with, and the divine criterion of the Scriptures must be applied to safeguard Christians against human error and deception. The “congregation of saints” is not manifest in every locality where people profess to be Christians and unite in congregations for alleged Christian worship and work. Some such organizations lack the es-

sential truth of the Gospel, which alone can constitute them a Christian Church and which believers are constrained to look for before they can recognize them as such; and some have in their confession of truth such an admixture of error that, though they may be recognized as Christian Churches, believers who are faithful to the Gospel, which is their only hope in life and death are constrained to avoid them, because they cannot be partakers of their sin in teaching otherwise than God's Word teaches, and thus, to that extent, damaging the cause of Christ while seeming to promote it. They can acknowledge as Churches only those who have the Gospel and Sacraments as means by which alone the grace of God creates believers and thus a congregation of saints. and fellowship only those churches in which "the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered."

It is a strange misapprehension of this simple evangelical mark of the Church, in its appearance on earth, when it is presumed to mean that. wherever arrangements are made for the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, and these are accordingly in vogue, there must of necessity be a Christian Church on the evidence of sense. The argument is presumed to be that, as only Christians use the Word and Sacraments as the means of gathering and edifying Christian congregations, there must be a Christian congregation wherever there is an assembly of people who use these means and gather around them. And on this misapprehension a doctrine of the Church is constructed, which is presumed to be Lutheran. but which conflicts with the doctrine of the Lutheran Reformation at fundamental points. It is an error that undermines the evangelical contention against the assumptions of Rome, and virtually concedes the claim of that proud sect, that the Christian Church is essentially a visible corporation, and that the papal organization is the only one that has any reasonable claim to its prestige and power.

The Reformers were not at all the confused heads which this theory represents them to be. Theirs was a too intensely earnest struggle of faith to allow of any such dallying with matters of eternal import. They firmly believed in the holy Christian Church; they ardently desired to live in it as the Body of Christ which enjoys all the blessings of the redemption from sin and death: and they were certain that the papal hierarchy, in its plain apostasy from the truth of the Gospel, is not that Church. They were quite sure that the Church is the congregation of saints who believe His Word and live under Him in His kingdom; and although they were aware that the believers

constituting this congregation are known only to the Lord, they were quite sure that it existed, and existed here on earth, where we sinners live and labor and suffer and die. The kingdom of God must be manifested here in order to carry out the purpose of the King. He has given orders which must be executed, and He has gathered a company of believers who are glad to execute them. They must appear in the world in the prosecution of their mission, and with them the Church appears. These believing people, being yet in the body, cannot gather for worship and for the performance of the great work for which they are commissioned without being seen of men.

Certainly the Church, according to the design of the Lord, becomes visible in this world of sense. But must it on that account cease to be an object of faith as a “congregation of saints,” who are known only to the Lord?

Must the Church in its essential character as a spiritual body change into a carnal body in order to worship and work in this material world?

Must the congregation of believers whom Christ has gathered by His Spirit, working faith through Word and Sacrament, become a mere congregation of professed believers, some really believing and some making the profession on other grounds than that of really believing, which Christians are helplessly doomed to recognize as the Church, instead of the holy Christian Church of the Christian Creed?

That is what some modern philosophies about the Church come to and advocate.

That is not what Lutherans confessed and still confess in this article of our Confession. They adhered to the ancient Creed of all Christendom, which not only declared the Church to be the Communion of Saints, but set it forth as an object of the Christian faith. Lutherans never departed from this Creed. They never thought that, when the Church appeared on earth it could be anything else than the congregation of saints that is subject to the truth of the Gospel, to which our Savior came to testify as King, and which must therefore be absolutely subject to that everlasting truth as revealed in Scripture.

The congregation of saints always remains the same company of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who are cordially subject to His Word as their only rule of life and hope of salvation. How could they otherwise, when that congregation appears in this world of sin, than apply the rule of the Gospel to test the validity of its claims? They could not see who among the professed believers were really such, but they could, by comparing their con-

fession with the infallible Word of Scripture, ascertain who confessed the truth revealed in the Gospel and who did not, and consequently who could be rightfully fellowshiped and who could not.

The Lord of the Church requires that for the accomplishment of His purpose of grace and salvation, the Gospel should be rightly taught and the Sacraments should be rightly administered, because these are the means which He who alone can accomplish it and does the work. has appointed to this end. By this rule the claims of all visible organizations claiming to be Christian churches must be tested.

For all affiliation and cooperation in church work the application of the test is of fundamental importance, and nothing in the practice of erring churches has been more damaging to the cause of evangelical truth than the neglect of such application. which under the guise of charity and liberality has induced and fostered a fatal indifference to the truth and to the kingdom of Christ which it established, and for the preservation and propagation of which it was established.

“Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” John 18:37.

Where His Word rules and His ordinances are observed, there alone is His kingdom set up among men.

When we declare that by the application of this simple biblical test we can be assured of the existence of the invisible communion of saints in this visible world, let us guard against the suggestions of the flesh, which are so likely to occur and which, if they are accepted, are sure to vitiate the plain teaching of the Bible. The suggestions usually made are that the criterion laid down in our Confession is in substance the same that reason teaches, and virtually identical with that which all sects accept and adopt in practice. It would be well if this were so. But unhappily it is not so.

What the sects usually mean in their professed acceptance of the test set forth in our Confession is this, that the fact of a profession of the Gospel, and of the administration of the Sacraments required by the Gospel, is sufficient proof that the people engaged in this work are Christians, and that therefore there must needs be a congregation of believers wherever such work with such a profession is done. This looks plausible and to many it is convincing. But it is a fatal fallacy, which is not at all expressive of the faith

of the Reformers, and of the Church of the Reformation, and is not at all what the Lutheran Church declares in her Confession.

A person may professedly preach the Gospel without himself being a believer.

Such things are not only possible, but have often occurred in fact and still occur, as we know not by an unwarranted judgment of their hearts, but by the confession of their mouths and of their ungodly acts.

And so it is with the administration of the Sacraments. A man may be called to preach and to administer the holy ordinances of our Lord, without being himself a believer in the Savior whose grace they communicate. They ought to be believers; believers can accept them as pastors only when they profess to be believers: but the fact remains that sometimes they are not, and sometimes it even becomes evident that they are not.

And the people who hear the Word and receive the Sacraments — are they all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus? We hope that they are, but the mere fact of their hearing the Gospel and receiving the Sacraments does not prove it. The lives of not a few have shown that their professions were false; that they have been deceivers of the people. and that their professed faith in the Lord Jesus was only a self seeking pretense. These are discouraging revelations. but they set forth the facts as the world presents them and as the Word of God leads us to expect them.

We always go astray when we depend on human thoughts and works instead of depending on the promises of God as they are made known to us in the Gospel. So far as our human sense and reason reaches we are never sure that there is a Church on earth, that is, a congregation of sincere believers in Christ, who have an assured hope of eternal glory.

It seems a sad conclusion.

But faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, and to faith therefore much is real that to sense is not perceptible, and to reason is even absurd.

By faith we know that there is a Christian Church on earth which is the congregation of believers, though sense and reason cannot prove it.

To the natural powers of man its existence cannot be established otherwise than as a congregation of confessors whose confession may or may not be honest and sincere. How then can Christian believers have any certainty that there is on earth a holy Christian Church. which is the Communion of Saints, and how is it possible that they should know that Church to exist in

any particular locality where they unite for their own edification as well as for the promulgation of the Gospel to others? They cannot read the hearts of people any more now than they could before their union in a local church. They presume indeed, as in charity they are bound to presume, that those who assemble with them and join in their confession of faith and labor of love are of one heart and one soul with them in Christ. But the mere fact that others unite with them does not prove that these are in hearty accord with them, seeing that in this world there are other reasons that may influence them.

Their certainty lies in their faith.

They believe the Word of Holy Scripture. They are not sure that all those who profess to be believers are really and truly such. These may be mere hypocrites, as men have often proved themselves to be. But they are sure that the promises of God are yea and amen forever. These promises are not only that all that believe shall have everlasting life, but also that the Word coming forth from His mouth shall not return unto Him void, but shall accomplish that which He pleases and prosper in the thing whereto He sent it. Therefore those who believe the Word know assuredly that where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered, there is a Holy Christian Church.

We know very well that not all who hear the Gospel believe the joyful tidings; we know also that not all who are baptized and who receive the Holy Communion appropriate the blessings conveyed for their reception. Our assurance does not rest at all upon our ability to discern and to discriminate by the proper use of sense and reason. It is false to assume that all who preach and administer the Sacraments, and all who hear and receive them, are of necessity believers. It is not so according to the Word of God, which tells us that many are called, but few are chosen, and it is not so in the experience gathered in past and present times. In truth, as far as our sense and our reason furnish any grounds of assurance we do not know whether a single individual in the congregation that hears the Word and uses the Sacraments is really a Christian believer. Possible they are all hypocrites, so far as our logic, working on a merely natural basis, can determine the case.

Happily the Gospel provides against the wrongs which might arise from this source because of the sinfulness of the flesh.

Infidels are very ready to conclude in their hostility to the Church that professed Christians are all hypocrites. IN their enmity they make the most

of the shortcomings and wrongdoings of church members to render plausible their malicious contention that Christianity is all a delusion and a cheat.

On the other hand, the power of grace renders all Christians charitable, and accordingly in their judgment all who use the Word and Sacraments and profess to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are trusted as sincere and honest in their profession, so long as their own testimony, in word or conduct, does not prove the contrary. But it is not this judgment of charity that furnishes the ground of the believer's assurance that there is always a congregation of saints where there is a congregation using the means of grace. Even when in charity we assume that all are true believers, we must admit that of the many called in any given locality the general rule applies, that few are chosen. What makes us unerringly certain is the faith that, where the means of grace are employed, they will not fail to accomplish their saving purpose in some souls. This faith, not the evidence of our sense or reason, or even of our charity, makes us sure that there is a congregation of saints among us. That is the meaning of the criterion presented in our article. But that does not exhaust its import.

Where the Word and the Sacraments are employed, there the Lord has promised that His work of grace shall be done and believers shall be gathered from the world that lieth in wickedness. There accordingly there will be a congregation of saints, or a Christian Church. But because of the deceitfulness of sin and of the infirmities of the flesh, that Church may be Romish or Zwinglian or Calvinistic Reformed. These types of error appeared in the days of the Reformation and have been perpetuated until our own times. There is a difference, and a distinction must be made. Therefore the mark of the Church was expressed in the definite form in which it appears in our article.

It could not be a matter of indifference to those who fought the battles of the Reformation, and suffered so much in the cause of the Gospel, whether the Church on earth should be Romish or Evangelical or Calvinistic. That there is a Church on earth that perpetuates itself by the administration of the means of grace, through which the Lord does His saving work in all time until time shall end, is of course a matter of first and highest import.

It is a great consolation to believers, in the war of sects and amid sentimental pleas for liberality in all sorts of questions, some of which are not worth a moment's worry, but some of which, though mingled in the general medley of human notions, are of fundamental concern to souls that are

seeking salvation, that there is on earth a congregation of saints whose citizenship is in heaven. Whether they are Romanists or Lutherans or Calvinists, or known by other names which indicate the desire to be recognized as Christians, is not of the highest interest to believers, whose first and chief concern is that there be a constant use of the divinely appointed means of grace and therefore an unceasing operation of the Holy Spirit, through these means, to lead lost souls to the Savior and give them peace in believing. It is this that thoughtlessly, or through erring thoughts, leads many sincere souls to a practice of unionism, which is founded upon indifference to evangelical truth, but which is made to seem a special zeal to preserve the fundamental truth of the Gospel, though it be at the expense of sacrificing the whole foundation upon which that truth rests. Ours is a Confession of faith, and accepts nothing and admits nothing that conflicts with faith in Christ and in the Gospel by which He saves souls and builds and governs His Church. That the Word and Sacraments are in vogue on earth is our joy, because this makes us sure that there is a congregation of saints on earth. But that does not dispense us from allegiance to His Word, by which He rules His people.

The criterion of the Word of God must be applied to churches as well as to individuals. “The foundation of God standeth sure having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His: and, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” 2 Tim. 2:19.

Therefore it was neither confusion in their thinking nor inconsistency in their conduct when the men of the Augsburg Confession admitted that there is a congregation of saints among the Romanists and among the Zwinglians and Calvinists, and yet were constrained to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints in opposition to the false doctrine taught by those churches. Their work was in the interest of the Church of Christ, which is the Communion of Saints; and whilst in the Reformation they labored and prayed and fought and suffered in the great struggle against the errors and usurpations and corruptions of Rome, they did this as much for the benefit of Roman and Reformed as of Lutheran Christians. What they ardently desired was that the truth in Jesus, which is revealed in the Gospel for the salvation of all them that believe, might be delivered to men in its purity, and that the Holy Sacraments, which are bearers of saving grace because connected with the Gospel and certified by its promises, might be ad-

ministered according to the divine intent and thus might accomplish the divine purpose.

The Reformation had absolutely no other interest than the salvation of souls to the glory of the Lord Jesus, who purchased them with His blood: and the conflict with Rome, and subsequently with Reformed parties who refused to join them in their glorious Confession at Augsburg, was in unselfish and humble pursuance of that great purpose. They struggled ardently and prayerfully against every corruption of the Gospel and Sacraments, whether in Rome or elsewhere, because they believed the Word of their Lord and knew from its teaching, of which they were diligent students and humble learners, that they are the means by which the Redeemer of the world accomplishes His saving work, and that every deviation from the Lord's Word is a detraction from its power unto salvation and a concession to the enemy of souls, who has no fear of human wisdom and policy, but is always worsted by the Word of God.

Lutherans believed, and now believe, that it is the truth in Jesus that overcomes the devil and the flesh and the world, and that Christians know not what they do when, in their love of ease and freedom from the self-denial involved in fighting the good fight of faith, they sacrifice everything to the demands of Rome and Reformism [Calvinism], to science and higher criticism, except what their leaders call the fundamentals of Christianity, though at the present stage of the Christian surrender it is impossible to determine what yet remains of Gospel truth that is accepted under this category.

The Reformers proclaimed the truth of the Gospel for the salvation of souls. They were sure that there is deliverance from sin and death in no other name but that of Christ, and that the redemption effected through Him could come to men according to His appointment only through the Word and Sacrament. When they contended for these in their purity against Rome, which had corrupted them, why should any believing soul blame them? It was just to liberate the true Christians held in bondage under Romish tyranny, and to prevent the continuance of that tyranny over others who might by the Gospel be brought to the salvation in Christ, that our fathers contended for the faith.

As they could not win the pope and his followers to the acceptance of the Gospel, but were rather rejected and persecuted for their earnest efforts. what could they do but unite on the basis of the pure Word and Sacrament

as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession? And having thus united, it is a matter of course that in pursuance of their faith they should insist on the acceptance of the Gospel in its purity and the right administration of the Sacraments according to its requirements as the condition of membership and visible Christian fellowship.

They contended for the truth against Rome and all adversaries, and they could not now, when circumstances impelled them to organize the Christian Church independently of Rome, abate one jot or tittle of that for which they had been contending in all their controversy. The right teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments must be the criterion of the visible Church, and by that rule, which it applied to Rome and all other supposed organizations of the Christian Church it desired to be itself tested. There may be errors in organizations which are formed to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, and these may be of a kind that does not destroy the validity and the efficacy of the means of grace, on which account it may be admitted that there is still a congregation of saints in such unfavorable conditions; but the errors work against the admission and are a constant menace to the faith which alone constitutes their title to be a congregation of saints.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession does not claim to be the visible congregation of saints in such sense that it is presumed to include all believers on earth and therefore to be the Christian Church to the exclusion of all claims of other corporations to be Christian churches. They believed the Word of God that the truth of the Gospel would exert its power, notwithstanding human errors which tended to destroy its efficacy, and that therefore even under the Romish apostasy there was a little company of believers recognized by our Lord as a congregation of saints, amid the crowd of actors in the mummeries and flummeries of Antichristian Rome. But they knew the power of error as well as the power of truth, and therefore built the Lutheran Church on the divine plan, that "the Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." According to the Scriptures they could not do otherwise.

So the Lutheran Church still builds and, building thus, rejoices in the blessing of God upon her work of faith, while she deplores the errings and misunderstandings of her opponents, many of whom are fully in accord

with her purpose and aim, though they fail to understand her evangelical position.

5. True Unity Depends On The Doctrine of the Gospel And Administration Of The Sacraments

When the principle of faith which is declared in our article is once apprehended and dominates our thinking and practice, the part following is implied as a necessary consequence. It might thus seem not to need express mention. But the history of the Church has shown how dull Christian people often are to comprehend the simplest truths of divine revelation, and on few subjects have they been less slow to understand the import of the Gospel than in regard to the doctrine of the Church. Our fathers therefore manifested their usual wisdom in adding to the definition of the Church, and the mark by which it could be distinguished in its manifestation in this visible world, the declaration:

“Unto the true unity of the Church it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by men, should be alike everywhere: as St. Paul says, ‘There is one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.’ Eph. 4:4. 5.”

This declaration helped many to understand what Lutherans mean in gathering churches around the pure Word and Sacrament, instead of teaching men to submit to human authorities and rites of human institution, which have no power to save, and which tend to substitute an outward organization under a visible head, with assumed power to dictate to consciences what they must believe and do, for the congregation of saints under Christ and His Gospel.

When congregations are formed with the expressed intention of establishing Christian churches, they should be so constituted as to be recognized as sister churches by all other Christian congregations. An external union of all Christian churches into one grand universal Christian Church on earth is indeed neither necessary nor possible. Every thought of that kind conflicts with the idea of the Church presented in Scripture as a spiritual kingdom of

Christ, over which He reigns and which is composed only of true believers, who are known only to Him.

It is not necessary that there should be such an external union, because the Lord does His saving work by means of His appointment, which can be effectually administered wherever two or three are gathered together in His name, and to the efficacy of which larger numbers and union with other congregations can add nothing. All the powers of the Church for the accomplishment of its saving purposes are as fully committed to a little country congregation in its confession of Christ and its possession of His Word and Sacraments, as to the largest and most influential city churches.

The greatest work for human souls that pope and cardinals and bishops in the gorgeous array of the Roman hierarchy can do is to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments which the Head of the Church has instituted and by which He does His saving work; and this, which the proud and pretentious hierarchy fails to do, is done by our poorest and obscurest congregations, whose pastors trust in the power of God and in the efficacy of His appointed means.

Protestants are all astray when they imagine that an imposing organization of churches under titled dignitaries, at which the multitude will gaze with wonder, or that the gathering of congregations in mighty masses under one general government, will so impress the community that the Church will conquer the world. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world, and only the Word and Sacraments contain the power of God which converts men to Christ and sustains their faith. Even Lutherans are enticed upon the wrong road when they are induced to lay great stress upon their numbers and to fancy that their union in larger organizations will give them more power. The power for all the legitimate purposes of the Church lies in the means of grace. Numbers may give us prestige, and in that respect give us larger opportunity to ply these means. But it is an erring and disloyal thought, that any concession in regard to the purity of the Word and Sacraments, which might increase the number of adherents to our churches, could by any possibility increase the number of believers, who alone constitute the Church.

A little company can do more by fidelity to the Lord and His Gospel and a faithful plying of these means in season and out of season, through evil and through good report, than could that company increased tenfold by a surrender to the liberal sentiment of men who cannot brook the exclusive-

ness of Christianity in its teaching that only Christ can save and only Christ shall rule the congregation of the saved. And as the establishment of an external kingdom of Christ on earth does not lie within the divine plan, it is impossible that such an organization could be legitimately realized. God's government on earth, which the goodness of God always makes tributary to His purpose of grace and salvation, has made it impracticable to form an external union of Christians in all the world. They never can get together in space, and the conditions are not such that they ever could get together by representatives in a general union or confederation of churches into a universal visible church. Why then should Christians trouble themselves about such human schemes, instead of devoting themselves to their proper work of preserving the purity of the faith and providing for churches in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered?

And yet, according to the will of God expressed in His Word and implied in the situation which results from its application, the individual congregation is not absolutely independent of all other congregations, seeing that all of them are manifestations in the visible world of the one Congregation of Saints, which is the Holy Christian Church. The brethren who unite in one locality, and make provision for the administration of the means of grace for their own edification and for the gathering in of others into the good Shepherd's fold, are glad to recognize as their brethren others who have joined together for the same purpose, and to be recognized by them. They are subjects of the same Lord and working together in the same glorious cause, and they not only desire to enjoy each other's fellowship and encouragement, but are engaged in a mission in which they need each other's encouragement and cooperation.

Hence the churches in apostolic days soon became known as the Christian Church, because they were of one heart and soul through the one faith which bound them together in mutual love: and hence in the days of the Reformation the Christians who renounced the idols of Rome and gathered around the Gospel which Luther preached, were rightly called evangelical churches and were soon known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church, because they were united in the one faith which found proper expression in the Augsburg Confession in its distinction from the corruptions of Romanism, which were ruining many souls and endangering all.

The evangelical churches had come into being through one of the fiercest conflicts in history.

They had struggled for the truth in Jesus as revealed in the Gospel against a mighty organization with tremendous power, which claimed to be the Church of Christ and hold all its prerogatives. And now, when by the grace of God, and by His marvelous providences that sometimes seemed miraculous, they had established evangelical churches and thus an Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession, these Lutheran Christians could not stultify themselves by pretending that any other congregations of professed followers of Christ could be recognized as divinely authorized and authenticated Christian churches on a full equality with themselves, who had fought the battles of the Gospel truth against a vigorous and furious foe that claimed preeminence and had the prestige and the worldly power to enforce its presumptuous claims.

They recognized Roman churches as Christian; because they knew that the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments were still efficaciously used among them, notwithstanding their dangerous errors, but they could not by any stretch of charity acknowledge them to be churches true to the Lord's Word. The Romish churches were not true to the Scriptures, and the Reformation came because they were not.

The Church of the Reformation could recognize all professed Christian organizations as churches as long as they employed the divinely instituted means of grace, through which the Lord by the Holy Spirit could lead sinners to the Christian faith, because thus a congregation of saints could be established, notwithstanding errors which did not destroy the validity of these means: but while they were constrained to reject some pretended churches that did not trust these means and built on other foundations. they were always ready to recognize the work of God by Word and Sacrament. and admit that there might be erring churches that. of because the prevalence of Word and Sacrament and thus of the Lord's work among them. might still embody a congregation of saints.

Their charity was wide as the grace of God is wide.

But they had no authority to alter the terms of visible fellowship, and if a congregation would not accept the truth which they taught and which the Church declared in the Augsburg Confession as its faith, they would not and could not recognize it as a sister church, but insisted that as a prime condition of fellowship it must be loyal to the Head of the Church and accept the truth of the Gospel.

The Lutheran Church in its humble devotion to that Gospel could no more concede the right of Reformed parties to depart from the Holy Scriptures than it could make such a concession to the Romanists. They must stand by the Gospel at every hazard, and the idea of falling in their firm adherence to the Gospel of Christ did not enter their minds. If they should fall, Christ would fall with them. Their faith forbade the thought of that, though as a matter of human speculation they were sometimes led to speak of it and to give it passing consideration.

They could not fall whilst the Lord of all sustained them.

They preached the everlasting Gospel, and their Confession fixed that as the test of the pure Church. Under no conditions would they depart from that. And under no conditions, though conflicts come again like those of the Reformation, and Christians in the providence of God be again called to suffer as our fathers suffered in the maintenance of the truth of the Gospel, can the Lutheran Church depart from its evangelical principle. "The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered."

Any stubborn and persistent departure from this rule must be a bar to church fellowship, though in some cases such departure does not necessitate the decision that the erring party is not a church. It may be a church inasmuch as, notwithstanding its errors, it still preaches the Gospel and administers the Sacraments in their essential validity, but it is not faithful to the truth of the Gospel, and its errors have the tendency to destroy that truth in the souls of men and to deprive them of its blessings. Therefore the Church of the Augsburg Confession insists that the visible churches must rightly teach the Gospel and rightly administer the Sacraments, and that refusal to abide by the Lord's Word on the part of any professedly Christian congregation must constitute a barrier to fraternal fellowship with it so long as it persists in such unfaithfulness to the Head of the Church.

That is her offense in the eyes of sects having another standard of membership and fellowship than that of the pure Gospel; that is her glory in the eyes of those who appreciate the Gospel and stand in awe of God's Word. When this principle of the exclusive authority of the Lord as He has spoken in Holy Scripture is understood and appreciated, it is not necessary to enter upon an extended exposition of the proposition concerning the unity of the Church. "Unto the true unity of the Church it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments."

Because the Lord who builds and rules the Church does His work by His Word and the Sacraments which He has instituted, the Church comes into existence only by their use, and only thus can we be sure that there is a congregation of saints, or a church, in any given place; and only when the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered can we recognize the congregation as a church that is faithful to the Lord. The Lord knoweth them that are His, and there is never any difficulty in this regard so far as the one holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, is concerned. But as we cannot search the heart, they are not known to us.

The visible church, although it can be a church only because it is a congregation of saints, cannot be tested in that way by men who are joined together as Christians for worship and work. They must hold fast what the Lord teaches them in regard to the nature of His Church, as well as regards all other points of revealed truth, and therefore never doubt that it consists of those who believe the truth of which the King of saints came into the world to testify, and thus to set up a kingdom which is not of this world; but they must live under Him in His kingdom, and not presume to go beyond the Word by which He rules it. They can know from that Word that there are some believers, and therefore a church, wherever His Word is preached, His Sacraments are administered, and His name is confessed. But they cannot know who of those confessing His name are truly believers. They must keep within their province of searching the Scriptures. And this true believers gladly do. Accordingly in their church association and cooperation they apply the test of pure Gospel preaching and administration of the Sacraments according to the institution made known in the Gospel.

“Unto the true unity of the Church it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.”

That is revealed in the Scriptures, to that the Lord holds His disciples, but that is sufficient.

“Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by men, should be alike everywhere.”

In the pride of man’s reason and overestimation of his own wisdom, the human arrangements, though originally conceived only as a necessary human

provision for the appropriate use of divine ordinances, are always likely, where proper vigilance is not exercised, to win their way in the minds of men as necessary institutions.

The history of the Church, which is of course the history of external organizations of the Church in this material world, is replete with instances of this tendency to confound the human provision for the execution of the divine will with the divine command, and of the consequent elevation of such well meant human expedients to the dignity of necessary attributes of the Church and consequently as conditions of its unity.

The Romish Church is a glaring example; the Anglican Church with its undue stress on episcopal government, the Methodist churches with their peculiar notions about forms of conversion, the Baptists with their fanatical notions about a special mode of baptism as essential to the divine ordinance, are illustrations of the same tendency and the same error.

The Church of the Reformation abides by the Word of God, and while it admits the importance of regulations in the visible church for the worship of God and the conduct of the work assigned, it never fails to warn against making these human expedients equivalent to divine commands.

The Lutheran Church insists on the pure Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments according to the divine institution.

All the rest must be free, because the Lord has not ordained it, and must not be a condition of church unity, because the Lord has not required it.

6. The “One Holy Church Is To Continue Forever”

Our churches “teach that one Holy Church is to continue forever.” They are confident that Christ has established His kingdom upon earth, which is an everlasting kingdom, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

It did in some periods of the Church’s history look as if it had ceased to exist, and some Christians became discouraged when appearances indicated that the fury of hell, though many of its emissaries wore the livery of heaven, would triumph over the Gospel. There was no need to fear. The very fact that there was still, even in the worst days, a little flock that confessed the Savior’s name and the truth recorded in Scripture, and who still

used His Word and Sacrament, always was sufficient proof that some were left who had not bowed their knees to Baal.

Neither at any time had all true believers been withdrawn from the earth and assigned their places of glory in heaven. There were always, and always shall be until the end of time, a company of believers here on earth who bear the commission to preach the Gospel to every creature and to fight the good fight of faith. The Lord, who reigns in heaven above and on earth beneath, provides for that.

Enemies have repeatedly prophesied the extermination of the Church, and scientists and critics are warning us now that Christianity has outlived its usefulness and that the end of the Church is near. Let not your hearts be troubled. These foes are doing what they can to make good their threats, but against the Lord their might is very impotence.

Visible congregations have ceased to exist, and visible churches may fall away and perish from the earth.

But the Church of Christ, which is the Communion of Saints, the congregation of believers, shall continue in all time and in all eternity.

The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32.

Article VIII. What The Church Is.

Though the Church be properly the congregation of saints and true believers, yet, seeing that in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled with it, it is lawful to use the Sacraments administered by evil men, according to the voice of Christ: “The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,” and the words following, Matt. 23:2 And the Sacraments and the Word are effectual, by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, though they be delivered by evil men.

They condemn the Donatists and such like, who denied that it was lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and held that the ministry of evil men is useless and without effect.

IN THE MINDS of some Christians a practical difficulty arises when they reflect upon the doctrine of the Church set forth in our Confession. If the Church be properly the congregation of saints and true believers, and if in this congregation of believers as it appears in this visible world there are confessedly some who are not believers, but are moved by other reasons than that of sincere faith to join them, must not the logical consequence be that the administration of the means of grace may be invalid and without effect, because those who are called to administer them may be among the hypocrites mingled with the congregation of saints?

This practical difficulty, which may easily arise even in cautious minds, our fathers, who never overlooked the practical side of their faith, deemed worthy of a special article in their Confession, all the more as they knew from history and personal experience not only how sincere minds had been troubled by the question, but also how it had led to separation and heresy.

Their faith was firm and their minds were clear on the subject. and accordingly they, in the first place, reiterated the truth that the Church is the congregation of saints; in the second place they admitted that in the visible churches there are persons who are not believers; but, in the third place, the means of grace rest on the institution and command of Christ and are not in-

validated by the insincerity of evil men administering them. Accordingly, in the fourth place, they condemn the error of the Donatists who teach otherwise.

[1] The truth declared in Holy Scripture and set forth by the Church as her faith from the beginning in the Apostles' Creed, that the Church of Christ is the congregation of saints and true believers, who by faith are joined to Him as one body whose citizenship is in heaven and who are heirs of eternal glory through the work of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament by faith in the Savior's name, cannot be set aside. That must stand, whatever difficulties may rise in our thinking. Only those who hear His voice and keep the sayings of our Lord are recognized by the good Shepherd as members of His flock. To this all Christian thinking must adjust itself, and when difficulties arise they must be solved under this fundamental truth, not by assumptions that overthrow it.

The Church is never any thing else, in the true and proper sense, than the Communion of Saints. That there is such a body of saints on earth we cannot know by the testimony of our senses, because we cannot see into the hearts of men and ascertain by such seeing whether they are believers or not. We simply believe the Word of our God that, where His appointed means of salvation are employed, some will be led to believe in the Savior. We do not know who they are, but they are in the congregation of those who use the Word and Sacraments and confess the Savior's name, because there only the means are employed by which God, according to His promise, makes saints of sinners by working faith in their hearts.

Through faith we know what sense cannot perceive, and are sure that the holy Christian Church exists and will continue to exist forever. It is the congregation of saints whom God knows, although we never can have any certain knowledge as to what persons among those who gather around the means of grace are really members. Therefore we speak of the one holy Christian Church as an invisible body, not as though the persons who form the local congregations or the administration of the means of grace among them were not visible, but because our senses, though they see the assembly and the work which is done in it in preaching the Word and dispensing the Sacrament, so that we can in reliance on the divine promises rest assured that the Lord is doing His work there and children are there born unto God by the Holy Spirit's work through these means, we do not know and cannot

know who among the hearers have received Christ by faith, and therefore constitute the congregation of saints.

The Lutheran Church insists on it that the holy Christian Church is “properly the congregation of saints and true believers,” and as such is an article of faith, not an object to be known by sense.

When we say that this Church appears on earth, the conditions are such that careless people easily fall into error on the subject. A visible Church is thus constituted in the material world, which is composed of people who confess the Lord Jesus and who engage in work which He has assigned to His followers, all of whom and all of whose professions and activities we see and hear. It is not a thoughtless use of language to call the visible organizations by the name of churches. The difficulty lies in the matter, not in the employment of the words; and only when error and confusion have entered the mind can the use of the term Church in regard to the external congregation be pronounced incorrect and misleading. Into such error and confusion those have fallen who assume that the visible organization which is called a church has taken the place of the invisible congregation of saints, or that there are two holy Christian Churches, one of them the visible congregation of professed believers, whom we can readily distinguish by their outward acts, the other the invisible congregation of saints whom only the Lord can distinguish.

The visible organization never becomes a substitute for the invisible essence of the Church, as if the Lord by condescension to human infirmity had instituted a Church in which faith is not essential to membership. Only believers in the Savior of the world can be saved, and only they constitute His people who live under Him in His kingdom, their hearts being purified by faith.

Men always deceive themselves when they imagine that by uniting with the external, visible congregation they are in the ark of safety. They are, if they are believers; they are not, if they have not by faith received the Lord Jesus as their mighty and merciful Savior. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Luke 7:21.

Only those who believe constitute the Church of Christ. For this He gave Himself, “that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not

having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Eph. 5:26, 27.

It is of the utmost importance that souls seeking salvation should not be lulled by seducing spirits into the sleep of carnal security by the vain imagination that their membership in a visible congregation is ample assurance that they are members of the congregation of saints that has the unfailing promise of eternal life.

Every local congregation which uses the Gospel and the Sacraments is by the grace of God working through these means in building a church, with all the promises and all the powers of the one holy Christian Church, because there we have the assurance of the divine Word that God is doing His saving work and gathers a congregation of believers. But it is the believers that form the church, not those who profess to believe while they remain in unbelief.

The visible church is called such for no other reason than that it is a congregation of saints and thus a church in the proper sense, although a multitude that is not the church may be mingled with it in an indistinguishable mass, so that only faith can be sure that it is a church at all. But it is a church because it is “properly a congregation of saints and true believers,” notwithstanding the admixture of foreign elements in its visible organization. It is therefore only a confusion of thought when the visible church of confessors and the invisible Church of believers are represented as two different churches. They are properly one and the same “congregation of saints and true believers.”

The Church of Christ which is the flock that hears the good Shepherd’s voice, believes His Word of redemption and pardon and blessedness and peace, and follows Him as He leads them by His Word, is properly the congregation of saints and true believers, whether as He knows them simply as believers, or as He knows them in their appearance in the visible world as believers confessing His name, administering the means of grace which He has given them, and worshiping Him in the beauty of holiness, though in the latter case some are joined with them who are not His. He knows them infallibly all the same.

The Church is always the one communion of saints, whatever may be the conditions or circumstances in which it exists and does its work, as wheat is always wheat in spite of its frequent admixture with tares.

[2] It is admitted “that in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled with” this congregation of saints and true believers. Because we have no mark by which we could detect a mere pretender to faith and distinguish him from a true believer, the congregation of believers receives some into external fellowship who lack the essential qualification for membership in the Church. They are hypocrites and are of course not known as such. In charity their profession of faith is accepted as sincere, so long as they do not expose their insincerity. And as these persons are members of the Church according to this fellowship of outward signs, they may bear offices in the Church. They have the name and title of Christians, and may accordingly even be called to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments.

These facts are undeniable, and the Lutheran Church makes no attempt to conceal them. It is true, the congregation of saints in its appearance among men by its organization for the administration of the means of grace and assembly for edification and services, should use all possible precautions to protect itself against “hypocrites and evil persons.” Christians are commanded not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers and to have no fellowship with works of darkness. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, ever loyal to the Scriptures, heeds the admonition. She does this in perfect accord with her character as the Church of the pure Word and Sacraments, and also in this respect maintains her high and holy claim as against Romanism and Reformism.

Rome can scarcely be taken into account in this connection, because in its subjection to papal power it has relinquished all rightful claims to consideration in a review of churches in the light of Gospel tests, which it stubbornly refuses to acknowledge.

Reformed churches, both of a Zwinglian and a Calvinistic type, if a distinction is still deemed necessary, have gone to the extreme of making the very existence of the Church dependent on a proper exercise of discipline, and making this a coordinate mark of the Church with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Evidently the Reformed parties did not lay the stress upon the definition of the Church, as properly the congregation of saints and true believers, which Lutherans laid upon it. They could not do this because their doctrine of predestination and their corresponding doctrine of the means of grace, which could be effectual only in the elect, forbade this. And yet, with all their errors, and the inconsistency of still running to the fanatical length of making discipline a mark by

which the claims of visible congregations to be Christian churches must be tested, they never reached the sober practice of the Lutheran Church in the exercise of discipline, or even learned to appreciate it. On the contrary, they pronounced and still pronounce the Lutheran fidelity to the Gospel and its pure Confession a narrow and uncharitable adherence to the letter. The principal fault in their theory lies in their manifest failure to appreciate the truth revealed in Holy Scripture in distinction from natural knowledge, and of its importance, not only for salvation, but also for the godly life in this world.

So little do they value the contention for the faith once delivered to the saints, that they make a practice of sneering at “sound doctrine,” which the Holy Spirit urges upon us as our safeguard against the wiles of the devil in his schemes to ruin souls. This has become so habitual with them, that the adoption of their practice may be regarded as a not uncertain sign of the Reformed spirit and thought, by whatever name those who follow them may choose to be called. They lay the main stress upon the life, overlooking the fact that the soul’s life is not determined by precepts of the law. If a person is a Christian, he will live a Christian life notwithstanding all the imperfections attaching to his individuality; if he is not a Christian, his life will not accord with the rule of right as set forth in the divine law, notwithstanding all his punctiliousness in the endeavor to observe it to the very letter. It is the truth of the Gospel, which works faith and regenerates the soul, that makes us free from the bondage of sin, and only by the preservation of this truth can true righteousness of life be established and fostered.

Reformed parties have been sincere in their desire to promote Christian morality on this sinful earth, but they have erred egregiously in the assumption that this could be done without the pure Gospel. It is true that the Gospel does its work notwithstanding the impurities which human minds mingle with it. But it is not true that these impurities themselves become a saving power. They are only and always hindrances to the saving power which is contained only in the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

A congregation may be a Church of Christ notwithstanding its errors, but it cannot be a Church of Christ by reason of its errors.

A person may be a Christian notwithstanding his sin, but he is never a Christian because of his sin.

The congregation may be ruined by its errors, and the Christian may be ruined by his sin.

Both may cease to be Christian, and in both cases it is not faults and failings under the Gospel that ruin them, but the departure from the truth of the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation. Therefore the Lutheran Church insists on pure doctrine first, on holy life next. Not that ungodly living is in any case, excusable, or can by true Christians be regarded with indifference. It is the unrighteousness which is hateful to God and against which He has revealed His indignation and wrath.

“We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.” 1 Thess. 4:1-3.

But as there can be no spiritual life and we can do nothing without Christ, and that life can be in our possession only by faith, which purifies the heart, the Lutheran Church manifests her truly evangelical spirit by her ardent concern for the truth first, which alone can make us free from the bondage of sin and liberate us from the devil’s service to a true service of the Lord as a peculiar people, zealous of good works. She knows that to urge a holy life upon the people, without first proclaiming and pressing the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation, tends to create a congregation of legalistic and ritualistic Pharisees, and that her only safety lies in plying the Gospel, which is the divine power of holiness as well as of salvation, and that therefore her discipline must be primarily directed to the preservation of the pure Gospel and Sacrament, that the power of God may be in constant exercise among the people, and thus holy lives as well as eternal salvation may be possible.

If this purity of faith be lost, all church discipline is vain; for while it may serve the interests of civil righteousness by the restraints which it places upon members, some of whom will always be thus influenced, the spiritual supports and correctives will be lost, and the congregations will gradually sink to the level of humanitarian associations in which the power of nature and reason alone reigns, and the supreme purpose of the Church, which is the saving of the soul, is overlooked. This is not a wild prophecy of what may come, but simply a sober record of what has been, as history reports and of what now is, as all enlightened eyes may see.

We make no plea for the neglect of church discipline in cases of plain transgression of God’s holy law. If Lutheran churches have failed in this re-

spect, we have no defense to offer. In that case they have sinned, and should repent of their negligence and amend their ways. But we cannot in justice refrain from declaring our conviction that such charges are mainly caused by erroneous notions in vogue among Reformed sects. But too often they are moved by prejudice against our giving the first place to the revelation of truth unto salvation presented in Holy Scripture, and accordingly to confessional faithfulness, and the consequent faultfinding is with what they suppose to be laxity in discipline when their ordinances are not observed and our members violating them are not expelled.

As our only rule of faith and life is the Word of God, it does occur that our people in the exercise of their liberty, refuse to be bound by Reformed ordinances, as they refuse to be bound by Romish decrees, and the Church of the Reformation does not discipline them, because according to the Scriptures they have not sinned, the Reformed and Romish notions and laws, set up without authority of the Scriptures, not being recognized as divine.

And in many cases the evangelical faith and spirit which actuates Lutherans suggests a procedure so different from that of erring churches, even when the conduct of members is really sinful, that in their eyes our rigid adherence to the Word has a lax appearance. For while some churches proceed at once to excommunicate a member who has fallen into an open sin, especially if it is a member that for pecuniary support and social influence is not in high valuation, the Lutheran Church in similar conditions seeks to regain and retain the erring member by the power of that Word to which he may still confess his subjection, and which may lead him to repentance through the grace which it offers. For not every fault in life is evidence that the person guilty of it has fallen away from Christ. In all of us Christians, the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and if one of us has been guilty of an offense, this does not prove that such a soul, weak though it may be, has renounced Christ. Only obstinate sinners, who refuse, notwithstanding all the efforts of the brethren to bring the powerful Word of God to bear upon their souls, to separate themselves from the sin which has become manifest to all, can rightfully be separated from the Church and declared heathen men and publicans.

The Lutheran Church is bound by the Gospel, not by the human notions of Romanists and Puritans, who just on that account often represent our discipline as too rigid in one direction and too loose in the other. They do err,

because they do not abide unreservedly by the Word of God, and therefore cannot understand our contention for the purity of the Gospel, first and foremost, and our practice as regulated by its teaching, not by human policy.

Lutheran Christians are human, as are all others. They may in some cases be at fault in their organization and administration of churches. They unquestionably have been so where they departed from their confessional principle and opened their doors for the admission of men who seemed to be good people indeed, but who would not, in their pride of reason or zeal of sentiment, submit to the pure Gospel of the grace of God. The Lutheran Church has in fact suffered much from this source, as the history of Pietism and Rationalism painfully proves.

And even in our time and in our country the unfaithfulness which threatened the ruin of the Evangelical Church in other days, is still maintained by many to be the proper expression of evangelical liberty. But it is the misguided departure from the principles of the Scriptures and of the Lutheran Reformation, not in any sense or measure the result of that Scripture principle. It could occur only when the watchmen on the walls of Zion were drowsy, and the introduction of elements, personal and doctrinal, gradually made it possible to place errorists in the chief seats of the Church and give the administration into their hands. It was that unhappy neglect of Christian vigilance that paved the way for Romanism, with whose mighty power the Reformation wrestled. It was that unhappy neglect of Christian vigilance which opened the dykes for the furious and fatal inundation of Rationalism in the Protestant Churches.

Will Lutherans of our day refuse to learn the simple lesson, that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

It may be that our churches have been at fault in the exercise of discipline with regard to plain departures from the Christian life. No doubt they have been so in many cases; for when they fail to apply the tests of the Gospel in regard to doctrine, there is no security against the inroads of sin in the lives of the people. We can safely challenge comparison with any church and with all churches in regard to the moral conduct of our people. But they are not perfect, and where there is no earnest regard to the requirements of the Gospel, there are likely to be many shortcomings and transgressions, as there always will be some even where the watchmen are vigilant.

Our churches have not always done their best in the maintenance of their Scriptural principle, and they could not prevent the mingling in this life of hypocrites and evil persons with their churches, even if they did their best. It is not necessary to remind true believers that such facts do not excuse Christians from the duty of fidelity to the Word, whatever the results may be: for Christ is Lord, not we, and His ordinance is that “It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” 1 Cor. 4:2. Not our conclusions of reason or calculations of policy and expediency, but His Word must rule, though the goal at which it aims should seem impossible when strict fidelity is maintained. Fidelity under the guidance of His Word and Spirit is not impossible, and He desires to attain His gracious ends in His own way, without consulting our reason. The truth therefore stands, that though the Church be properly the congregation of saints and true believers, yet in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled with it.

[3] But it does not follow, as unhallowed reason is prone to infer, that this invalidates the Word and Sacraments. Notwithstanding this, “It is lawful to use the Sacraments administered by evil men, according to the voice of Christ, ‘The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,’ and the words following Matt. 23, And 2: the Sacraments and the Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, though they be delivered by evil men.” The faith of our confessors is thus clearly set forth. They do not depend on the power and ability of men. Their trust is in God. And believing, they are sure that what He says shall come to pass, though He not only says it through men, but chooses men as instruments through whom He purposes to effect His ends by appointing them as ministers to apply the means of grace which He has instituted. Though His agents are full of faults and may even prove unfaithful, it is He that does the gracious work of salvation, and His faithfulness never fails.

It is natural that men should have doubts about the efficacy of the Lord’s institutions when they observe that those who administer them are not assuredly holy people. The ways of God are so entirely different from our ways that our reason does not understand them, and in its endeavor to comprehend the problems presented necessarily draws upon its own resources to explain them.

Observing that the word of man carries with it in man’s most strenuous efforts of oratory only human power, and that the water and the bread and wine of the Sacraments exercise no other perceptible power than that

which, as earthly elements, belongs to them in the sphere of nature, the natural thought is that, if any spiritual efficacy attaches to them, they must either work magically or the persons appointed to apply them must in some way become conductors of the grace imparted. The inference is readily made that, when "hypocrites and evil men," administer the Sacraments, no good results can be produced, and as they are not the proper persons to administer them, it would not be lawful to receive them at their hands. Of course such thoughts can not arise when the Gospel reigns supreme and every thought is brought into obedience to Christ; for then the Word and Sacrament are recognized as the means which He uses to accomplish His gracious ends, and which therefore convey divine power that alone can secure the divine purpose. But even in the ancient Church there were errorists who refused to accept the pure truth revealed in the Scriptures, subjecting this to the criticism of reason and common sense, and accordingly concluding that the divinely appointed means of Word and Sacrament could not be effectual for regeneration and salvation, but that the Spirit of God, who alone can produce such great effects, must in some other way produce them.

To us it is one of the wonders of religious thought and speculation among Christian people who have the Word of God to instruct and guide them, that they stumble at the truth so plainly declared by our Lord in regard to His appointments for the execution of His saving will and so firmly established by His promises, and who hesitate and doubt and deliberate and finally decide that the Holy Spirit must have a way of His own, though He has not been pleased to reveal it or give any indication that He has it — a way of His own other than that which Christ has revealed. When we think of it, we are confronted by one of the mysteries of human thought among Christian people, especially when we take into account the express words of our Lord:

"Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for He shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I that He shall take of mine and shall show it unto you." John 16:13-15.

In view of such plain and direct words of our Savior, how can any intelligent Christian wonder that Luther, in his conflict with fanatics who ap-

pealed from the Scriptures to the Spirit, in the earnestness of his faith could declare that the spirit that sets itself against the Word of God is the devil, and he would rap it on the snout.

But the natural mind receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, and even when men have by that Spirit been made believers through the Word and Sacrament, which Christ has appointed for the purpose, the flesh still lusteth against the Spirit; and in consequence of this some in their reasoning re fuse to recognize the means by which they were brought to believe in the Lord Jesus as the Savior of their souls. Thus it came about that there were Donatists in the Church of old, and thus it came about that there was a party of Christians who in the days of the Reformation declined to subscribe our glorious Augsburg Confession, but organized Reformed churches on a Zwinglian or Calvinistic basis, who would not recognize the Word and Sacraments as the divinely appointed bearers of the Spirit for the conversion of sinners and their growth in grace and the knowledge of the truth. These churches, refusing to believe that our Lord Jesus, the great Head of the Church, is constantly present and prosecutes His gracious work of salvation through these means, are always disposed to imagine that the Holy Spirit does His work in some other way, and that so far as there is any human instrumentality employed for the purpose, these human instruments must in some way be endowed, as holy vessels, with the power to serve as channels for the conveyance of the heavenly gifts.

The next step in the reasoning is easy.

If the ministers are not themselves converted men, it is not lawful to accept their ministrations. The whole theory on which these reasonings are based is aside from the Gospel. It may find a lodgment in believing hearts, but it is of the flesh, and Christians err when they permit it to guide their thoughts, and refuse to treat it as an error against which they must contend as against every lust of the flesh.

The Gospel leads us to believe that to our Lord Jesus all power in heaven and in earth is committed, and that believers must recognize Him as the way and the truth and the life. The Holy Spirit applies His grace, and knows no other way of salvation. There is no other name given under heaven by which we could be saved. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one in essence, and one in purpose, and one in the means of executing it.

The institution by our Lord and Savior of Word and Sacrament as means of salvation is the institution of the Triune God, and neither the Father nor

the Holy Spirit pursues any other plan of saving souls than that of the great salvation in Christ. If we refuse to hear Him, we refuse to hear the Father and the Holy Spirit as well. There is no revealed way by which the will of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost can be accomplished on earth but by the Word and the Sacraments, which our Lord has appointed as His means of grace.

When, then, errorists affirm that it is not lawful to use the Sacraments administered by evil men, and in consequence cause divisions to the great injury of the Church, the false foundation of their false reasoning and false conduct is manifest. Failing to accept the pure truth of God's Word, they fall into error through the guidance of what is alleged to be enlightened reason, overlooking the obvious fact that all the illumination possible to man can never lift the light of his reason to the heights of God and render it a substitute for the revelation written in Holy Scripture. And one error leads to another. False doctrine eats as doth a canker. Soon the little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. and the party, though it may have begun in the sincere desire to live in the Spirit, runs further and further in the ways of the flesh, until it becomes a heretical sect.

Evidently those who contend for the purity of the Christian life in the Church are not in the wrong path: they go wrong only when they abandon the clear teaching of Holy Scripture and set up a standard of Christian purity which is not that of the Gospel, and make their rational conclusions tests of the validity of the Lord's work and of the legitimacy of His Church. These people are right when they contend for the holiness of the Church; and while they too often overlook the main feature of that holiness and the condition under which alone other features can exist, which is the purity of doctrine in Word and Sacrament, they still are right when they urge purity of life.

The Lutheran Church in her insistence on the pure Gospel never for a moment lost sight of the corresponding purity of heart and its manifestation in the conduct of her people. But she humbly submitted herself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as He speaks in the Word, not as He is presumed to speak in the hearts of thinking people aside from the Word, or in addition to it. For the latter there is to believers no warrant that it is the voice of God that is spoken; for the former Christians have the full assurance of faith, that what is written in the Scriptures is the Word of God. Hence the Reformers and the Church of the Reformation are always misrepresented and often

maligned, when they are alleged to have been indifferent to holiness of life; and we are constrained again to express our judgment, that such railing accusations against our Lutheran Church never had their origin in any words that she has spoken against proper efforts to secure holiness of life as well as purity of doctrine, nor in any lack of pure living among our people, as compared with Christian people of other confessions, but simply in conclusions, as illogical as they are uncharitable, from our assigning to a pure Gospel the first place and to a pure life as wholly dependent on the Gospel, the second place, which belongs to an effect as related to its cause. And so the Lutheran Church stands today, and so must continue to stand, notwithstanding the obloquy to which she has been subjected on this account. She wants no ministers who are not willing to teach and to live as the Word of God requires. She is not faithful if she permits her ministers to teach and to live otherwise than God's Word teaches and still to occupy her pulpits and dispense the Sacraments at her altars. She does what she can to prevent this desecration and to have her Churches appear in the beauty of holiness. She therefore will not allow her preachers to set forth doctrines that are in conflict with the pure Gospel which she confesses; neither will she permit evil men to minister at her altars when they once become known as such, although she lays no such claim to reading their hearts as is the evil habit of some fanatics. But she must continue to maintain "that though the Church be properly the congregation of saints and true believers, yet, seeing that in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled with it, it is lawful to use the Sacraments administered by evil men."

The reason for this is obvious to those who know the revelation given us in the Holy Scriptures and are willing to be guided by it. In the first place, the Church is the congregation of saints who believe, notwithstanding the fact that, when it presents itself in the world as a congregation of believers, some get mingled with it who are not believers. In the second place, this foreign element which gets into the Church as it appears, though it is not at all part of it, as it exists in its essence, cannot deprive believers of their treasures and their rights, as the tares that grow among the wheat cannot destroy its essence as wheat. The congregation of saints and true believers retains its God-given powers and rights, whatever may be mingled with them. And in the third place, the means of grace are not dependent for their efficacy on the Church, to which their administration has been committed. but on the Word of the Savior, whose promise remains connected with His insti-

tution, notwithstanding any faults or delinquencies in the Christian people who are commissioned to administer them, or in the persons who are called to perform this ministry. “The Sacrament and the Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, though they be delivered by evil men.”

It is required of a steward that a man be found faithful.

The Church, which is commissioned to employ the means of grace, ought not to entrust them to evil men. These ought not to be admitted to our communion, much less to our offices in the Church. But the wisdom and mercy of our blessed Savior are made manifest in His gracious plan of performing His saving work through means of His own institution, whose administration is indeed committed to His Church, but which are not dependent on the ministers for their efficacy, but on His institution and promise alone. we cannot know whether the person who preaches the Word and administers the Sacrament is a true believer or not, but we do know that these are divine institutions and that the promises connected with them stand sure forever, even if the ministering servant should not be a believer. He can thus exclude himself from the blessing which they convey, but he cannot deprive the divine means of their power and thus exclude others from the blessing.

The Word of the Lord is sure, and His people need not be disheartened if among those who administer the means of grace there be some who do not avail themselves of that grace. “Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” Rom. 3:3.

“Neither does the fact that the Sacraments are administered by the unworthy detract from their efficacy, because on account of the call of the Church they represent the person of Christ and do not represent their own persons, as Christ testifies, ‘He that heareth you heareth me.’ Luke 10:16. Thus even Judas was sent to preach. When they offer the Word of God, when they offer Sacraments, they offer them in the stead and place of Christ. The Word of Christ teaches this in order that we may not be offended by the unworthiness of the ministers.” Apology iv, 28.

[4] Our churches “condemn the Donatists, and such like, who denied that it was lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and held that the ministry of evil men is useless and without effect.”

The Donatists were a sect of the fourth century who manifested great zeal for personal holiness, especially in the clergy, but who fell into the error of making the means of grace dependent on the piety and devotion of

the ministers instead of relying solely upon the Word and promise of God. For a while they had a large following, and created much trouble, but in the following century gradually disappeared. Their error, however, has cropped out in various places and at various times since then.

Hence our Confession not only refers to them by name, but includes all “such like” in its condemnation, because they are the type of a dangerous heresy that seems reasonable and therefore never ceases to exert an influence on the minds of the people, and even on unwary Christians. Modern Separatists of various descriptions are “such like.” The Reformation, with its lucid exhibition of the doctrine of the Church, has not entirely banished such aberrations from the earth. Those who minister in holy things should be holy, and nothing can hinder the bad logic which concludes that these things cannot be holy when the ministers are unholy.

The pure Gospel, which so many treat lightly in their alleged zeal for the holy life which seems to them of paramount importance, protects the Lutheran Church against such errant fallacies, because it fortifies them against the assumption of carnal premises and consequent confusions. She holds fast to the Word of her Lord, and is therefore in her faith perfectly sure that His Word and His Sacraments will effect that whereunto they are appointed, whatever may be the fault of the servants through whom they are administered.

The spirit of sect that is so rampant in our day finds a congenial support in the Donatistic heresy. Although history reports the sect to be dead, its ghost still haunts the churches, and those who think the condemnation expressed in our article to be merely a historical reminiscence which is of no import for our times, only display that unwisdom which is ready to find fault with the rigor of our fathers in their maintenance of the purity of the Word and Sacraments and accordingly is equally ready to open widely the doors of the Church for the admission of errors that seem harmless, but operate disastrously both upon the spiritual life of individuals and the true unity of the Church.

It is not an innocent mistake to assume that the eighth article of our Confession is out of date. It places an emphasis upon the spiritual unity of the Church in its adherence to the pure Word and Sacraments, and upon the childlike reliance on the divine institutions and promises in their relation to the visible churches, and their ministers, that cannot be ignored without harm to the kingdom of Christ. For if the error is permitted to take hold of

souls seeking salvation, that the grace of God which alone can confer it is in some way bound up with the servants who administer the means by which God has promised to confer it, how shall these souls be comforted when they see or suspect that the ministers are “evil men”? They can separate from their brethren, hold conventicles, form new sects, cause much damage, but they cannot read hearts, and therefore never can be sure that in their new environment they have holy ministers who can efficaciously administer the holy means.

Alas, that Christian people refuse to accept the pure Gospel, which would bring them peace.

Article IX. Of Baptism

Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that by Baptism the grace of God is offered, and that children are to be baptized, who by Baptism being offered to God are received into God's favor.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the Baptism of children, and affirm that children are saved without baptism.

MATTER is crowded in this article. It sets forth in a quiet way, without any manifestation of strong feeling, the faith of the Christian Church in regard to the holy Sacrament of Baptism.

The Romanists, with whom they were chiefly in controversy, had not abandoned the divine institution of Baptism nor denied its power as a means of grace. Its efficacy was in some sense acknowledged by all except the Anabaptists, and therefore these only were an obstacle in the way of its maintenance.

Rome had indeed gone to the extreme of asserting that efficacy in individuals for their salvation without by faith accepting the grace offered. This was in accord with the Romish disparagement of faith as the divinely appointed means of appropriating the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Romanists still held fast the truth that God offers His grace in Baptism, and thus in that holy Sacrament presents a heavenly gift to which faith may cling. The comfort of the Gospel was therefore still retained in its foundation, notwithstanding the grievous error which denied the necessity of faith for its personal appropriation.

The error of the Reformed parties, who denied the objective gift and therefore left nothing to which the faith of a poor soul could cling for consolation in its misery of sin, was relatively worse. The Anabaptists were the representatives of this extreme element in Christendom.

The Church of the Reformation had for many years contended against Rome and its disregard of the necessity of faith, and now with the same earnestness declared against the error of those who proclaimed themselves, as her friends in her opposition to Romish pretenses. Our article therefore crowds within a brief compass the essential points of the Evangelical faith in regard to Baptism, which are: 1. That Baptism is necessary to salvation; 2. That children are to be baptized; and 3. That Anabaptists are to be condemned.

1. Baptism Is Necessary To Salvation.

It is necessary because the Word of God requires it, and it is necessary because the grace of God is offered by it. In the first place, the Lord has instituted the Sacrament of Baptism and commanded it to be administered wherever the Gospel is preached among all nations.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Matt. 28:19:20.

The disciples must obey the Master’s precepts. They could not be recognized as true disciples if they refused. If they have not the Spirit of the Lord they are none of His. And the Lord has impressed on His people’s minds the importance of obedience to His instructions by assuring them that He has all power in heaven and earth, and that He is present with them always to do His saving work through His appointed means, and to bless them in their administration. Therefore Baptism is necessary, and those who presume to build the Church without it are not living under Him, in His kingdom, and cannot be accepted as workers together with Him in the great cause of human salvation. If in view of the doctrine of Justification by faith alone any reader should find difficulty in the necessity of baptism, let it not be forgotten that this Sacrament is a means of grace, not a ceremonial ordinance. Even these ordinances must be observed by loyal subjects of the King, so far and so long as He makes them obligatory. Christians are such and remain such only when and while they own Christ to be their Lord. When

they renounce His authority they are not in His kingdom of grace and salvation.

But it is true that in the new dispensation of grace there are no ceremonial ordinances, all of which as given in the old dispensation were preparatory for the coming of Christ, who is the end of the law. Therefore, in the second place, Baptism is necessary because it is not only a command to use the Sacrament, but Christ, who commanded it, connected with it His promise of grace and salvation. It is a ceremony, in which by divine command water is applied to the subject in the name of the Triune God.

There is nothing surprising in the conclusions of those who deny the essence and purpose of Baptism, that too much importance is attached to the rite by Lutherans, and that they are not consistent with their principles in their doctrine of the Sacraments. This strange delusion provokes a smile. Reformed Churches persistently deny the communication of divine grace through the holy Sacraments, and these accordingly appear to them impotent rites whose value can be only that of a sign or symbol, like that of a crucifix on the altar or a picture on the wall.

The Quakers who have no love for crucifixes and pictures or any form of art, are the most consistent in their advocacy and practice of the Reformed theory, when they reject the use of the Sacraments entirely. Why should we practice Baptism, if the command to use it is merely a ceremonial law, unless we find a beauty in the emblematic representation and gratify our taste in the exercise of our liberty, by administering it?

The Lutheran Church has no interest in mere ceremonial laws, and no desire to impose them on the people, seeing that the shadows of the Old Testament all passed away when the substance came into view. We have the reality now and need no signs of its coming. The Reformed arguments against us, and their impeachment of our consistency, all rest upon their refusal to accept our Lord's plain words regarding the Sacrament of Baptism as well as of the Lord's Supper. They assume that the Sacrament of regeneration is a mere dumb show, though our Lord says that we must be born again of water and the Holy Spirit if we would enter into the kingdom of heaven, and therefore they cannot understand our insistence upon its necessity. It is necessary not only because our Lord has commanded it, but also because He has promised through it to communicate His grace unto salvation. That is the reason, in the third place, why it is necessary to salvation.

Obedience to the Lord's Word is obligatory always and under all circumstances. No one can be faithful to Him without recognizing His authority. Even ceremonial laws had to be obeyed, in the old dispensation by the Jews at the peril of forfeiting their privileges as the chosen people of God. When the Savior came these ceremonial laws, which were types and foreshadowings of things that should be realized and fulfilled in His advent, of necessity passed away; and in His kingdom, in which all the preparatory prophecies in word and type were fulfilled, there was no further need of ceremonial laws; the old had accomplished their purpose and become useless, and for new ones there was no call and no place. Only the moral law remained to arouse the consciousness of sin, and thus to be a schoolmaster to Christ and a guide to holiness in those who were justified by faith. And their obedience to the law had and has no potency in effecting the salvation which Christ secured and faith accepts. It is wholly a gift of grace, without any merit or worthiness on the part of the recipient. Only faith is necessary to salvation, now that God has prepared it through the mission of His Son for the fulfillment of all righteousness and through the mission of the Holy Ghost for its application to all people, since Christ died for all.

Nothing could be more foreign to the import of the Gospel than the thought, that Baptism is a ceremonial law which must be obeyed to the end that such obedience may merit salvation. Christians have no ceremonial laws and always err when they recognize any ordinance as such a law; and they always err when they attach any saving merit to the obedience of such a law, or of any law, not excepting that of the ten commandments. No work of obedience as such is necessary to make that salvation ours.

The whole difficulty which men ordinarily find in our confession, that Baptism is necessary to salvation, is found in the false assumption that the Sacrament is merely an institution without meaning and purpose except that of testing our obedience. Certainly a Christian will be guided and governed by the will of God, as this is made known to Him in Holy Scripture. He could not be a Christian if this were not His heart's desire. But the will of God in regard to Baptism is utterly misconceived when a person supposes that the baptismal command is an arbitrary imposition by a Sovereign to hold his subjects to the loyal performance of duty in absolute subservience to His will. The moral law of righteousness imposes duties enough to be a perpetual reminder of our duty, and of our sin in coming short of its requirements. That is an all sufficient test of our loyalty to our Lord. "If ye love

me, keep my commandments.” Baptism is miserably degraded to a servile ceremonial law, in which enlightened Christians can find neither reason nor comfort, when it is laid upon them simply as a duty which they must perform because it is commanded them, though no light is given that could show what good it could do them. The Scriptures do not so present it, and the church which scrupulously follows the Scriptures does not so present it in her Confession.

Baptism is necessary indeed because our Lord has commanded it, but He has commanded it because in His mercifully and wisely ordained plan of salvation it is necessary as a means for the communication of His grace. Not because our obedience, but because His grace is necessary to our salvation is Baptism necessary to this end. The Sacrament is a precious means of grace by which the great salvation in Christ is communicated to souls that are lost in sin, and therefore it is necessary to salvation.

But, in the fourth place, this necessity is not absolute, but ordinate. Our theologians make this distinction because the teachings of God’s Word require Christians to make it, in order not to push such necessity to an extreme that would conflict with the statements of the Gospel in other respects and deprive them of the comfort which it gives in its totality. As men may be lost though they are baptized, so men may be saved though they are not baptized. But they are not lost by reason of their Baptism, and they are not saved by reason of their lacking it. They are lost notwithstanding the grace of God offered in Baptism for their salvation, and they are saved notwithstanding their lack of Baptism. In the one case the mercy of God which comes to save them is rejected, and the wrath of God remains on those who despise His grace. In the other case that mercy provides other ways in which the soul that could not obtain Baptism may receive the baptismal blessing.

Ordinarily Baptism is necessary to salvation, because our Lord has instituted it for the very purpose of bringing His grace unto salvation to lost souls. But while He has bound us to this means of grace for the attainment of this blessed end, He has not exhausted His mercy or His power in the institution of this means, and may in His infinite love resort even to extraordinary ways of bringing sinners to the great salvation provided for all men in Christ. There are two considerations which demand notice in this connection. The first is that Baptism is not the only means which our Lord has ordained for the conveyance of His grace unto salvation. He has appointed

His Word and the two Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Supper as means of grace and committed them to His Church for administration. Of these the Word is chief. It is preeminently the power of God unto salvation, on whose authority the validity and efficacy of the Sacraments are absolutely dependent. Hence the commission given by our Lord puts the preaching of the Gospel in the foreground.

“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.”

Without this there would be no knowledge of the institution and purpose of the Sacraments. and without the divine Power of the Word they would be mere signs which could convey no grace and effect no salvation.

This does not intimate that they are a needless appendage to the necessary preaching of the Gospel. Any such profane thought is at once averted by the promise given in immediate connection with it, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Mark 16:15-16.

And in the ministerial commission as given by St. Matthew, the preaching and baptizing are coordinated, the command being to disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and teaching them to observe all things which our Lord commanded. Matt. 28:19, 20.

Baptism is necessary: for “Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word.” Eph. 5:25, 26; and hence “Baptism doth also now save us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” 1 Pet. 3:21. But it is not the only means of our salvation, so that there could be no salvation if it could not be obtained.

The Gospel also conveys the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and persons may therefore be believers and thus in a state of salvation before they are baptized. The case may therefore occur that a believer dies and is saved before Baptism is accessible. Hence when the promise is given that “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” the antithesis in the second clause, “But he that believeth not shall be damned,” omits the condition of being baptized. This plainly indicates that the necessity of Baptism is not in every respect the same as that of faith. Faith is necessary and Baptism is necessary; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Our minds would expect the negative to assert that he that believeth not and “is not baptized,” shall be damned. But it does not so read; according to the Scrip-

tures in other places it could not so read. For Baptism is a means by which God brings to us the grace of salvation in Christ, which is necessary for every soul, and without which no soul can be saved. But that grace is conveyed to men in the Word also.

Baptism is the washing of regeneration; we must be born again, and ordinarily that birth, which is always by the Holy Spirit, is “of water and of the Spirit.” John 3:5. That would seem to make Baptism essential to salvation, seeing that without the grace of God which it conveys there could be no possibility of salvation. It would thus appear to be as indispensable in the divine economy as faith, and the two seem to be placed in the same category as absolutely necessary, so that it would be impossible to be saved without Baptism as without faith. But that is the conclusion of reason without reckoning with the other information imparted by the Word, which is a revelation that must be regarded independently of our natural knowledge and of our mental processes as governed by such knowledge under natural law.

The Word of God presents no way and shows no power by which the salvation wrought out by our Savior for all men could be appropriated but that of faith. That is absolutely necessary to salvation.

Our nature finds it hard — even under grace — to submit to such a humiliating way of salvation. Human nature protests, but the Word of God stands. As there is no name under heaven given by which we could be saved, there is no other way of embracing the power of that name with all its blessed import but that of believing the Gospel, which brings it to our souls in all its blessedness.

Since God so loved the world as to give His Only-begotten Son as a ransom for the world’s sin; since the Second Person of the glorious Trinity in His infinite love was pleased to become incarnate, and live among us in perfect obedience to the law and die under its curse in our stead and for our salvation; and since the Holy Spirit applies to sinners the righteousness which He has acquired for all men and which avails for all through faith in His holy Name, there is only this one thing yet needful for the salvation of any miserable sinner, that he should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. That is now the one and the only indispensable thing for our salvation. To this there is no exception; the necessity of faith is absolute: “He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.”

But the necessity of Baptism is not of the same kind.

There is no other way shown in the Scriptures by which the righteousness of Christ could be embraced but that of faith. and there is no other way conceivable by our reason.

But there is another way by which that righteousness can be conveyed to us than that of Baptism. This is one of the means which the mercy of God has appointed to bring to us sinners the salvation secured by our Savior. But that mercy is great, unlimited, superabundant, glorious.

Even believers sometimes wonder how this can all be, that God offers His grace in the Word and in Baptism and in the Holy Supper, and that it is always the same thing. Some times they raise difficulties for our human thinking by suggesting that the Word of the Gospel, or Baptism, or the Sacrament of the Altar is sufficient for our assurance, and especially see no great reason for the absolution preceding the Holy Supper, which is also for the remission of sins. But sinners, who have come to know the exceeding sinfulness of sin, know also the need of consolation in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and are glad that the infinite love of our Lord has provided so many ways for our peace and comfort.

The Word of God conveys to us the same gifts as the Sacraments. Let us thank fully use them for our salvation by faith, wherever they are offered. We need them every way — we need them every day. Therefore, instead of giving way to the suggestions of Satan, who would have us discard Baptism as a needless ceremony because the Word offers the same grace, or to disparage the Word because Baptism works the regeneration which it sets forth as necessary, we should let the Gospel lead us into all the truth which it reveals and make us glad in the manifold gifts of our gracious God.

Baptism imparts a blessing which all men need, and therefore it is necessary; but it does not follow that a person who seeks Baptism, but is unable to obtain it, is on that account lost, since God who is rich in mercy, conveys the grace needful for salvation also through His Word.

A second consideration that challenges our attention is the fact that, while God has appointed means by which He conveys to men the great salvation secured for them by the sacrifice of Christ, He has not in such institution exhausted His power and rendered Himself impotent to help us in any other way. When He gives us faith in His Word He makes us sure that His promises are yea' and amen forever, and therefore banishes all distrust of their fulfillment as this is so apt to arise from our inability to see how, in the conditions often presenting them selves, it is possible for Him to make

good His Word. Although the time of miracles is past, the power of Him who performed them is still the same, and His promises to provide for us and give us our daily bread are still sure and will certainly be fulfilled, even though the ordinary means which He has established in nature should fail to meet an extraordinary case, and He in His wisdom should therefore resort to an extraordinary means and effect His purpose and fulfill His promise by miracle.

The Christian's faith is not nonplussed when it is confronted by conditions which impress upon sense and reason the impossibility of realizing the divine assurances to which our Lord has taught us to cling. Our Lord is not governed by our sense and reason, nor rendered powerless when to our human faculties the limit of possibility has been reached. For the accomplishment of His will He always has ways and means, though we know nothing of them beyond that which He has been pleased to reveal. To this revelation He has bound us, and it is not faith, but rather an indication of unbelief when we disregard the means shown us in His Word and presumptuously expect His help in other ways than those in which He has promised it. But when we trust His promise we shall not be put to shame, though the situation may be such that to our minds all means of help and all resources have been exhausted and the promise of God must fail. Faith, which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." is sure that it cannot fail.

"The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away, but the Word of the Lord endureth forever." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."
Mark 13:31.

Christians are therefore quite sure that God will find ways to fulfill His promises, even though this require the performance of a miracle: and faith feels secure because the promises of God are sure, and none the less sure when extraordinary times and extraordinary eases in ordinary times in His wisdom require miracles to fulfill them. And this applies to His government of the Church as well as to that of the world.

He has provided means of grace for the application of the redemption in Christ Jesus to all men, since He died for all that all might be saved. These means are necessary not only because He has instituted them and commanded us to use them but because His good and gracious will is to save us,

and He has instituted them and commanded us to use them for the accomplishment of His purpose. They are necessary for our salvation.

That is what our Confession says of Baptism, and says in full accord with Scripture, from which we gain all our knowledge of its import and purpose and to which the Lutheran Church adheres with the confidence of her divinely wrought faith. if these means do not reach all possible cases, she is not troubled, but trusts in the mercy and power of her Lord to accomplish His gracious purpose still. though we do not know how it is done, or how it is possible except through the assurance that with God all things are possible.

Baptism is necessary as the ordinary means of regeneration when once congregations of believers are established. But if one hears and believes the Gospel, and dies before he could secure Baptism, he is not on that account deprived of salvation, because he is “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” 1 Pet. 3:21. And if a little child that cannot understand the Gospel is unhappily left without Baptism and dies without the grace which Baptism was instituted to convey, must it necessarily be lost?

We have stated principles which are designed to warn against rash and rude judgments without abating one jot of the truth revealed for our learning in Holy Scripture. But this leads to the second point in our Confession, that

2. “Children are to be baptized, who by Baptism, being offered to God, are received into God’s favor.”

There was no controversy with the Romanists on this point. The whole Church, Roman and Greek, was a unit in teaching and practicing the Baptism of infants. But Protestants of the Reformed school, departing from the biblical doctrine of the means of grace and teaching a Spiritualism that had no need and no room for them, awakened doubts in some minds about the baptism of children and soon led to parties which renounced and condemned it. A doctrine was devised concerning the means of grace which divested them of the power which alone entitles them to the name and renders

them superfluous. Thus Baptism became a mere sign or symbol that conveys no divine gift unto salvation, and although most of the Reformed sects retained it, some of their adherents thought its application to children so glaringly inept that they declared against it and formed a sect in opposition to Infant Baptism.

The Reformed principle in its antagonism to the Lutheran Church thus became manifest, although it was only in Quakerism that it subsequently found complete expression.

Our Confession properly sets forth its adherence to the old faith and condemns the innovations of parties that forsake the ancient landmarks.

Baptism is a means by which the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is applied to sinners for their salvation from the curse of sin, and as our children as well as all the rest of our race partake of that sin and are under its curse, they have need of Baptism with its saving grace, as well as all others who are under the condemnation of the law requiring righteousness. When the Scriptural doctrine of the means of grace, which the Lutheran Church confesses, is rejected, the baptism of infants has no vital meaning and may be abandoned as a useless ceremony; when the Scriptural truth concerning these means is maintained, as the Lutheran Church has always done, the baptism of infants is necessary. And so the Lutheran Church confesses.

The question with us is not one of sentimental devotion to usages that have grown venerable by age, or of expediency in retaining what could be removed only with offense to many brethren in Christ, but one of fidelity to the truth of the Gospel and to the loving interest in the salvation of souls which comes of true faith in that Gospel.

We must not wonder that earnest-minded and loving-hearted Lutherans do not manifest the profound interest in the petty strifes and bootless assaults of Baptists on the old Christian faith and practice regarding Infant Baptism. With us the main import of the question concerns the import and purpose of the Sacrament as the means of grace which the Word of the Lord declares it to be, and when this is ignored or denied the whole contention about forms is merely a great ado about nothing, in which those who are intent on the deliverance of sinful souls from the death and damnation that hangs over them, must not be expected to have much concern.

Whether in the cleansing of the soul by the grace of God in “the washing of water by the Word,” or the being born again to an eternal inheritance “of water and the Spirit,” one drop or a whole ocean of water is used — how

can such a question elicit any enthusiasm in a soul that knows itself lost by nature, but rejoices in the great salvation effected by the Son of God and applied by the Spirit and the Word of God in the water of Baptism? God does the saving work, not the water, and whether much or little is used. what is that to a believer who trusts in the mercy and power of His God through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, certified to him by the Gospel? Men fight about forms when they have lost the substance, and the Lutheran Church, which holds fast the substance, has little interest in the fight.

But all this points to the fundamental ground on which the baptism of children is based. It is not a matter of mere expediency. The Word of God shows it to be necessary. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." John 3:5-7. To this truth the apostle refers when he declares:

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Tit. 3:5, 6.

Baptism is necessary for children, not because it is a ceremony commanded, but because it is a Sacrament of regeneration unto salvation in Christ. A twofold truth is thus presented, showing the two sides of the necessity of Baptism for all men and for children in particular. One is that we are all children of wrath by nature and can by no means deliver ourselves from the curse which sin has brought upon us. The other is that God in His infinite mercy has prepared a way of salvation through the redemption effected by His incarnate Son, which He applies to sinful souls by the means of grace for their deliverance from the curse.

Children, who are not free from the sin of our nature, are not excluded from the salvation provided for all. How could they be, seeing that the love of God embraces our whole sinful race, that Christ offered His life as a ransom for all, and that the divine will is that all should be saved? Believing hearts could entertain the idea of excluding children from the unspeakable gift of salvation in the Redeemer of the world only if this were expressly ordained of God and unmistakably declared in His Word. But so far is this from being the case that explicit mention is made of the children as espe-

cially embraced in the plan of salvation. "They brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased and said unto them, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.' Mark 10:13, 14. Children need salvation, and the grace of God has provided it for them.

The thought that babes have no part in the sin of our nature, and therefore need no forgiveness and no cleansing. never was derived from the Scriptures. It is a purely human notion, springing from the corruption of our nature. The innocence of childhood is indeed proverbial, and its common acceptance indicates that some truth must underlie it to give it currency. But innocence in' the affairs and judgments of men does not mean the sinlessness which the Scriptures attach to the state of innocence in which man was created and in which he lived until the dreadful catastrophe came which we call the fall of Adam — the greatest catastrophe that has ever befallen this world of horrid upheavals and eruptions, of storms and tempests, of conflagrations and wars and tumults and distress of nations. Compared with the brutal murderer, the drunkard that breaks the heart of loving wife and children, the speculator that ruins confiding friends, the calumniator that banishes peace from hitherto happy families, the babes are innocent. But that means only that the potentialities for evil which are in the child and which, if they are not arrested and regulated, in after years become manifest in the lusts of the flesh as enumerated in Eph. 5:19-21 are yet dormant. The child is not an adulterer or a murderer, an idolater or a heretic. It is innocent, though common usage gives a hint of the truth in its sanction of the phrase, "it is yet innocent." What is meant is that sin is not reckoned sin so long as it does not manifest itself in the acts which all men recognize as wrongdoing. That God judges the heart and that the internal motions of evil are sin as well as their expression in the outward action, the natural man does not know. Hence children are spoken of as innocent, and the superficial judgment of the world pronounces any allegation cruel that implies their guilt. Disputes thus arise which are sometimes merely a war of words. But the Scriptures do not thus trifle. They describe the child as a sinner, not at all with the suggestion that it is engaged in highway robbery, or runs riot in chambering and wantonness, but that it is an offspring of Adam, who fell away from God and set up his own will in opposition to his Creator, and thus joined Satan and his host in their rebellion against the Lord of all.

“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:12.

That is what the Bible teaches and what true Christians believe. Relatively to grown up people who engage in manifest works of the flesh, the children are innocent: but they are born of the flesh and are flesh, though the works of the flesh are not yet manifest in them. Hence David says:

“Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Ps. 51:5.

And this iniquity of our nature is sin and brings condemnation upon us, as St. Paul says: “We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” Eph. 2:3.

Plainly on this account our Lord declares that “except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3.

Our race is ruined by sin, and only the grace of God through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus can restore it, and make that restoration effective through the application by the Holy Spirit of the great salvation in Christ to the lost souls of men. Children are lost as well as adults, and children can be saved as well as adults, through the application of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, That application is made in Holy Baptism. It is the Sacrament especially adapted to children. In view of all that the Scriptures say about the means of grace, and especially about the baptismal grace, Infant Baptism is not only included in the design of its institution, but stands out as its principal use.

Those who read intelligently what the Bible teaches about it cannot doubt that in the establishment of the Church on earth the preaching of the Gospel necessarily came first, and that only those who believed, or professed to believe, were baptized. The truth in Jesus must first be proclaimed to the world before there could be any in the world who received it and confessed it. Such as by the power of the Holy Spirit, bearing testimony in the Word, received the truth of God, were baptized. In the nature of things Baptism was thus a Sacrament applied only to adults who heard the Gospel and professed to believe it. It was the Baptism of hearers of the Word who confessed Christ. So it must always be in the extension of the Church by missionary work in heathen lands. It must begin with the preaching of the

Gospel, the entrance of which giveth light; it cannot begin with the seal upon a document which is not yet presented.

Lutherans are not embarrassed by the zeal of Anabaptists to show that in apostolic times the preaching preceded the baptism of converts. That is a matter which is self-evident in the circumstances. But that sets aside no provision which God has made for the salvation of the babes upon whom the curse of sin has come by inheritance of the flesh in their birth of the flesh. The promise which the Gospel proclaims to all people is not confined to the few who hear and believe it, but “is unto you and your children.” Acts 2:39. And Christian parents trust the promise and bring their children to Baptism, in which the grace of God is offered for their regeneration. That is really their only recourse.

Our Lord says, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” John 3:5-7.

Loving hearts can never be satisfied with the suggestions of reason that this applies only to adults and that the preaching of the Gospel is sufficient to meet all their wants, while children are safe without any provision of grace to save them. In the light of Scripture that is not so; in the light of faith they know that it is not so. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and no one can inherit the kingdom of God unless he is born of the Spirit. This much is indubitable to every sincere believer of the truth revealed in the Bible. And parents who love their children cannot be content, when the grace of God has brought to them the good tidings of the Gospel and the glorious hope of eternal blessedness through faith in Christ, with the speculations and sophisms of professed Christians who are guided by their alleged common sense and enlightened reason, to the effect and intent that their children are incapable of regeneration and that therefore Baptism is to them a meaningless rite and must be denied them.

A lingering doubt and fear and hope presumably arises in the minds even of Baptists when they read the Gospel, whether they have not made a sad mistake in denying the grace offered to children in Baptism to their loved ones, notwithstanding the theory taught them, that these “innocent children,” though declared in God’s Word to be “children of wrath by nature,” are free from sin, and that for unconscious babes there are no means of grace. Where faith has been wrought in the heart there must be misgivings

even in those who have embraced Anabaptistic errors, when they read in the Bible of the sin that came upon all our race and of the salvation provided by the mercy of God in Christ Jesus for all the lost. Has my dear child no part in that unspeakable gift of grace which is designed to rescue us all from the damnation of hell? Has God's wisdom and mercy no plan to save the whole race, including our children, as they are evidently included in the human race upon which the curse of sin has come? Christians would no doubt be endowed with sufficient grace to bow to the rigid decree, if such a decree were promulgated.

God is good and God is wise, and true Christians are content to live by faith and not by sight. But they adhere to the Word which God has given them for their guidance. That is the support of their faith against the pretensions and clamorings of sight and reason as asserted by our flesh, which is the motion of our corrupt nature, against the Spirit of God. Hence even those who are perverted by dogmatism of the flesh, if they have faith unto salvation, are insecure in their unscriptural beliefs, and hesitate and doubt and vacillate, ready to make compromises with those who adhere to the Word, whatever sense and reason may say against it, and to form unions with them on the basis of compromises which those who are guided by the Word of God alone can never make. Errorists doubt and waver where those who know the truth are sure of their foundation and have no concessions to make, because they trust in the Gospel alone, which never fails.

Those who reject Infant Baptism, if they are believers at all, have reason to feel insecure of their position. Neither faith nor love sustains them. The commission to disciple all nations by preaching and baptizing plainly shows the intent of the Sacrament to be a blessing to all people, leaving as little room to exclude children as it does to exclude Gentiles from the blessing. So important is the grace which it conveys and so important for all, that we are expressly told that it is indispensable for admission to the kingdom of God, which is prepared for all through the redemption effected by Christ, but into which only those can enter to whom the Holy Spirit applies that redemption.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” Tit. 3:5.

“Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?” Rom. 6:3.

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal. 3:27.

Hence we rightly confess our faith in “one Baptism for the remission of sins,” as Christ, into whom we are baptized by the Holy Spirit, is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

By what right can little children, who were received into covenant with God by circumcision in the old dispensation, now under the Gospel, with its ampler revelation of grace for all men, be excluded from the blessings of God’s people?

The question is all the more urgent and intense because of the declaration of St. Paul which puts Baptism in the New Testament in the same relation to this covenant as circumcision occupied in the old. He says:

“Ye are complete in Him which is the Head of all principality and power; in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.” Col. 2:10-12.

If there is thus evidently mercy in heaven for babes, all of whom are born in sin and are children of wrath by nature, who are we that we should heartlessly limit that mercy to adults and deny the Sacrament of regeneration to our helpless children! All the more must this be urged and pressed because there is no known way in which the redemption in Christ can be applied to children but that of Baptism. Our Lord appeals to His disciples:

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.” Mark 10:14.

They had “brought young children to Him that He should touch them, and His disciples rebuked them that brought them. But when Jesus saw it He was much displeased.” He wanted them to be brought to Him, for He had a blessing for them as well as for older “children of wrath by nature.”

How can Christians now forbid them to be brought to Him?

True, there is no mention of Baptism in the passage thus impressing upon our hearts the Savior's love of little children and His displeasure at those who forbade them to be brought to Him. But there is a strong proclamation of His mercy for them as well as for those of maturer years, and a rebuke for those who would exclude them from the blessings which He sacrificed His life to secure for all people — people of every nation and hue and age, who are all "concluded under sin that He might have mercy on all." No doubt He could bless the babes that were brought to Him without administering the Sacrament of regeneration, as He is the fountain of all blessings, for the conveyance of which Baptism is a means. But His presence, as certain now as it was when He was bodily before the eyes of the people, is not visible now.

How can we now bring our children to Him, for the blessing which He is always ready to confer, otherwise than by bringing them to the Sacrament of Baptism, which was instituted to implant the sinner into Christ and make him partaker of the life which is in Him — to the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost?

What right has any mortal man to forbid them to be brought to Him who is so ready to receive them and make them members of His kingdom?

They are sinners for whom He died; they are sinners for the introduction of whom into His kingdom of grace and salvation He has not in the fullness of His love failed to make ample provision.

How now shall His good and gracious will be done? The Gospel is indeed preached to all nations. We poor creatures are not competent to judge what is possible with God in His gracious work of restoring our lost race to its original manhood in body, soul, and spirit. Considering our fallen estate we should be modest in our pretensions. But our attainments in the knowledge of psychology have not rendered it probable that the preaching of the Gospel has any effect on the souls of babes. That would prove nothing in spiritual matters if we had any promise that it would have a saving effect. But we have no such promise.

But Baptism does implant into the Holy Trinity, does put on Christ, does cause the forgiveness of sins through burial with Him, does save us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. By it we are born of water and the Holy Spirit, without which we cannot enter into the kingdom of God. It is the Sacrament by which the life of our Lord Jesus is conveyed to those for whose sins He tasted death and conquered it, coming

forth victorious from the grave. Why not now let children, for whom our Savior died as well as for adults, share the blessing?

There is no faith and no love underlying the denial of Baptism, with its unspeakable gift of grace and salvation, to babes. Forbid them not to be brought to Him, who loves them and has an everlasting blessing for them. We are not unaware of the difficulty which reason suggests and with which it inspires opposition to the baptism of children. Nor are we at all disposed to make light of the doubt which arises in Christian minds on the ground of the necessity of faith for the appropriation of all divine gifts unto salvation. The children of the Reformation who never can be faithful without keeping in view the great Gospel truth of justification by faith alone, on which all their comfort depends, cannot treat with indifference any argument drawn from this central doctrine of their Confession. And such an argument is ostensibly brought against us when it is alleged that infants are not entitled to baptism because they cannot believe.

A sufficient answer to this might be found in the declaration of our Lord, that “he that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned.” That would throw the burden of proof on our opponents. Do they mean to contend that all children must be damned since they cannot believe? According to the words of our Lord, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned,” a person might be saved without Baptism, but not without faith, for while both are required, only the lack of faith, not the lack of the sacramental washing is mentioned as resulting in damnation. Faith is indispensable, however it may be wrought in the soul, and saying that faith is impossible in little children is simply declaring them incapable of having any part in the great salvation which God has prepared for our lost race in Christ. What an impeachment that is of the wisdom and mercy of God! And how wanton that impeachment is in view of the repeated assurances of Holy Scripture that Baptism conveys the grace that is needed to all men, since Christ died for all!

There is absolutely no ground in Scripture for declining to accept the numerous statements there made, in all their clearness and all their fullness, just as they are written for our learning and our reception by faith. All arguments against them are drawn from the corrupt reason of our fallen nature, which continues to exert its power even in those who have by grace become children of God and who, if they relax their vigilance against the wiles of the devil, are induced to follow the motions of the flesh rather than the

guidance of the Spirit, who speaks in the Word and means to lead us into the truth of that Word and to sustain us in its faith and confession. These arguments will always be plausible to the mind of the flesh, and we therefore cannot wonder that they deceive so many and exert such an influence for evil in the Church.

Weak Christians follow the line of thought pursued by men who have little regard for the Word of God, and are therefore, on the subject of Baptism as well as on other subjects, led into theories and opinions which are adverse to our Confession in its simple faith and humble adherence to the truth given by revelation in the Gospel. Thus it has come about that the whole purpose and import and efficacy of Baptism, as the Bible teaches it and the Church of the Reformation confesses it, has been denied by churches which call themselves Protestant, but refuse to join the great Evangelical Church which issued its Protest at Spires against all Romish oppressions and all anti-scriptural pretensions of power to subjugate consciences without the Word of God

Giving heed to the voice of reason rather than the Word of God, they made mere signs and symbols of the Sacraments, and therefore could find nothing in Baptism which could be of any benefit to children. It is difficult to see why, under such a view, the Reformed Churches retained Infant Baptism at all unless it was simply to honor the tradition of centuries which had practiced it before them. And Reformed sects have had their trouble to retain it, as their people, when they learned the theory, had difficulty to see any use in it and therefore became indifferent to its practice. It is otherwise in the Lutheran Church, with its honest adherence to the Gospel and its happy experience under the rule and reign of the Gospel.

Believing that Baptism is a divinely appointed means of grace by which the redemption in Christ Jesus is brought to souls under condemnation because of their sin, they prized it as a precious institution of divine mercy and power. We are helpless, God helps us. He helps us in the way that seems to Him good. We are content to receive the unspeakable gift as He in His infinite wisdom is pleased to give it. He cleanses poor sinners by “the washing of water by the Word.” Eph. 5:26.

“According to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Tit. 3 5-7.

“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”, John 3:5

“Baptism doth also now save us.” 1 Pet.3:21.

Why should not the Church of the pure Gospel accept the good tidings for young and old, as “the promise is unto you and to your children?” Acts 2:39. God alone can help us in our lost estate and He has promised to help us and our children by communicating the grace of our Savior unto salvation by the holy Sacrament of Baptism.

Is then salvation after all by the mere work performed in the Sacrament without faith? The question overlooks the main truth set forth in regard to Baptism. Faith is essential to salvation. No one can share the blessings of the redemption without it. All the means of grace are designed for its production and continuance in the souls of men, all of whom are dead in trespasses and sins, and none of whom can deliver himself from the curse which sin has brought upon us all.

God alone can help us and He helps us alone in His appointed way, which is by the Word and Sacraments. These work faith by the power of His grace. No man can create it in himself. It is the gift of God. He has not only loved the world and given His own dear Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but He has instituted means by which the Holy Spirit may create the necessary faith in the hearts of all men.

The whole Trinity is concerned in our salvation. The Father has loved us all, the Son has died for us all, the Holy Spirit offers the grace unto salvation to us all. As surely as it is the will of the Triune God that we should have eternal life in the Son, the grace by which alone this good will of our God can be accomplished is offered in the means divinely appointed for its conveyance. Must not the glorious treasure of salvation be brought to us before there can be any reasonable question of its acceptance?

According to the Word of God it is brought to us in the Word and Sacraments, whether men will hear the Gospel which assures us of this or will forbear to hear, or whether they accept the gift which the good tidings convey or refuse to accept it.

God’s mercy is the same to all, whether men embrace it by faith, and rejoice, or reject it in unbelief and despair. The means of grace are as surely God’s chosen vehicles for the conveyance of His grace unto man’s salvation

as the redemption is the ground upon which that salvation is possible. In both cases the Word of God makes the believer sure, as God's promises cannot fail.

But this does not imply that these means effect their purpose without faith. That is a notion of the flesh, just as is the other notion that we need no means for the conveyance of God's grace to our souls. In both the reason of man refuses to hear the inspired Word, and deprives poor souls of its light and comfort. Some imbibe the seemingly comfortable delusion that, if they only hear the Word of God and receive the Sacraments, they are certainly saved, notwithstanding the plain declaration that only he that believeth shall be saved. Some nurse the equally baseless delusion that the Holy Spirit will do His saving work, as they please or as He pleases, without regard to the means through which He has promised to do it, so that faith may have a sure foundation and to which He has bound us, leaving everything outside of His ordinance unsafe ground.

The fact that some hear the Word and receive the Sacraments who are evidently not believers, and whose lives discredit the power of the means which God has appointed to exert it unto salvation, seems sufficient evidence that the whole contention of the Reformation is not true. Alas for the fatuity of human reason in its proud rebellion against the Word of God!

Is the gracious gift of divine grace — the unspeakable gift of salvation in Christ — null and void, empty and delusive, because many are determined not to accept it? Because of the suicidal folly of such people, must all men be taught to become fools and to reject the saving grace, for the stupid reason that some have rejected it and thus proved that it is not saving at all?

Christians are people who trust in Christ as their Savior and hear the Word of God and keep it. With all their faults of nature, that is their calling and their character. That Word shows us that Baptism is instituted for the remission of sins. It brings to us the grace which implants us into Christ and makes us partakers of His merits unto salvation. As that purpose implies that we must be believers in Him, as only he that believeth shall be saved, it of course requires faith to receive the gift which it offers and which of course is offered whether we believe or not, since there would be nothing to believe if nothing were offered. The difficulty which is thus presented is one that no doctrine which pays regard to truth can avoid. The schemes of reason which are designed to avoid it only undermine the whole revealed plan of salvation and leave us nothing but sin and death, and man's utter help-

lessness to escape it. No reasoning can overthrow the truth that man has become helpless and that his help is alone in the name of the Lord. How that help shall be afforded, of which our blind nature sees no need, may be a subject of speculation among Christians who are not fully liberated from the bonds of the flesh which still dwelleth in us all, and more or less influences the best of us in our thinking and feeling and willing. But a faith that is sincere will always be willing to hear the Word of God, however much the flesh may trouble the believing heart.

To a sincere Christian the Word of Holy Scripture is decisive, great as may be his difficulty in bringing his thinking and feeling and willing into subjection to its declarations. The true Christian spirit always agrees to the sentiment, "Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth," and is ready to "take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ." The means of grace according to the Gospel, which alone makes known to us the way of God for our salvation, convey to us the fruits of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and thus at once offer to us the gracious gift and the power to embrace it by faith and to rejoice in the hope of glory. Baptism, like the preached Word, is the power of God unto salvation, at once conveying the saving grace and by it enabling us to receive it in faith unto the saving of the soul.

But how is this possible in the little child?

That is a difficulty which encounters us in any and every view that is presented of the work of grace in the sinful hearts of men. No scheme of reason can relieve us of the difficulty except by the denial of the whole plan of salvation as revealed in Scripture and eliminating faith, which is the one thing needful. The difficulty presents itself in considering the case of the adult that hears the Gospel as well as of the child that is baptized. How can a person who is dead in trespasses and in sins believe the announcement that he is dead and that the Gospel of our Lord brings to him life and bliss in room of his misery in sin?

We do not know.

But we do know that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and that the Word never returns to God void, but accomplishes that whereunto He sent it. Some do not believe it, but some certainly do. How this is brought about we cannot explain, except so far as the statement of the means by which God does it is accepted as an explanation.

The Holy Spirit works faith: He does it by the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation. That is all clear, and there is not the least dif-

ficulty about the matter in a logical point of view. The cause is assuredly adequate for the effect. God can work faith where and when He pleases, and when He pleases to do it by the Gospel, who shall forbid it or declare it impracticable? The power of God explains the matter sufficiently to the Christian mind.

But when men go back of the Word and want to know more than God has seen good to reveal in it, and especially when they refuse to believe unless demonstration is offered on grounds independent of revelation, there is unquestionably not a little at which the intellect stumbles. Our minds are darkened by sin, so that we cannot find the truth unto salvation, even supposing that nature in some remote recesses reveals it, which is not the case. And when a supernatural revelation is given us in the Gospel, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Cor. 2:14.

How then can anyone become a believer?

If we try to explain it by referring to the power which arguments carry to the natural man — arguments that are sound, because making plain the absurdity and supreme folly of living in sin and misery with the prospect of its continuance after death in all the horrors of its outcome in everlasting despair, while free deliverance is offered by the mercy of God in the Gospel of Christ, our reasoning fails of conviction because, sound as it is on Scriptural premises, the natural man is moved by the lusts of the flesh and has no sympathy with the truth on which the whole force of the argument depends.

Reasoning never makes Christians.

The whole system of religion that depends on natural power, whether based on logical processes leading to better convictions, or esthetic culture leading to better tastes, or ethical education of the will leading to better habits and conduct, never can bring a poor soul to a complete consciousness of its lost estate or save it from the ruin which sin has wrought; These natural methods are as powerless for salvation when they are called Christian as when they are called heathen.

Naturally those who oppose the doctrine of the Reformation and of the Lutheran Church will ask: How then is it possible that lost souls ever can be saved? Our simple answer is that no way is possible but that of the grace of the Holy Spirit applying the redemption which is in Christ through the

means which the wisdom and mercy of God has appointed for the purpose and given for administration to the Church of Christ, our Savior.

When it is argued on the same natural grounds, that children cannot be recipients of the great salvation which Christ has secured for all men by His sacrifice upon the cross which the Holy Spirit offers to them in the Sacrament of Baptism, which is “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost,” our answer is the same. He has not asked us, nor any man or body of men, to be His counselors, and He pursues His way of mercy for man’s salvation without regard to the quibblings of men. They know nothing of the matter, except so far as He enlightens them by His Word, and there is no help for them in their darkness if they refuse that light. He saves us by His grace: it is the only hope of our lost race, and those who refuse to flee for refuge to that hope are irretrievably lost.

The case of adults is full of troubles and perplexities to the flesh, which wars against the Spirit. The case of little children has much less difficulty for human thinking, when once that grace has wrought faith in the soul. When the Gospel is preached to people who have grown old in sin, what a troop of objections arrays itself against its claims. In their estimation they are not as bad as they are painted; they are not as helpless as they are represented: on the contrary, many of them are good members of the community, and some of them are models of uprightness in their social relations.

What shall we say to it all?

Only this, that “he that believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” To Christians the reason is plain. We are all lost in sin, we can be saved only by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. If adults believe and be baptized they shall be saved; if they stubbornly resist the pleading of the Holy Spirit, they must remain children of wrath, which they are by nature. And many resist and are forever lost. Considering the pride of reason and the lusts of the flesh we must wonder that not all resist. But the mercy of God is beyond comprehension: it is high, with our thoughts we can not attain to it. But in the case of infants the conditions are simpler. The work of grace remains a mystery throughout; but for the believing mind and heart the difficulty is greatly lessened when their case is considered. The Savior died for them as for all the rest of our fallen race; in Baptism He offers them, as He offers to all men, the forgiveness of sin which He has secured for all; shall they be excluded from its

benefits? How could they be, seeing that the Savior, who knows their need of salvation which He came to bring for all the lost, bids them to come unto Him?

It is said that they do not understand the Gospel and therefore must be excluded from its gracious promises. How heartless this is, seeing that our Lord does not exclude them, but bids us to suffer them to come unto Him. He has life and salvation for them. If we do not know how that life and salvation can be imparted by Baptism to babes, He knows, and for believers that is enough.

But unbelievers, and some even who in a general way are believers, object that children are incapable of faith and therefore should be denied Baptism; as without faith it would be use less. The objection has no force on minds that are governed by the truth revealed in the Scriptures. It does not follow that Baptism would be useless if children could not believe, and it is not true that children cannot believe. The premises are false, and the conclusion is fallacious, even if the premises were true.

In the first place, even assuming the allegation to be true, that children cannot believe, the inference is unwarranted that Baptism is useless in their case and must not be applied to them. It is not treating reverently the inspired Word of God to pronounce the Sacrament which it declares to have been instituted as a washing of regeneration for sin-polluted souls, a useless ceremony. How could a believing heart pronounce such a wanton judgment in the face of the Holy Spirit's assurance that God "according to His mercy hath saved us by the washing of regeneration" and that "Baptism doth also now save us," because "as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ?" On the basis of nature such judgments are common.

Sense perceives the water in Baptism, and reason expects from its application what water is capable of doing. It can wash away the impurities of the body. That washing may represent another cleansing which is seen to be needful. Souls have their impurities and need purification as well as the body, and the symbol which brings this need to mind may be beneficial. But this is possible only when the mind grasps the meaning of the symbol and takes its admonition to heart. The child does not yet understand symbols and cannot apply the lesson. Hence what could be the use of applying the sign when it is known that the signification could not be apprehended and the lesson could not be learned? The reasoning is correct; it is natural; but it is the wretched Naturalism and Rationalism which ignores or discards the

revelation of Holy Scripture, and thus sets the blindness of the natural man against the light of grace which shines super naturally from heaven. On merely natural grounds Infant Baptism cannot be maintained. This, we think, must be conceded.

But those who imagine that the concession damages the cause of the Augsburg Confession must not close their eyes to the fact that a revelation of grace and truth has been given us, of which nature knows nothing, and that all Christianity is founded on that revelation, not at all on our natural knowledge and natural processes of reason on the foundation of that knowledge. On merely natural grounds the necessity and glory of Baptism, whether applied to infants or adults, cannot be maintained at all. What good can water do us in any case when the trouble is the sin of our souls? If infants cannot understand the meaning of a symbol setting forth the purification of the soul, what good can it do the soul that does understand it, seeing that it is power less to change the situation?

Perhaps the thought can be made more intelligible if we ask the question, what good can the Gospel do a poor condemned sinner by its offer of grace and pardon, seeing that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him”? 1 Cor. 2:14. The adult has no more natural power to believe than has the child, and from the standpoint of nature even less. In the interest of revealed truth we cannot suppress the remark, offensive as it may seem to the natural mind, that the Reformed opponents of the Lutheran Reformation laid the foundation for Anabaptistic errors and practices by denying the efficacy of God’s appointed means of grace, in consequence of which it is no wonder that in Reformed sects the baptism of infants is so much neglected, notwithstanding their efforts to maintain it. What is the use of baptizing, or even of preaching the Gospel, when the power of God as conveyed for regeneration and conversion in these divinely appointed means is denied, and the acceptance by faith of the divine promises is pronounced a superstition? On rationalistic ground the baptism of children must seem useless, but the rationalistic principle is subversive of all salvation through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and thus of all Christianity.

In the second place, it is not true that children cannot believe. By their natural power they cannot. Neither can adults by their natural power. All are alike dependent on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that grace is not subject to our power or behest. It is conferred according to God’s will and

order through the means which He has instituted for the purpose. It is a great pity that so many will not learn the simple lesson which is taught our children:

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened, me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

We can do nothing to effect our salvation: God does it all.

The thought that our reason must do something to make the redemption which is in Jesus Christ available or the work of the Holy Spirit effective, and that therefore Baptism can accomplish nothing in a child, which is confessedly incapable of exercising its reason in behalf of the Gospel, is not a product of the Spirit but of the flesh, to which the Gospel is foolishness.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed’ on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Tit. 3:5-7.

God loved the world and sent His Son to save it, and gives His Holy Spirit by Word and Sacrament to apply the salvation effected by the Redeemer. That salvation is for all the world, and all the qualification needed for the Holy Spirit’s work is the possession of a human soul that, being sinful, needs salvation. What now should hinder the application of His grace for the salvation of little children? They have souls to be saved; the son of God died for them; the Savior bids them come; Baptism conveys the grace unto salvation which they need: who shall forbid it? But what is the use, opponents of Infant Baptism ask, seeing that they cannot believe?

Such learning has not been learned in the school of Christ.

Even supposing that God could not work faith in the soul of a babe, would not its induction into covenant relations with its Lord through baptismal grace be of some use in its forlorn condition, and would not the impartation of spiritual gifts from the fulness of Christ be of some value to the child that is dead in sin, even if it were so that it is as yet incompetent to utilize these gifts?

It is surely something to be made an heir of great treasure even if, for the present, it be impossible to realize the benefit. In numerous cases the adult

does not appropriate the gift of grace by believing at the time of his baptism, and yet even Anabaptists do not deem it necessary to baptize such a person again when he later believes. The promise and the covenant stand sure for all time, and the benefit is realized when we believe, though it be long after the means by which the grace is conveyed was first employed.

But it is not true that children cannot believe. God can work faith in them with less hindrance than in adults, whose developed reason is usually an obstacle which is not found in babes. Let it not be forgotten that faith is the gift of God, not the product of our reasoning or effort of any sort. The adults that hear the Gospel, and are baptized, are all made believers by the grace offered in these means, if they do not stubbornly resist the offer and thus deprive themselves of the blessing which they are designed to convey. Children are so far from being incapable of receiving grace unto salvation that they have a great advantage over adults, who must become as little children, if they would enter into the kingdom of God.

Adults cannot by their own reason or strength believe in Christ, but they can by their own reason and strength willfully oppose the power of the Gospel and obstruct the work of the Holy Spirit, and thus hinder the accomplishment of God's gracious will for their salvation. Babes offer no such impediments. The grace offered them in Baptism overcomes the hostility in their sinful nature, and no obstinate resistance is developed in minds not yet conversant with the practice of sin in thought, word and deed. So every baptized child is made a believer in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit exerted in Baptism. The psychological difficulty which opponents interpose is no difficulty at all to the Holy Spirit, who regenerates the child. Nor can it be of any moment to those who believe the Scriptures. If they feel themselves unable to solve the scientific problem presented, they will not allow themselves to be disturbed by that, seeing that faith is not dependent upon our science or philosophy. God knows it all, and that is sufficient for His children, even though He does not reveal it all. What is revealed is enough. And that revelation sets aside the whole human theory of children's incapacity for the kingdom of God; and this not only in regard to the power and gift conveyed in the means of grace, but also in regard to its appropriation by faith. For the Scriptures teach us that the Holy Spirit not only can do His work in infant souls, but does perform it in fact.

It is written:

“Jesus called a little child unto Him and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one little child in my name receiveth me; but whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Matt. 18:2-6.

The utmost that can be urged against our Lord’s statement about “these little ones,” that they “believe in me,” is we have no means of knowing the truth of that the statement aside from His Word. But for believers His Word is assurance enough, and the demand for something more than this as a ground of our faith is but a symptom of that unbelief which is natural to fallen man and which no effort of reason can overcome. Faith is the gift of God. He gives it to children in Baptism; and as they do not reason it away, they are all made believers by the grace which the Sacrament conveys.

Considering that man was made for communion with God, and that after the great catastrophe in Eden a Savior was given through whom that communion which sin had broken should be restored by faith, it seems an argument not only against the very words of Scripture, but against all Christian reason, that children on account of the limitations of childhood cannot believe and can not enjoy the blessing of the new covenant. It is unquestionably the reason of the flesh directed against the reason of the Spirit. For can any one, if he really believes the Bible, doubt that children were taken into covenant relations with God by circumcision in the Old Testament? If children were capable then of enjoying the blessings of the covenant, what could prevent them from enjoying the blessing now that Christ has come? Our race was lost, and our race is now redeemed: how can any Christian think that now, when the redemption is finished, the poor little children are excluded? Is there no mercy for babes now that the light of heaven’s mercy for man in Christ shines in glorious splendor over all the earth in its darkness of sin?

Our flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and our carnal reason relucts against the reason of heavenly truth: but is it in accordance with the light and the power of Christian truth to yield to the clamoring of the flesh? “If ye live after the flesh ye shall die.”

The Holy Spirit wrought in the soul of John when he was yet in the womb of his mother, who declared: “Lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.” Luke 1:44.

The same power of the Holy Spirit that wrought upon the unborn child still exists to perform God's gracious will, and the same capacity for the work of the Holy Spirit exists in children still, that His gracious will unto their salvation may be done.

We may not understand how it is done. The thoughts of God in the whole work of our salvation are high: we cannot attain to them. But they are graciously effective, whether we comprehend them or not. Their power to execute His will is not dependent on our poor understanding.

Faith is the evidence of things not seen: we believe the Word, and are sure that these things are so when the Word certifies them. And no one who truly believes in Christ as his Savior and rejoices in the hope of glory at all, imagines that his faith depends on his ability to demonstrate to the human intellect the strength of the foundation on which it rests. He believes the Word, and He does this by the power of the Holy Ghost.

In the child the Holy Spirit exerts the same power by Baptism. To say that it has no faith because it has no developed self-consciousness and cannot reflect upon the contents of its soul, is a bare assumption, for which there is no warrant. The existence of powers and activities in our souls is not dependent on our consciousness of them or our ability to judge of their nature and worth. The child has a rational soul, though reflectively it knows nothing about it; it clings to its mother, though it knows no marks by which she is distinguished from other women. Even in the adult there are forces and processes of which he has little knowledge, so that to know one's self is a study. There are depths of sin in the human soul which none have fathomed with their natural powers, and it is a comfort to know from the Word of God that grace is operative according to the divine promise in many a heart beyond what consciousness reports.

In times of trial and trouble a believer may even be bereft for a while of the comfort which the consciousness of being in Christ by faith brings, and when we lay ourselves down to sleep we are not afraid that the absence of a consciousness of faith would, if we should die in the night, deprive us of the salvation which faith secures. The way of safety and of comfort is the way of trust in God's promises in regard to Word and Sacrament.

3. Our churches therefore rightly “condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the Baptism of children, and affirm that children are saved without Baptism.”

The Anabaptists were a party who joined the Protestants in their refusal to subject themselves to the authority of Rome, but who pushed their claim beyond the Gospel, and therefore could have no part in the great Confession of Augsburg, but formed a sect of their own which ran into such wild fanaticism that modern Baptists, who agree with them in their renunciation of Infant Baptism and in their contention for immersion as the exclusive mode of administering the Sacrament, generally decline to recognize kinship with them.

Our Confession makes no reference to the mode of Baptism, because in Article VII it had already laid down the principle by which all questions of ceremony must be decided according to the Gospel; and we have here only to remark in this regard, as a matter of general note, that in proportion as sects abandon the substance of divine institutions they become zealous and even fanatical in their maintenance of forms and ceremonies in which that substance is ordinarily communicated. The less stress Baptists and other Reformed sects lay on the “washing of water by the Word” as a means of cleansing from sin and on the “washing of regeneration” as the way of God’s mercy to save us, the more they are inclined to contend earnestly for the mode in which that washing is to be performed.

That there is “one Baptism for the remission of sins” and that the Sacrament implants in Christ and makes the subject a blessed participant in His merits, is overlooked, but the command to baptize keeps staring them in the face and sounding in their ears and drives them to give attention to the ceremony and attach to that the importance which belongs only to its substance as an institution for the conveyance of saving grace. When a person once believes that God in His infinite mercy means to save us, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, by “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost,” he is little concerned about the quantity or the quality of the water used, because he knows that it is not the water that docs

the great work of grace, “but the Word of God which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts such Word of God in the water.”

The faith with which our fathers were gifted by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, and by which they fought the great battle of the Reformation, could not otherwise than “condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the Baptism of children and affirm that children are saved without Baptism.” They believed and therefore they spake. We also believe, and therefore we speak. Their speech and ours seems harsh to the natural man, but it is speaking the truth in love. Two things are said, which merit the attention of Christians as the reason for the condemnation expressed.

In the first place, the errorists “reject the Baptism of children.” To evangelical believers that is a sore offense. It violates faith, hope, and charity. It contravenes the faith which humble Christians have in the precious Word, “the promise is unto you and to your children.” Acts 2:39.

In view of the plain declarations of Scripture that our children, being born of the flesh, must be born again of water and the Holy Spirit as an indispensable condition of entering the kingdom of God: that Christ bids us suffer little children to come to Him and rebukes those who would forbid it; and that Baptism is the only means of grace that is applicable to little children, who cannot avail themselves of the knowledge imparted by the Word and cannot examine themselves as a prior condition for a worthy reception of the Lord’s Supper: it is a manifest lack of faith to “reject the Baptism of children.” Hence it is in conflict also with the love which is born of faith in the redemption through Christ and the work of the Holy Ghost in applying His merits for the salvation of souls ruined by sin.

In reading of such assaults upon the universal practice of the Christian Church from apostolic times through all the ages since to administer Baptism to the children of believers, the question keeps forcing itself upon the mind, “Why, what have these little children done, that they should be excluded from the great salvation which our Lord offers them in Baptism? If He has redeemed them and provided for them a Sacrament by which His merciful will that they shall enter the kingdom of heaven is realized, how can a loving heart forbid them to come to Him and share the unspeakable gift of His grace? It is a manifest lack of charity towards the little ones to”reject the Baptism of children.” And it violates the hope that gladdens believing hearts.

We do not say that, if parents can find it in their hearts to refuse Baptism to their children, there is no hope for these poor babes, as there is no excuse for this rude refusal. We know what God can do for them, notwithstanding man's seemingly heartless denial to them of the means by which the Lord would save them. But we have no promises in regard to His work of grace aside from the means which He has appointed for its conveyance, and therefore can have no assurance of faith as to what He will do. The special ground of our hope is thus rejected by those who "reject the Baptism of children;" and it is only because of the general ground, that the mercy of our Lord is great and endureth forever, that we still refuse to despair of the salvation of unbaptized children, though the Scriptures reveal to us no way in which God is pleased to compensate for the fault of those who reject the Baptism of children and to supply in an extraordinary way the lack of the washing of regeneration by His ordinary means.

In the second place, the condemnation of the Anabaptists is just, because they "affirm that children are saved without Baptism." That affirmation would seem to defend them against the charge of cruelty to the children in their rejection of Infant Baptism. In a certain respect it does; for they evidently do not mean to deny their children the salvation which Baptism is designed to convey as our Lord's chosen means. They plead not guilty to the charge of caring nothing whether their children are saved or not. That would be so horrible that they themselves must see its criminality and their forfeiture of all rights to the Christian name if they occupied such a position. But that makes no material difference in the situation. They "reject the Baptism of children," and in lieu of the Sacrament of regeneration substitute their human notion that children need no new birth and are saved without the Sacrament which our Lord has appointed to confer it. The matter thus grows worse.

The root of the evil in those who reject the Baptism of children is exposed by their efforts to cover up the truth which the Scriptures reveal. They deny that all who are born of the flesh are flesh, and that unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. They deny the exceeding sinfulness of sin as it exists in all who are born of Adam and are thus "children of wrath by nature." The whole Gospel of grace in Christ Jesus is thus undermined. Not only is the Scripture teaching of the means of grace, as the Lutheran Church confesses it, thus renounced, but the need of grace, which these means are divinely ap-

pointed to convey, is pronounced a superstition. Evidently the whole Gospel is thus perverted, and a speculative system of human reason is built 'up in its stead'.

There is no need for the grace of Baptism in children, because there is in this system no need of grace at all in children, although the Bible teaches us that they are born in sin and conceived in iniquity. According to the Scriptures all who are born of the flesh are children of wrath by nature. How shall they escape the damnation of hell, if the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ does not save them?

Anabaptists may think it necessary to remind us that they do not claim the salvation of children without divine grace, and that our Confession charges them only with teaching that children are saved without Baptism. But they fail to tell us how they are saved, if it is without this Sacrament of regeneration. And if they should allege that God may have other means of applying grace for their salvation, we must remind them that the Scriptures make no other way known to us, and furthermore that, if in the divine wisdom and mercy there are other ways, the grounds on which they reject the Baptism of children apply equally to any other means or way of regenerating and saving them. If children are incapable of being brought to Christ by the Holy Spirit in Baptism, how can they be capable of being saved in any other way? The Anabaptists are condemned because their doctrine is a human notion that is subversive of the way of salvation revealed in Holy Scripture.

The truth which our Confession teaches concerning Baptism is full of consolation to believing hearts, and that this is so little heeded by churches of the Reformed school is greatly to be regretted. To us Lutherans it is appalling to notice how the Baptist influence is spreading among the sects and how even in the more sober and conservative of them Infant Baptism is declining. In some it has almost ceased to be a custom and in most of them it has become a matter of indifference and therefore of neglect. This is not surprising, though it is none the less deplorable on that account. The Zwinglian and Calvinian opposition to the Lutheran Reformation had in it the seeds of error which have grown into trees of fundamental heresy, and the result cannot surprise those who are accustomed to think. But the inconsistency which protected Reformed sects from the consequences of their error is departing, and the fruits of false doctrine are becoming more apparent. Accordingly we have the false principle, against which the Lutheran

Reformation firmly set the exclusive authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God, working out its natural results not only in the theology but also in the hearts of men, who are taught to give ear to reason, though it conflict with the revelation in the Gospel which they profess to believe. All this admonishes us Lutheran Christians to stand fast in the truth which our fathers by the grace of God so valiantly defended and so nobly confessed at Augsburg.

In our land the influence of the type of Protestantism which declined to join the Lutherans in their great Confession of 1530 is great. Even some of our own people are affected by it, and even pastors are occasionally led to depreciate our great treasures in deference to the prevailing sentiment in their sectarian communities.

Even among our own people the great consolation of standing in covenant relation with our God since our Baptism, when we were little children, and when God gave us His Holy Spirit and promised that He would be our God and we should be His sons and daughters, so that with all our faults and whatever betide we could find a refuge strong and sure in Him, seems to be waning. O, let us hold fast that which we have, that no man take our crown!

Article X. Of The Lord's Supper.

Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present and are communicated to those that eat in the Lord's Supper. And they disapprove of those that teach otherwise.

The German copy has some additional words which make the meaning more plain. It reads thus:

Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the true body and blood of Christ are truly present under the form of bread and wine and are there communicated to those that eat in the Lord's Supper, and received. Wherefore also the opposite doctrine is rejected.

NO DOCTRINE of the Lutheran Church has been more the subject of controversy in the Protestant Churches than that which is set forth in this article. While the Romanists have made the doctrine of justification by faith the chief point of their attack, the followers of Zwingli and Calvin have generally preferred to wage their warfare against the Lutheran Church on the basis of their errors respecting the means of grace; and as the Scriptural doctrine of the Holy Supper which the Lutheran Reformers maintained and set forth in their Confession seemed most exposed to objections of human reason, the battle generally concentrated at this point. This was not because there was ultimately less objection to our doctrine concerning the Word of God and Holy Baptism, as means of grace, but because the doctrine of the Lord's Supper could be assaulted with arguments appealing more plausibly to the common sense of people and therefore with more prospect of success.

Not all professing Christians have faith, and not all who have faith are sufficiently strong to resist the appeals against the words of Holy Scripture which they profess to believe. Natural reason objects to the entire teaching of the Gospel respecting the means of grace and therefore has as little sympathy with our confession concerning the purpose and power of the Word

and of Baptism as concerning the Sacrament of the Altar. But it has been found easier to reduce the teaching of the Gospel in regard to this Sacrament by seemingly rational processes to the level of common sense, as the natural man possesses it, furtively making this a rule of biblical interpretation, and thus to undermine faith in the truth which the Scriptures teach without seeming to reject the authority of the Gospel, than openly to renounce the whole plan of God to convey His grace by means of His Word and Sacraments as conflicting with human reason and therefore untenable.

The avowal of the rationalistic principle according to which the Zwinglians fought against our Confession in Luther's day came later; but its results were so horrible in its manifest efforts to exterminate Christianity, that all Christian believers, not excepting those who had applied that principle in contending against the pure doctrine of the Gospel, were constrained to dissent. But the contention against the Lutheran doctrine still continues.

The difference among Reformed parties was one of degree, not of substance; and the degree was regulated by expediency rather than by the Christian faith, which recognizes no authority against the words in which God has been pleased to give us the gracious revelation of His will in the Bible. Not what the words say in regard to the Lord's Supper is regarded as decisive and final, but the rule continues to be that the words must be interpreted in conformity with the requirements of common sense. And so the controversy has continued for four hundred years, and the principle on which the opposition to our faith has been waged is today the same as that on which it was maintained when the Augsburg Confession was published, notwithstanding the exposure of the carnality of that principle during the sorrowful reign of Rationalism in its avowed acceptance of human reason as a criterion by which divine revelation is to be judged.

It is beyond expression lamentable that the holy institution of our Lord, which was designed to be the center of unity of His disciples, and in which their common faith in their Lord Jesus and their love for one another in their fellowship with Him should be declared, was made by Satan's wiles a subject of incessant controversy, which, because Christians are human, was sometimes bitter. The fault was not in those who at Augsburg confessed the truth which the Gospel teaches nor in those who still confess it, but lies at the door of those who refuse to accept that truth, and would rather cause divisions and maintain them than take their reason captive under the obedience of faith, and with us confess that faith. The Holy Spirit cannot lead

Lutherans to renounce the words of our Lord; He can lead opponents into the truth which those words declare, if they will not stubbornly set their own wisdom and will against the luminous and gracious guidance of the Gospel.

Our Confession makes but a brief statement of the Gospel truth, and condemns all contrary teaching. Our exposition purposes, in the first place, to make some explanations of the doctrine presented; in the second place to indicate the grounds on which that doctrine rests; and in the third place to give attention to the grave import of the antithesis.

I. The True Body and Blood

Of the Lord's Supper our churches "teach that the true body and blood of Christ are truly present under the form of bread and wine, and are there communicated to those that eat in the Lord's Supper, and received." It is the doctrine which the Lutherans had taught in their churches from the beginning of their glorious work of the Reformation. It is the doctrine which the Lutheran Church, after four hundred years of trial and labor, still teaches, because it is the truth of God revealed in His holy Word, which is forever the same, as God is forever unchangeably the same.

1. Communicated and Received

Our Confession declares that that which is communicated and received in the Holy Supper is "the true body and blood of Christ." It is not mere bread and wine that are imparted. These have their uses in the order of nature, but in themselves have no power in the economy of grace. The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking. The food of our bodily nourishment neither gives us spiritual life in our death of sin, nor does its choice determine or display the nature of that life. What our Lord instituted in the holy Sacrament of the Altar is neither the mere eating of bread and drinking of wine, nor the eating and drinking of these natural elements as a means of attaining or showing forth spiritual life. The life is in Christ, not in bread and wine.

It is His body and His blood that He gives us in the Holy Supper, that His disciples may be made sure not only of His presence when they gather together in His name, but of the precious Gospel that He gave His body into

death and shed His precious blood for our deliverance from the damnation of hell and from the sin which brings about that damnation. He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. And now He gives to His people His very body and blood as a pledge for their redemption through His sacrifice upon the cross, that they might have no lingering doubts about the forgiveness of their sins, which the Gospel announces and faith in which gives us peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. "This is my body," our Lord tells us, "which is given for you, this is my blood which is shed for you for the remission of sins." Our Lord would make us perfectly sure of the great salvation which He offers without money and without price.

There is no deception in the gracious Sacrament. Much has been said about and against the Lutheran use of the word "true" in connection with the words "body and blood." What is communicated is "the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." Our opponents are right when they assert that, in the record of our Lord's words given in the Gospels, the word "true" does not occur. We are disposed to make the admission that, as it was not necessary then, it is not necessary now. Certainly our Lord did not mean that what He offered as a divine pledge that His sacrifice was real, and that the remission of sins thus secured for us all was infallibly sure, was a mere sham. It is declared to be His body and His blood. That declaration is certainly enough for any soul that the Holy Spirit has led to believe in the Lord and His Word. For our fathers in the days of the Reformation it was abundantly sufficient. It is so for us, their children. By the grace of God they believed the Lord's words, and were sure that what He communicates in the holy Sacrament is what He says it to be, His body and His blood. By the same grace the Lutheran Church has, during all these centuries, believed and been sure that these things are so, as He declares them to be. Neither our fathers nor we have, for our own assurance or comfort, needed one word more than the Gospel contains. Hence the Latin copy of our Confession simply says that "the body and blood of our Lord are truly present." That it is the true, not an unreal or pretended body, was to them self-evident. The thought that there might be some deception in the case did not and could not occur to their believing hearts.

Why then did they insert the word "true," to which so much objection has been made? It occurs even in the Catechism, which was designed for children, and from which our children still learn the truth unto salvation.

What need is there for it? Our Lord unquestionably expressed His meaning clearly with out it, and thus its superfluosness is apparently established. And yet the Lutherans had and still have good reason for using it.

The parties who followed Zwingli and Calvin and who are usually classified as Reformed, in distinction from the Lutherans whose Augsburg Confession they refused to subscribe, were willing to admit that the body and blood of our Lord are present in the Sacrament, but reserved the right to put their own interpretation on the admission. They did not agree with the Anabaptists and the Socinians in pushing the principle of human reason, which actuated the entire opposition to Luther's reformatory work among the Reformed, to the extremes with which these shocked the feelings of sober Christians, but they could not be brought to take their reason captive under the Word of God as the Lord gave it and the Lutherans confessed it, but thought they could let that Word stand and still satisfy the demands of their rebellious flesh by rational explanations. They accordingly did not deny that the words of our Lord, as Lutherans presented and urged them, are contained in the Scriptures and are divinely authoritative. They would not reject the Scriptures as God's Word which is binding upon all men and whose declarations are decisive for all Christians. The Reformed parties did not renounce the authority to which Lutherans constantly appealed in regard to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, as in regard to every other doctrine which they taught and confessed. We think it a wrong to the Reformed churches in their opposition to the Lutheran Reformation in the trying days of Augsburg and to the Lutheran Church during all the centuries of controversy since, to charge them with a formal renunciation of the Bible as divine authority. Some individuals carried their opposition to that sad result and did not hesitate to declare that whatever in the Bible militated against their "common sense" must be rejected, thus declaring human reason to be the ultimate court of appeal to which even the Scriptures must of right be subject. But men of that kind usually felt uncomfortable in established Reformed churches and found it convenient to organize sects of their own or to stand aloof, that they might be less molested in their exercise of a larger liberty. That these sects, so far as they still have respect for the Scriptures to the extent of using them for the preaching of portions of truth by which it is possible to find out and to embrace Christ as the Savior from sin and death, are still reckoned by historians of the Church as Reformed sects, is perfectly natural and should offend no one who understands the situation. Their work

is the result of the Reformed principle consistently carried to its logical conclusion, although the Reformed churches generally, though inconsistently, stop before that conclusion is reached. But whilst justice seems to demand that all this should be admitted, the fact remains that these opponents of the Lutheran doctrine set aside the authority of the Word of God by denying what it teaches at the same time that they profess to accept its authority.

Why did Lutherans find it necessary to say that the “true” body and blood of our Lord are present in the Holy Supper? It was because their Reformed opponents, while they rejected the Lutheran doctrine, had not the heart to deny that the Scriptures teach the presence of the Lord’s body and blood in the Sacrament, as the Lutherans teach and confess, but devised a scheme by which they might appear to let the words stand whilst they, in conformity with the alleged requirements of reason, emptied these words of their plain meaning by substituting a body and blood of our Savior that was not real and true, but only symbolical and imaginary. This rendered it necessary, in order that the people might not be misled and that their Confession might not be misunderstood, that they should declare that which is present in the Sacrament to be the “true body and blood of Christ.” They knew very well that, if the body and blood of Christ are present at all it must be the true body and blood. There is none other — our Savior had no other and has no other. But our adversaries devised another and sought to convince the people that there is another, and that this other is what our Savior meant to set forth when He declared, “This is my body.”

It is an astonishing piece of work that was done to make it plausible that these words, after all, mean that “This is not my body,” but simply present to the imagination an emblem of a body far away. The actual presence of our Lord’s body could not be believed, because the fact is incomprehensible and its acceptance lays too heavy a strain upon our reason, which cannot fit it in with the knowledge which is derived from natural sources and find a place for it in its system of thought. We do not say that antagonists of the Lutheran doctrine were and are now always conscious of this difference of principle between them and us, we standing unflinchingly upon the truth of the Word revealed in Holy Scripture, whatever the devil and the world and the flesh may devise against it, they endeavoring to make the Scriptures palatable to proud human nature by explaining away the supernatural truth which they reveal and which the natural man cannot receive, and substitut-

ing for it a figment to which, because it lies within the realm of our nature, reason cannot legitimately object.

Hard as this judgment may seem to some persons, it is the utmost that charity can do in the way of concession to the purpose of erring Reformed churches. Uncharitableness would decide that they are hypocrites, who for selfish intents desire to appear as believers in the Bible while at heart they hate the Gospel, therefore adopting tactics which seemingly present them as believers, while they are engaged in a warfare against the faith. We make no such charge.

Mindful of the infirmities of the flesh and the deceitfulness of the human heart, we desire to speak the truth in love, as we have need to be treated in love by others. The enemies of the Lutheran Church have often done her injustice by imputing to her not only motives, but even doctrines which she abhors. She has tried to recompense good for evil. Therefore she never refused to acknowledge that there are Christians among those who deny the truth of God's Word which she teaches in regard to the Sacrament, charitably assuming that the intent is not to renounce the authority of that Word and to overthrow it, but, in pursuance of an error of the understanding, to support a theory which, though it has its root in the flesh, is supposed to be the mind of the Spirit. None the less, however, must we contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and insist that the war upon the doctrine of our Confession is a war upon the authority of Scripture upon which that doctrine rests, whether this is intended or not. And therefore we must repeat that the effort of Reformed parties to explain away the words, "This is my body," and to substitute for it, "This is not my body," but only a poor figure or symbol which may serve to suggest it to the memory of those who have the necessary information and are in the proper mood to have their imagination rightly affected, is an astonishing feat in the eyes of true children of the Reformation who stand in awe of God's Word. But it makes plain why Lutherans found it necessary to insert the word "true" in their Confession and to say that what is given in the holy Sacrament is "the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ," not a mere sign or symbol, or sham representation of something that is not there at all and is not given.

2. "Truly Present"

Our Confession further declares that the true body and blood of Christ are “truly present” in the Holy Supper. The words are not superfluous. They assert that our Lord meant not only that what He speaks of in His blessed institution of the Sacrament is His real body and His real blood, but that these are really present in its administration. No Christian who is such not only in name denies that our Lord has a true body. The Reformed Churches, when they claim that what is communicated in the Holy Supper is merely bread and wine, not His body and blood at all, do not teach that there is, or at least was, no such thing as could be rightly called His true body and blood. But they denied that these are present in the Sacrament. What the Reformed parties regard as truly present are only the bread and wine, and these they suppose to be emblems or figures of things which are not present, but which are suggested to the imagination of observers by such symbols. The things thus represented are not truly present.

The Zwinglians, who are probably a large majority among Protestant sects, not only avow this, but in many cases emphatically maintain it as a safeguard against what they regard as sacramental superstition.

Even the Calvinists, who, so far as they still adhere to the teaching of Calvin as regards the Holy Supper, express in no gentle words their abhorrence of the superficiality of Zwinglian argumentation and the irreverent Rationalism which it betrays, have no essentially different apprehension of our Lord’s words in the institution of the Sacrament; and after all their subtle speculation upon the presence of His holy body and blood to believers by the power of the Holy Ghost and our Lord’s humanity as the medium of communication of His life to their souls, can make nothing of the body and blood, which the Savior offers in the Sacrament, but a sign and symbol of His humanity that is in heaven, not truly present here on earth where we poor sinners need it for our spiritual nourishment and our salvation from the sin and death which threaten us and stand in the way of our peace and comfort now and our hope of blessedness here after.

Our Augsburg Confession had ample reason for declaring the Christian faith, that not only are the words of our Lord sincerely meant when He says, “Take eat, this is my body,” and that therefore it is His “true body and blood” that is offered. but also that this true body and blood are “truly present” in the Supper. Of course when the Savior assures His disciples that what He gives in the Sacrament is His true body and blood. these must be “truly present.” So far there would seem to be no call for this further state-

ment: it seems to be a needless repetition, or at best an inference that lies upon the surface and is self-evident. But when that which our Lord declares to be His body and blood is, by the manipulations of benighted human reason, made out to be merely a picture or sign of that precious body and blood, the statement becomes necessary for the expression of our faith, that this body and blood, not a mere semblance of them, are “truly present.” For those who deny the reality of the things which our Lord declares to be communicated in the Sacrament, do not mean that there is no such reality as that which the words of the institution indicate, but only that it is not a present reality. The words “body and blood” are supposed to mean a symbol or sign or emblem of a body and blood that exist or have existed somewhere, but have no reality in the Savior’s employment of the words in instituting the Holy Supper. Hence our Confession emphatically declares that “the true body and blood” of Christ, not only are a reality, but that, according to His own words, they are “truly present” in the Sacrament.

3. “Under the Form”

This true body and blood are truly present “under the form of bread and wine.” When our Lord, in the night in which He was betrayed, instituted and administered the blessed Sacrament of communion of His disciples with Him and with one another in Him, He took the bread and the wine and gave it to them with the simple declaration, “This is my body, This is my blood.” We can imagine how astounding such a declaration must have been to the poor disciples who gathered around Him without understanding the mystery of His death, and of His kingdom that could be established only by His death as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. But they could see the bread and the wine, and they had the grace to believe that His words, This is my body, This is my blood, meant more than the mere bread and wine which they saw. The Holy Spirit was teaching them and continued to teach them with ever increasing light that true disciples of the Savior live by faith, not by sight. His Word is a light to their path which grows brighter and brighter in the darkness of earth until the perfect day.

If they did not comprehend the mystery of the Sacrament, they knew that what the Master gave them was not merely bread and wine. They could see this, and by their senses could know these earthly elements, but by their faith could know also that the gift communicated with the body was the

body and blood of their Lord, however incomprehensible this seemed. And the Church of Christ, led by the Holy Spirit who gave us the Word of Scripture and continues to lead into all its truth by His enlightening power, has heeded the heavenly guidance and learned to confess the truth in Jesus respecting the Sacrament as well as respecting all other points pertaining to our salvation. So the Church of Christ, Romish and Greek and Protestant, has with one accord, excepting only the comparatively small contingent of Reformed sects who fought against the Lutheran Church, accepted the words of our Lord, "This is my body." All Christendom, with the exception mentioned, agrees in the faith that in the Holy Sacrament the true body and blood of the incarnate Son of God are truly present and offered to the communicant under the form of bread and wine. But the Lutheran Reformation, in its strict adherence to the Word of Holy Scripture, did not fail to bring the light of the Gospel to bear on the Sacrament, and to correct the errors and abuses on this subject as it did on others by which Christian people were misled.

The Romish Church had for centuries gradually developed a theory regarding the nature of Christ's corporeal presence in the Holy Supper. This was the doctrine of transubstantiation, with which were connected a number of the abominations by which the papacy built up its power, oppressed the people, and enriched its treasury. The theory is that in the celebration of the Sacrament the consecration changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, so that afterward what is upon the altar and what is communicated is not bread and wine at all, though it looks like it and smells like it and tastes like it. A divine deception is supposed to be practiced on our senses, and the people are taught to adore the miracle which is said to be wrought, and thus to regard the consecrated wafer, or host, to be the Lord Himself, to worship Him in the host when it is carried in their processions, and to credit the priestly allegation that this wafer or host may be offered as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead. Taking in connection with this the figment of purgatory, which was part of the same scheme of papal devices, the sacrifice of the mass, as this abuse of the Sacrament was called, became one of the most horrible of the perversions against which the Reformation had to contend.

The Lutheran doctrine has no affinity to these human speculations of Romanism and their resultant abominations. It merely sets forth what our Lord's words as recorded in the Scriptures declare and what Christians

therefore believe. There is in these words no warrant for the theory of transubstantiation, much less for the abuses which benighted reason has deduced from the unscriptural device.

The charge which adversaries have made against Lutherans that the doctrine of our Confession, which alleges that the body and blood of Christ are truly present under the form of bread and wine, is only another rational theory of the real presence, which at best can have no more ground for faith than other theories of reason, is utterly false. Reformed parties have persistently urged that the whole sacramental controversy resolves itself into questions which lie outside of the fundamentals of Christianity, alleging that their doctrine and that of our Confession differ only in regard to the mode of Christ's presence in the Supper. In their advocacy of unionism it would be a comfort to them if this were so. But it is not true, and all who are willing to look upon the subject in the light of God's Word, which alone is decisive in matters of faith, can easily know that it is not true.

The Romanists allege that in the distribution of the sacramental elements there is no bread and wine offered; the Reformed declare that in such distribution there is no body and blood of our Lord offered. The former explain away the real presence of the bread and wine by assuming that by a sort of magical incantation performed by priestly consecration of the elements, the bread and wine have ceased to exist, and the body and blood of our Lord have taken their place; the latter explain away the real presence of the body and blood of Christ, though He assures His disciples that these are His gift in the Sacrament, by assuming that He could not rationally mean what He says, but must have meant that the bread and wine offered are symbols of His body and blood, which must not be regarded as the reality, and which are assumed to be far away. These are human theories which, being such, and thus not the truth revealed by inspiration of God and written in the Gospel, may pass in the court of reason for what they are worth, but have no claim upon Christian faith, which adheres to the Scriptures and accepts as truth only what these teach.

Does the Lutheran Church really stand upon the same ground with these sects when it teaches that the true body and blood of Christ are truly present under the form of bread and wine in the Holy Sacrament?

It is a deception to say that all churches agree in the statement and differ only in regard to the mode of that presence. Especially the Protestant churches which followed Zwingli and Calvin and which refused to accept

the great Confession of the Reformation delivered at Augsburg, are not pursuing a course that is assuring in regard to their sincerity and honesty, when they allege that all are agreed in the fundamental truth of the Sacrament, which is that the body and blood of our Lord are truly present and communicated when the Sacrament is rightly administered, and that all the controversies are about the mode, which does not affect the substance of the doctrine and of the faith which embraces it. If we said that they know no better, we would be imputing to them an ignorance that is incredible. They reject our Confession and cause divisions; they deny that what is administered in the Lord's Supper is His true body and blood; they declare the real presence of the Lord's body in the Sacrament to be impossible and its maintenance to be absurd; they accuse us of barbarism when we speak of eating our Savior's body and drinking His blood in the sacramental mystery: and yet they would have people think that in substance they are one with us, and differ only in the mode of the incomprehensible presence. Plainly these Reformed parties could take a long step towards peace between us if they would believe and confess that the Lord's true body and blood are truly present in the Supper, as His own words undeniably declare. The mode of the presence, as a secondary matter, might then be discussed among theologians at their leisure, while the faith of the people in the plain words of the institution would be left undisturbed.

Our controversy with the Protestant sects that rejected and still reject the Augsburg Confession so far as the Sacrament of the Altar is concerned, is not about incidentals and accessories, but about the truth of our Lord's words, This is my body, and about the consequent fact of the real presence of that real body when the Sacrament is celebrated according to our Lord's command, "Do this."

With the Roman and Greek Churches the case is somewhat different. They admit the presence of the true body and blood in the Sacrament. But they deny that what is distributed to communicants is bread and wine, declaring that in virtue of the priestly consecration these have ceased to exist, and the body and blood of Christ have taken their place. Here the allegation of a difference in mode might challenge some respect. They admit that the body and blood of our Lord are truly present, but they deny the presence of the bread and wine as the earthly elements which our Lord appointed as the means of their communication. They have decided something about the mode, about which true Christian believers do not allow their faith to be

disturbed, and require their figment of transubstantiation to be accepted as an article of the Christian faith. Is now our controversy with them simply a quarrel about a mode, which lies beyond the truth revealed in Scripture and thus within the sphere of things which God has left to human liberty? It is this just as little as it is with Reformed sects. In neither case is it a question of mode which God's Word has left to human wisdom to choose, when faith has embraced the substance of the truth revealed. In both cases it is a question of the acceptance of the truth revealed from heaven and which is decisive for all men and for all time.

Romanism does away with bread and wine in the Sacrament; Reformism does away with the body and blood of Christ. Neither deals merely with the form while the substance is preserved; both reject the words of our Lord in their presentation of the substance of the Sacrament, the one in repudiating the bread and wine, the other in repudiating the body and blood. There is no sense in disputing about forms when the thing whose form is supposed to be under debate is denied to exist. Such trivial disputes have no right in Christendom, and sober Christians have nothing to do with them.

But when our Confession declares that the true body and blood of our Lord are truly communicated under the form of bread and wine, some reason is given for speaking about forms. According to the words of Holy Scripture our Lord took the bread and the wine and blessed and gave them to His disciples; and when the Romanists explain the mode or form, they mean that the reality of the bread and wine is no longer present at all, and of course not present in any mode or form. Our Confession has nothing in common with such trickery of words when it plainly declares the faith of Lutherans to be that "the true body and blood of Christ are truly present under the form of bread and wine." If they are present at all, they are present under the bread and wine, if these are present at all. With us there are no "ifs" about it, because we believe the plain words of our Lord as they stand; but there is so much mystifying of words and mystification of truth going on among men who seem determined at every cost to get rid of the mystery of the real presence of our Lord's body and blood in the holy Sacrament, that the cause of truth requires repeated reference to the sorrowful device. The bread and wine are given in the Sacrament, and that which is given is the Lord's body and blood. Both are truly present and truly given and are present and are given in one and the same administration. The one is given with the other, and in and under the other.

We see the presence of the bread and wine, and that is the form in which the gracious gift of the Sacrament is communicated; we believe the presence of the body and blood, according to our Lord's words, and that is the gift which the Sacrament communicates as the certification of the forgiveness of our sins and the bread of heaven for the nourishment of our spiritual life. The earthly and the heavenly are together: the one is the bearer of the other. If we desire the special gift of our Savior's body and blood which the Holy Supper was designed to impart, with all the blessings which these involve, we must receive the bread and wine in the Sacrament. It is not a question of one form which human wisdom may suggest as compared with another form which human wisdom may suggest, the rights of each and of all being equal in the court of reason, but a question of faith in the divine wisdom which has appointed the bread and wine as the medium for the conveyance of the heavenly gift. The form of bread and wine is that which the Lord has appointed to transmit His body and blood in the Sacrament. There is no other.

Our Confession simply declares the faith of all Christians in the Word of God, accepting its teachings in every part concerning the Holy Supper, as in all other respects, and has no controversy with others about forms which that Word has left subject to human liberty. The body and blood are communicated under the bread and wine of the Sacrament, and there is no other form.

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ.” 1 Cor. 10:16.

4. “Communicated”

The true body and blood are truly present “and are there communicated to those that eat in the Lord's Supper, and received.” These holy gifts are present only for communication. Only to this end was the Sacrament instituted, that His disciples might take and eat, and all of them drink, what His loving kindness had to offer them as a parting gift on the night in which He was betrayed. It was a memorial, for they should do this in remembrance of Him.

But the gift which He offered them in His testament before His visible departure from them, was not a trinket or bauble which had no value but

that which sweet memories of His gracious presence among them could lend it. Strange that Christians should admit into their hearts the thought that only a valueless object could serve as a remembrance of His love, which was so rich in heavenly treasures and gifts. A trinket of little merchantable value may indeed be a souvenir of priceless worth to a dear friend. Circumstances determine the appreciation. But must a gift be inherently valueless in order to render the memory of the giver sacred?

What our Lord gave was not the gold and jewels which the world deems precious. But must on that account the gift of the Sacrament be merely bread and wine? The parting feast would have a precious memorial of His undying love if there had been nothing more. We would not say a word in disparagement of this, but we cannot for a moment concede that His parting testament could consist only in this. What He did impart was His own precious body and blood, and this His disciples should eat and drink in memory of Him, whose body was offered and whose blood was shed for the forgiveness of their sins.

The thought that this could not be accepted in memory of Him, as well as mere bread and wine, ought never to have been broached among Christians, whose faith and love it offends, and should never have been suggested as an argument against the real presence of Christ's body and blood, as if a precious gift could not be received in remembrance of the Giver as well as one that is of little worth. We are to take and eat the body and blood of our Lord, and do this in remembrance of Him, the reminiscent power being all the greater, because the gift imparted involves the whole work of our Lord for the salvation of our souls.

That this precious gift was designed to be communicated and received is plainly declared when our Lord says, "Take, eat." It was not, because our Lord assures us that it is His body and blood, to be offered for the sins of the people and to be worshiped, as the adherents of the pope do in their sacrifice of the mass and the adoration of the host. There is but one sacrifice for human sin, which was offered on the cross when our Savior died.

We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool; for by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." Heb. 10:10-14.

The sacrifices of the old dispensation were typical of that which the new dispensation should furnish in Christ, the promised Redeemer; and when He came as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, offering Himself upon the cross as an atonement for all the world's sin, the types were realized and their shadows of realities to come passed away, because the substance had come.

The Romish conceit of a priestly sacrifice in the Lord's Supper, as if the offering of the bread designed by our Lord to be means of communicating His body to His disciples for their assurance of the forgiveness of sins through the blood that was shed for them upon the cross, were meant to supply some defect in the Lord's provision for our salvation and designed to eke out the shortcoming of the sacrifice upon the cross, is a speculation that is wanton, and only displays the want of faith in the divine revelation and the proud spirit that dreams of bettering it, but only succeeds in robbing it of the heavenly power and holy comfort which it brings to those who believe the Gospel message brought to them in the Scriptures.

The body and blood of our Lord are truly present in the Lord's Supper, as our Lord declares. True believers do not question the truth of His Word. But by the very faith which makes them sure of this they are led by the Spirit of God, who leads them into all truth by His precious revelation given in the Word of Holy Scripture, to abide by His Word, and give no ear to seductive spirits, who appeal to the pride of human reason against the authority of divine revelation as the absolute and final authority. Intelligent Christians have no difficulty in this respect, except so far as their flesh still militates against the Spirit's revelation of the truth of God given in Holy Scripture. They know from the Word of the Lord that the body and blood of Christ are communicated in the Sacrament, but they know nothing of a sacrifice of this precious gift in the mass or of its adoration in the host, which Romish reason, in subservience to the interests of the papal hierarchy, has made an article of Romish faith.

Lutherans abide by the Word, and refuse to submit to the authority of human reason, whether it come in the shape of Romanism or Reformism. The Word of God alone must decide, and that declares that the true body and blood of our Lord are truly present in the Holy Supper, and are distributed and received. There is no ground in Scripture for assuming that they are present when they are not distributed and therefore not received. The Sacrament requires the consecration of bread and wine and their distribution and

reception. The bread and wine remain through the whole transaction as the medium for the conveyance of the body and blood. But there is no Scriptural authority for the assumption that they remain after or are present before the sacramental act.

When the Sacrament is administered the body and blood of our Lord are distributed and received. Before and after the administration of the Sacrament we have no word of promise assuring us of their presence as the sacramental gift. We know only that the Lord's true body and blood are truly present when the bread and wine of the Sacrament are communicated and received. That they are present apart from this communication and reception, for which they were designed by our Lord, there is no Word of God to assure us, and that the elements through which they are communicated are to be adored outside of the communication, in which alone they are declared to be present, is a conclusion of human reason that has no ground in Holy Scripture, which alone has authority in all the things pertaining to man's salvation.

It is always in the last analysis the conflict between God and man — God's holiness and man's sin — that comes into view in the efforts that men make to set aside the plain statements of the Word by the introduction of human inventions, which are supposed to be improvements. The true body and blood of our Lord are truly communicated in the Sacrament, and therefore as a matter of course also truly received. This proposition, which is practically self-evident to those who receive the truth set forth in the Gospel, has also been disputed by adversaries of our Augsburg Confession.

We can understand their objections.

They deny that the true body of our Lord is truly present in the Holy Supper, and therefore they must in consistency deny that it is communicated in the Sacrament; and as a further consequence they must deny that it is received. Their chain of error is this. The Savior cannot mean what His words say, when He tells His disciples that what He communicates is His body and blood. Their reason declares this to be impossible. Then it necessarily follows that what is communicated is not His body and blood, whatever else it may be that is associated, with them, and thus suggestive of the words used in the administration. And the third step is a requirement of common sense that what is not present and not communicated cannot be received in the Sacrament. That bread and wine are distributed and received is to them beyond question, because to that the actual senses give testimony. But that

is all that sense and reason can admit: sense perceives nothing else; and reason cannot admit that the body and blood of our Lord, which His words point out as the gift communicated, can possibly be communicated. Therefore the opponents of our Augsburg Confession and its doctrine of the Sacrament can see in the sacramental communication and reception nothing but bread and wine, leaving it to the piety of communicants to supply whatever they may think needful for edification.

The Lutheran Christians of the Augsburg Confession had no such troubles to determine what might be the appropriate thought to be supplied. They took the Lord at His word, and rejoiced in the consolation which it gave them. Accordingly they received the gift as what He declared it to be, His true body and blood. It is the body which is given for us and the blood which was shed for the remission of our sins. That is what the words say, and that is what Lutherans believe.

The difficulties of sense and reason, which have no rights and no voice in matters which the Lord of all decides and for which His truth and omnipotence stand good, may be subjects for theological apologists to discuss, but they had no weight and bearing on the faith of humble Christians except so far as these still have the lusts of the flesh, which the Gospel calls them to crucify. The words of our Lord in the institution of the Sacrament say, when He distributes the bread and wine, This is my body, This is my blood. The humble believer takes Him at His word, and sees no difficulty in trusting all to His almighty power and infinite love, whatever the rebellious hearts of our fallen nature may think or say against it. To their minds, subdued and led by the Spirit of truth, there is only the one thought in our Savior's words, that what they receive is the true body and blood of our Lord.

Against this simple thought of faith, however, the thought of human reason is urged, that surely not all who receive the Sacrament can by any possibility receive the body and blood of Christ. Human reason, in its opposition to the Word of God, is as stubborn as it is inventive. If the body and blood are really present and communicated and received in the Holy Supper, must not every recipient partake of the blessings which the sacrifice of the Lord's body upon the cross and the shedding of His blood secured for our lost race? The argument means to charge upon us the twofold error that the body and blood of our Lord, which are communicated in the Sacrament, are identical with the blessings which are secured by the offering of that body and the shedding of that blood upon the cross, and that the communi-

cation and reception of the body and blood confers eternal life by the mere work performed, that is, confer the heavenly blessings without appropriation by faith. Our Church has never given her opponents any reason for making such a charge or furnished any excuse for raising such an injurious report against her. From the beginning of the Reformation until this day she has consistently borne vigorous testimony against the Romish theory of salvation by human works of any kind. Not even the work of God effects the sinner's salvation without its appropriation by faith.

Neither the work of the Father in the mission of His Son, nor the work of Christ in the redemption of the world, nor the work of the Holy Spirit for the application of these benefits through Word and Sacrament, accomplish their purpose in hearts that refuse to accept them. No Christians of any age have ever more clearly, more emphatically and more persistently set forth and maintained the necessity of faith for the sinner's salvation. It is now, since the love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost is made known by the Gospel, the one essential and indispensable thing. On God's part all is ready for our rescue, and all is offered without money and without price. That offer is made by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the holy Sacraments which our Lord has instituted and to which the Gospel promises are annexed. That Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe, and conveys the grace by which the impotent sinner is enabled to believe and rejoice in the great salvation.

But "he that believeth not shall be damned." The wrath of God abideth on him. Notwithstanding all that God has done for His rescue from sin and death, he is not rescued, because he has rejected all that God has done and can do to save him. God will not force salvation upon him, and he is lost by his own choice. Faith is absolutely indispensable to salvation.

So the Church of the Reformation taught and teaches, and on this ground she has fought the battles, and on this ground she stands and fights her battles still. It is an arbitrary and wanton charge that enemies make against her, when they allege that she teaches, or in any way or form, directly or by implication, sanctions the Romish notion of a sacramental salvation without faith. The Sacraments, like the Gospel preached, bring forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, but only he who believes appropriates and possesses what they bring. "By grace are ye saved. through faith." Eph. 2:8.

But whilst opponents, if they are honest Christians, must admit that the Lutheran Church has never taught any other doctrine than that of justification by faith alone, in complete submission to the Word of God as her only authority in matters of faith and life, and thus has put herself upon record as the adversary of any scheme to put human works, or even ceremonies that have more than human authority, in place of the regeneration and conversion and adoption as children of God, with its claim of inheritance of the blessings which are made sure by such adoption, they still presume that incautiously an error has been admitted which vitiates her whole contention. That would be sad, if it were true. But it is not true. There is not even a semblance of truth about it.

The supposed ground of such an accusation exists only in the imagination of our opponents, and has its root only in the errors which lead them to contend against the truth of God as revealed in the Scriptures. The true body and blood are truly present and truly communicated in the holy Sacrament. What then does the communicant really receive? The answer cannot be otherwise than that he receives what is communicated. Those who are led by sense alone, will naturally think that they receive what they see, which is bread and wine. Those who believe will certainly think that they receive what the Lord says, which is His body and blood. Luther and Christians take the words given by inspiration of God just as they stand in Holy Scripture. These tell us that in the institution of the holy Sacrament our Lord took the bread and said, "Take eat." His disciples could see the bread, and knew that what he offered them and what they were to eat was bread. And when our Lord says, "Do this," and the Church in obedience continues to celebrate the Sacrament in His name and for His purpose, communicants can see the earthly element designated to be used and know that what they take and eat is bread. That would be a simple matter about which there could be no controversy among people of sense. If that were all that the Bible teaches us about the Holy Supper. It would be a memorial feast observed by the churches in compliance with a ceremonial law, if it could be shown that its observance is obligatory at all. The Reformed opponents of our Confession would thus have what they want, although Lutherans, with their clearer and deeper knowledge of the Gospel plan of salvation, would still wonder what the design of such a ceremonial law in the time of the New Testament, when all the ceremonial shadows passed away in their real-

ization by the coming of the foreshadowed substance in Christ, could possibly be.

But the fact that our Lord distributed the bread is not all that the Bible teaches about the Sacrament, and its reception is not all that is meant by the words, "Take eat." That would not express the substance of the divine institution and its beneficent design. The words of our Lord in the distribution were: "Take eat, this is my body." It was not necessary to mention the bread which all could see, but it was necessary to mention that which sense could not discern, though it was the very element through which the sacramental gift of grace should be imparted. That which our Lord communicated and which was received, and that which is communicated and received ever since when, in accordance with the Master's command, "Do this," the holy Sacrament is administered, is the Savior's body and blood. That is what communicants are to eat and drink; and that is meant to convey the whole unspeakable blessing which was secured for mankind by the sacrifice of His body and the shedding of His blood upon the cross. Therefore He mentions that this body was given and this blood was shed for us, for the remission of our sins. The Holy Supper stands in the most intimate relation to the atonement made by the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

But the offer of the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation, which are pledged and assured to us by the presence and communication of the body and blood of that Lamb of God through which these blessings were secured, is not the same thing as the appropriation of these blessings, which here as everywhere else can take place only by faith. That is the one thing indispensable to salvation, though it seems a little thing compared with the love of God in the gift of His only Son, the death of Christ for the sins of His enemies, the work of the Holy Ghost to apply this love and the merits of this death to the souls that sinned and were lost in the sins which called forth all this love and sacrifice to rescue the creature that deserved only the damnation of hell. But so it pleased God in His infinite wisdom to create man with reason and will — in comprehensible as this may seem to us when we once understand the situation — and to' make it possible for this intelligent creature to fall.

His infinite wisdom could not change His plan and therefore still made the deliverance from the effects of that fall dependent, not on His almighty power to change His creative purpose, but on the influence of divine grace to change the hearts of men in their relation to God and bring them into ac-

cordance with the gracious thoughts of God. For the Scriptures teach not only the great salvation which is wrought out through the life and death of our Redeemer, but also the gracious work of the Holy Spirit to bring sinful souls to Christ and to the free salvation which He offers. This offer is made in Word and Sacrament and can be embraced only by faith in Christ, which the Holy Spirit works by means which offer the salvation wrought by Him. It is a glorious plan, that is consistent as it is glorious. The Scriptures reveal it with a clearness that leaves every soul without excuse, if it unhappily rejects the gracious offer and chooses death rather than life. "O house of Israel, why will ye die?"

And so our Lord offers all the treasures of His grace in the holy Sacrament. His body and His blood, which were given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins, are communicated as an assurance to all believing hearts that the redemption is an accomplished fact and these believing hearts rejoice in the consolation. But some who come to the communion are not believers. How is it then? It is not a sufficient answer to say that they ought not to be admitted. Certainly they ought not. But as pastors and people cannot prove the hearts of men, there is no way of excluding hypocrites. And if they eat and drink in the Sacrament, what do they receive? Surely their unbelief does not make the word of our Lord without effect. They receive just what our Lord says. That by their unbelief they do not make the truth of our Savior's words false is as plain as that the misfortune of a blind man, who cannot see the bread and wine, does not render the presence of these visible elements impossible. Unbelief is blind, and of course it cannot discern the Lord's body in the Sacrament. But it is the sin of unworthy communicants that they do not discern the Lord's body. Hence it is declared in the Scriptures that those who eat and drink unworthily eat and drink damnation to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body. Unbelievers eat and drink the Lord's body and blood, but they do not receive the great salvation which these elements are designed to present and which only faith can appreciate.

To Christians who heed the light of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, there is no more difficulty in the sacramental communication of the Lord's body and blood with all the unspeakable benefits which the offering of that body and the shedding of that blood upon the cross has secured, than there is in the offering of the same benefits in the Gospel preached. God offers mercy and grace and peace, but man in the depth of his sin and misery is capable of rejecting it; and alas, the most of men do reject it, when it is

brought to them in the preached Word, and many even of those who unite with the visible Church and receive the Sacrament still reject it. Shall we say then, as so many do who have no love for the Lutheran Church and her pure teaching of the Gospel, that their rejection proves the words of our Lord untrue, when He says, "Take eat: this is my body?" Assuredly the unbelief of man can not make the Lord's words of none effect. All that it does prove is that unbelief deprives of the benefits offered, while the gift with its divine intent remains unimpaired. And this is what the Scriptures expressly declare:

"He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." 1 Cor. 11:29.

They receive the Lord's body, but failing to discern it they deprive themselves of all the blessings which it is designed to bring, and add to their sin, of the forgiveness of which the reception of our Lord's body and blood is designed to assure them, the further sin of profaning the holy Sacrament by their unbelief. Not that the glorified body of our Lord carries with it both a spiritual poison for unbelievers and a spiritual tonic for believers. It has no death in it, but has passed through death for our redemption from sin and death, and is eternally living and only life-giving. But only faith can appropriate the blessing which the promise, based on the body given and the blood shed on the cross for the remission of our sins and sealed by the communication of this very body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar, contains and conveys.

The rejection of this promise does not make the Sacrament null and void. It remains the same gracious institution for the remission of our sins and the confirmation of our faith in that remission, whether we believe or decline to believe it; but faith appropriates the great blessing which it offers, and unbelief rejects it. That is the all-important difference. Hence our Catechism says, in answer to the question, How can eating and drinking produce the great effects attributed to the Holy Supper, that "It is not the eating and drinking that does it, but the words here written, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins': which words, beside the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins." He who does not believe these words receives the body and blood unworthily and

has not what they promise, though he has the bodily eating and drinking, because he has not the faith which alone can appropriate the blessing.

II. Proofs of the Doctrine

Although our explanation of the doctrine set forth in our Confession has touched at various points on the Scripture grounds on which it rests, the fact that there has been so much controversy on the subject not only justifies, but seems to demand that something more should be said in regard to the proofs which make Lutherans so sure of their doctrine.

We cannot here go over the whole ground which has been covered by the controversy in its multitudinous particulars, most of which only presented the various lights in which the claims of reason against the teaching of God's Word could be made to bear against the truth set forth in the Gospel and confessed and maintained by the Lutheran Church. Our limits will not allow the following of the manipulations and evasions to which blind reason has driven the enemies of the Lutheran doctrine into all their tricks and hiding places. Nor is it necessary. Those who were and are now sincere in their opposition to our Confession are advocates of substantially the same principle, and are alone entitled to any respect, whilst the fanatical opponents, who may be justly said to be beyond the reach of reason as well as of the Gospel, may rightfully be ignored as having no standing in human judgment or divine revelation.

The argument for the doctrine of our Church was summed up in the days of the great Reformation in the following points, which Luther presented in his great works on the subject of this Sacrament and which are reproduced in our Formula of Concord. They are these:

1. That Christ is true God and true man in one person;
2. That the right hand of God is everywhere;
3. That God's Word is true and never lies;
4. That God has various ways of being present, not only the local presence to which philosophers would confine Him.

The first, second and fourth of these points are really for refutation of opposing arguments, and only the third is positive proof of the Lutheran

doctrine. But as our opponents depended only on their negation, never on any positive proof of their doctrine, it seems meet that we should consider their negation as well as the doctrine of Scripture which it is meant to set aside.

[1] It is not strictly accurate to array the points enumerated as coordinate proofs of the true Spiritual doctrine set forth in the Confession. Three of them are presented in refutation of errors advanced by theologians of Reformed parties who rejected the Lutheran doctrine and endeavored to support their rejection by arguments of reason. That is the only kind of argument upon which the advocates of false doctrine could rely with any hope of success against the simple appeal of Lutherans to the plain words of Holy Scripture.

Our Church in her assurance of faith was ready to meet them wherever they sought refuge, and so it came about that she was charged with resting her conviction on proofs that showed indeed the possibility that what our Confession teaches is true, but failed to show that the possible is realized in the Holy Supper. The design of our opponents was to fasten upon Lutherans an error in their logic with the hope of diverting attention from their own error in doctrine, and thus practically neutralizing it. The fact was the Lutherans relied upon the Lord's own words in the holy Sacrament, and when opponents urged that what these words really say is impossible, our writers made its possibility manifest from those very points which were adduced against it. In this way the controversy was largely conducted on other topics than those directly set forth in the words of the sacramental institution. But that was owing to the efforts of the adversaries to get away from these words and to shift the question to ground that seemed to them more promising. The argument stood thus. The Scriptures expressly teach what our Confession declares as the faith of the Church.

The Reformed opposition insists that this doctrine is not true, because the matter taught is impossible. It is declared to be impossible, because the Lord's body is at the right hand of God in heaven and therefore is at no place on earth, and because, if that body were on earth, it is confined to one locality. Lutherans might content themselves with the curt reply, that it is not their business to show how the Lord can do what He says He will. They believe His Word and trust His power, and could with Christian propriety answer all the cavils of their adversaries with the words, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." Matt. 22:29. But they were

always willing patiently to teach those who were willing to learn and to give a reason for the hope that is in them. They have been the more ready to do this in their doctrine of the Lord's Supper because, while some who condemned it were not sincere in their professed submission to the Word of God, but rather deceivers who caused divisions contrary to the Gospel, there were others who were deceived and who might accept the truth, if it were clearly brought to their view.

Men of Christian experience do not find it difficult to understand how even a sincere believer may be entangled in doubts, when persistent appeals are made to his flesh against the alleged absurdity of believing that what the Lord gives in the holy Sacrament of the Altar is His true body. Can it be right to believe what our reason declares to be impossible? Of course the question is, whether reason should rise in its might and assert its supremacy against the words of Holy Scripture, or whether faith should reign, "casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. 10:5

It is scarcely possible that a sincere child of God through faith in the Savior could hesitate, when the alternative is thus fairly stated according to the Scriptures. But opponents of our Confession are not disposed to present the alternative in so plain a form. Some of them are teachers who are not mighty in the Scriptures, some of them are manifestly deceivers, and some of them are simple-minded Christian people who accept the Scripture is according to the light which is given them. The writer does not doubt that there are many of this latter class in Reformed denominations who, when they read the Bible, are sincere Lutherans, although by their membership in a church that rejects the Augsburg Confession and accepts a different one as a basis of Christian union, they declare themselves against us.

The sect system works badly. According to the Word of God, and in the nature of things involved, it cannot work otherwise. Departures from the principle of "one faith, one Lord, one Baptism," must cause trouble. But when members of sects which oppose the Lutheran Church and her Confession avow their acceptance of our Lord's words, "This is my body," on the simple ground that so the Scriptures teach, the answer of their leaders is ready. The Lord says so, but does He mean it? The Lord's words are not to be denied, nor the authority of Scripture which reports them; but do the words really mean that what is imparted in the Lord's Supper is really His

body and blood? It cannot be; it is impossible. And then comes the argument which seems Scriptural, that our Lord ascended bodily into heaven and sat down on the right hand of God, and therefore His body cannot be down here, where the holy Sacrament is administered. The purpose is to show the unreasonableness of taking our Lord at His word, and thus to make room for some rational interpretation. How much of damage has thus been done to the cause of revealed truth by introducing the human canon of reason to test it, and thus allowing it to sit in judgment on the Word of God as a supreme court of appeal, God knows and church history to a lamentable extent shows, but blind leaders of the blind refuse to see. Still honest believers of the Gospel are misled, and many a simple soul is induced to believe that it is still holding fast the revealed truth, when this has been pronounced absurd, and what is regarded as a rational sense has been substituted for its plain meaning.

Our theologians patiently entered upon an investigation of these perversions of the truth and the alleged grounds of opposition to the plain meaning of the words of our Lord. They agreed that our Lord ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God. Luther and the Lutherans confessed this from the start as part of the Christian faith as contained in the ancient Apostles' Creed. But they could not for a moment, in whole or in part, admit the rationalistic conclusions which errorists draw from the facts in opposition to the explicit and plain words of the Lord. They showed that our Savior was true God and true man — God manifest in the flesh; that His human nature, which was impersonal, was assumed into the unity of the person of the Son of God, and that thus the two natures joined in Him were, and forever are, one person — only one; that therefore where the Lord Jesus is, there His humanity with its human body is also, as well as His eternal Godhead; that when He ascended into heaven He did not leave His disciples orphans, but was always with them, and would be with them unto the end of the world — He, not only His Spirit or His power, and not only His divinity, but He who is God and man in one person; and that when He sat down at the right hand of God it was not to be confined to a narrow space, or to be separated in His humanity from the larger range of His divinity, but as the heir of all things to reign over all. Thus the exaltation of our Lord, which is supposed to prove it impossible that His body should be really present in the Holy Supper, is an additional reason why all doubt of our Savior's words should be dispelled.

“We believe, teach and confess,” says our Formula of Concord, Part I, Chap 8, 15-17, “that the Son of Man is really; that is, in deed and in truth, exalted, according to His human nature, to the right hand of the almighty majesty and power of God, because He was assumed into God when He was conceived of the Holy Ghost in His mother’s womb, and His human nature was personally united with the Son of the Highest. This majesty, according to the personal union, He always had, and yet in the state of his humiliation He abstained from it; and on this account truly grew in all wisdom and favor with God and men; therefore He exercised this majesty not always, but when it pleased Him, until after His resurrection He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, and not the nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation and declaration of the divine majesty and thus entered into His glory (Phil. 2:6), so that not only as God, but also as man, He knows all things, can do all things, is present with all creatures, and has under His feet and in His hands everything that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth, as He himself testifies (Matt. 28:18; John 13:3): ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.’ And St. Paul says (Eph. 4:10): ‘He ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things.’ Everywhere present, He can exercise this His power, and to Him everything is possible and everything is known. Hence being present, He is also able, and to Him it is very easy, to impart His true body and blood in the Holy Supper, not according to the mode or property of human nature, but according to the mode and property of the right hand of God.”

The objections drawn from the presumed absence of our Lord from earth in His human nature, on which account the presence of His body and blood in the Sacrament was alleged to be impossible, led our fathers to further searching of the Scriptures in regard to the person of Christ, and the deeper insight thus obtained of that fundamental doctrine evinced how fully the article of our Confession on the Holy Supper accords with the analogy of faith. The ascension of our Lord and His session at the right hand of God confirms the Lutheran doctrine, and the objections of adversaries on that ground only show that they add error respecting the person of our Lord to their error respecting the Sacrament in their effort to make the one support the other.

But also in another respect did the cause of truth gain by the sectarian assaults on the evangelical doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, confessed in the article under consideration in full accord with the teaching of the ancient

Church. The arguments urged against it were often crude in the extreme, and are so now. The notions entertained about the presence of our Lord's body were so crass and were presented by sectarians with such grossly materialistic realism as to fill sensitive souls with horror at the thought of eating it. The necessity was therefore laid upon those who took the Lord at His word to let the light of heaven shine on the people who sat in this darkness. In much patience Lutherans explained, while they would not for a moment swerve from the truth of our Savior's words or the obligation which they lay upon us to confess that truth before men. We quote again from the Formula of Concord, Part II, Chap. 7:

“God has and knows of many modes of being in any place, and not only the single one concerning which fanatics talk flippantly and which philosophers call local. The one body of Christ, says Luther, has a threefold mode or three modes of being anywhere. First, the comprehensible, bodily mode, as He went about in the body upon earth when according to His size He made and occupied room. This mode He can still use whenever He will, as He did after the resurrection, and will use it at the last day, as St. Paul says, 1 Tim. 6:15: ‘Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords.’ And to the Colossians (3:4) he says, ‘When Christ, who is our life, shall appear.’ In this manner He is not in God or with the Father, neither in heaven, as the wild spirits dream; for God is not in a bodily space or place. And to this effect are the passages of Scripture which the fanatical spirits cite, how Christ left the world and went to the Father. Secondly, the incomprehensible, spiritual mode, according to which He neither occupies nor makes room, but penetrates all creatures according to His will, as, to make an imperfect comparison, my sight penetrates air, light, or water and does not occupy or make room, as a sound or tone penetrates air or water, or board and wall, and is in them, and also does not occupy or make room; likewise as light and heat penetrate air, water, glass, crystal, and the like, and are in them, and also do not make or occupy room, and much more of the like. This mode He used when He rose from the closed sepulchre and passed through the closed door, and in the bread and wine in the Holy Supper, and, it is believed, when He was born of His mother. Thirdly, the divine, heavenly mode, since He is one person with God, according to which of course all creatures must be far more penetrable and present to Him than they are according to the second mode. For if, according to that second mode, He can be so in and

with creatures that they do not feel, touch, circumscribe or comprehend Him, how much more wonderfully is He in all creatures according to this sublime third mode, so that they neither circumscribe nor comprehend Him, but rather that He has them present before Himself, and circumscribes and comprehends them. For you must place this mode of the presence of Christ, as He is one person with God, as far beyond creatures as God is beyond them, and again so deep and near to all creatures as God is In and near them. For He is one inseparable person with God; where God is, there must He be also, or our faith is false. But who will say or think how this occurs? We know indeed that it is so, that He is in God beyond all creatures, and is one person with God, but how it occurs we do not know: this mystery is above nature and reason, even above the reason of all the angels in heaven, it is understood only by God. Because, therefore, it is unknown to us, and yet is true, we should not deny His words before we know how to prove to a certainty that the body of Christ can by no means be where God is, and that this mode of presence is false. This the fanatics ought to prove; but we challenge them to do so. That God indeed has and knows still more modes in which Christ's body is anywhere, I will not herewith deny; but I would indicate what awkward and stupid men our fanatics are, that they concede to the body of Christ no more than the first, comprehensible way, although they cannot even prove that this conflicts with our doctrine."

It was thus made evident that the efforts of reason to overthrow the plain teaching of Scripture are vain, and that our Lord can easily accomplish what He promises, though our blind understanding fail to see how it is or can be done.

[3] But the Lutherans rested their faith on the plain words of Scripture, notwithstanding their extended exposition of related topics in defense of their faith. To such defense they were compelled to resort by adversaries who sought to set aside the sense of the Lord's words by alleging the impossibility of that which these words declared.

All the more was it disingenuous and blameworthy in these adversaries, when foiled in their efforts to overthrow the pure doctrine of the Gospel which the Church of the Reformation confesses by reference to these other topics, to charge upon us a resort to philosophical speculations on the person of Christ and the modes of His presence to establish the doctrine which we confess.

Unquestionably these discussions brought much gain to systematic theology, and this gain inured to the advantage of the Lutheran Church, so that what was designed to destroy the faith of the Augsburg Confession only served to confirm it. But it was not this confirmation that was the Lutherans' ground of assurance. They relied upon the Lord's Word and were sure that that would stand when heaven and earth pass away.

Of course attention was directed first of all to the institution of the Sacrament on the night of our Lord's betrayal and the words which He used on that solemn occasion. They would tell us what the Sacrament is and means. Our blessed Savior said, when He distributed the bread and wine, that this is His body and His blood, that this was given and shed for the remission of sins, and that His disciples should do this in remembrance of Him. About this there is no controversy among those who believe the Bible. But when the Lutherans, who recognized no authority but that of Holy Scripture, put forth their confession that what is distributed in the Holy Supper is the true body and blood of Christ, the trouble began. Some who had joined the Lutherans in their protests against Romish usurpations were offended. Not understanding or misunderstanding the liberty which the Gospel brings to all believers in Christ, they doubted whereunto this would grow. How could these things be? And consulting their natural reason, they concluded that this could not be. They do not see the body of the Lord in the Sacrament; they cannot comprehend how that body could be present at different places where the Sacrament is celebrated at the same time; they know that the body of our Lord has ascended into heaven; and supposing that heaven is a place like earthly places, and that its inhabitants are all like those of earth in their bodily constitution, they cannot understand how our Savior, who is now seated at the right hand of God in heaven, could by any possibility be present here on earth in the Holy Supper.

It is apparent how necessary it was that our theologians should shed light which the grace of God had given them upon these things, and how important it was that they should reach out beyond the Sacrament to the questions which caused difficulty in thinking minds, some of whom were no doubt sincere. But they believed the Word of God. That was the foundation of their faith, on that they depended for their assurance, and to that they never ceased to appeal as the judge in the controversies which arose. The first and fundamental and final question must be, What saith the Lord?

The adversaries did not deny that He said what is reported in the Gospels and repeated by St. Paul in his epistles. They did not deny the truthfulness of these records, as numerous errorists do now. But hearkening to the voice of their human thought and feeling and will, which in our fallen humanity is far from being the voice of God, they doubtingly inquired how these things could be, and as is always the case when the soul heeds the voice of the flesh against the Spirit, they concluded that these things could not be. Then came the efforts to prove that the Lutheran doctrine was false. Reason rejected what the words of our Lord say, and what the Lutheran Church in faith accepts and confesses, and reason must seek to justify the rejection. That is what was attempted and is still attempted.

To Christian believers, who give earnest attention to the controversy, it is of no little importance to note that it is a conflict between reason and faith. Our adversaries can not claim that they are bound in conscience to reject the doctrine of our iConfession, because it is in conflict with the Word of God, and to confess and teach a different doctrine, because they are constrained to do this by fidelity to the plain words of the Lord. Their conduct shows that they are not actuated by such a moral necessity. They have devised different modes of evading the force of the teaching of Scripture and justifying a doctrine of the Sacrament which avoids the offense that blind reason takes at that teaching, and they have always been willing to let our doctrine stand, if we were only willing to accord equal rights to their devices. This the Lutheran Church could never do, because she could not without violating her conscience depart from her Lord's words. This has even been made by sectarians a ground for accusing the Lutheran Church of illiberality and intolerance, and for a comparison, ostensibly much to her disadvantage in this respect, with churches of the Zwinglian and Calvinistic type. These churches are always ready to treat our doctrine of the Lord's Supper as one of the many opinions prevalent about it, and only ask that we should be as liberal as they and admit all the various opinions which have been broached as equally authorized with our faith in the clear words of the institution and our confession of their plain import. What is thus used as an argument against the Church of the pure Gospel can not fail to convince sincere Christians who will think that hers is the true evangelical position and course; for it makes manifest that the controversy lies between faith in the Lord's words and the opinions of human reason which refuses to be bound by these words.

The Lutheran Church believes, and therefore speaks, as the Scriptures teach. She cannot do otherwise as long as her faith does not fail. She has no authority and, believing, confesses that she has no wish to yield one jot or tittle of that which the Lord has given her for her comfort and committed to her trust for the comfort of others who are willing to hear her testimony. The opposition churches can well afford to be more liberal, as men judge liberality, because their opinions, of which more than a score have been counted on this subject of the Lord's Supper, are products of human reason in its antipathy to the teaching of the Gospel. The reason of one has the same authority as the reason of another. But no man's reason has any authority or any rights against the Word of God, to which all men are subject alike, and therefore the effort is vain to frighten Lutherans from their faith by reproaching them with stubbornness in adhering to the words of our Lord as the very truth of God, while others, declining to accept that truth because carnal reason pronounces it untenable, are more pliable and conciliatory and willing that all opinions should have equal rights.

The Lutheran Church abides by the Word of the Lord, and keeps on confessing her faith, whatever men may do or she may be made to suffer on account of her fidelity to the truth revealed from heaven.

The main point of controversy has always been about that which our Savior gives us in the Holy Supper. That bread and wine were administered, at least all Protestant parties are assured. Only the Romanists, guided by their peculiar speculation of reason, which is called transubstantiation, refuse to believe that bread and wine are the elements administered. But while all Protestants agree in regard to the actual distribution of bread and wine, the devout reader of the account of the institution given in the Scriptures cannot suppress the inquiry, Is that all? Certainly that cannot be all, seeing that Christ does not mention that in the distribution, but does mention something else. There was no need to mention that, because that is manifest to sense. The disciples could see and taste earthly these elements, and we can discern them by our senses when the Sacrament is administered now. Our Lord took the bread and the wine and gave them to His disciples to eat and drink. About this there is no mystery and no dispute, always excepting the Romish speculation which all Protestant parties discard. But when He administered the visible elements and commanded His disciples to eat and drink, He told them what it was that He gave them, and when He ordered them to do this, and thus to observe this feast until He come in glory,

He informed them that what He then gave should be given in all future time for the remission of sins and in remembrance of Him. What this was and is He did not leave them to surmise. He tells them in express words: "Take eat, this is my body; Drink ye all of it, this is my blood of the New Testament." This leaves no room for doubt as to what it was that He gave them. Nor does any intelligent reader doubt as to what He said that He gave them, and says that He gives them now when the Sacrament is administered according to His institution. He says as plainly as it can be said that what He gives is His body and blood. If there were any possibility of mistaking the meaning of His words, it would be excluded by the explicit statement, that it is the body which is given into death and the blood which was shed for the remission of our sins.

There is no reason why among Christians there should ever have been any misunderstandings and any consequent controversies about words so plain. It is not conceivable that there ever could have been, if faith had always reigned in the hearts of those who professed to accept the Gospel of Christ. But in these hearts there is a natural power called the flesh, which is not easily overcome and which, when vigilance is relaxed, exerts itself even in Christian souls. And hence come questionings that are not of faith. Our Lord does indeed say, "This is my body." That is not questioned. But how can that be, and seeing the difficulty which it involves for our reason, does He really mean it? What the words say is confessedly plain enough. But reason stumbles at it, and hence man's ingenuity is applied to set aside the proper meaning of the words and to substitute a sense that is more palatable. Thus the Sacrament became a subject of controversy in the days of the Reformation and has remained such until this day.

Readers will observe that the doctrine put forth in our Confession is openly condemned and bitterly opposed because it is alleged to be against all reason, which is regarded to be the highest authority and to which even the Word of God must submit. But not all who oppose our faith are avowed Rationalists, who reject all revealed truth and who therefore can not be here taken into account. There are many who have no desire to reject the Bible and yet are moved, often unconsciously, by rationalistic principles which place them practically in the rationalistic ranks. These, who are not confessed enemies of revealed truth, still permit the words of the Sacrament to stand as authoritative, but endeavor to divest them of their manifest meaning. It is a vain endeavor, but it is persisted in with a wonderful persever-

ance, to the great injury of the cause of divine revelation. The efforts of these erring Christians are directed to showing that the words of our Lord, "This is my body," are capable of a different meaning from that which they literally express, and that, if this possibility can be made to appear, the result must inure to the benefit of human scruples at the plain meaning of our lord's words. And so the work of interpretation begins with the assumption that the Savior does not mean what He says, because what He says is not possible. This rendered it necessary for our fathers to enter upon those questions to which we have referred concerning the person of Christ and the modes of His presence, and to show how the sacramental words are in perfect harmony with the whole revelation of the Gospel concerning our blessed Savior's person and power. But when our adversaries had done their utmost to show the impossibility of the Lord's communication of His body and blood in the Sacrament, even supposing that their errors had not been exposed and confuted by the truth revealed in Scripture, they were confronted by the very words of our Lord in the Sacrament, "This is my body; this is my blood." So, notwithstanding all their labors to set aside the truth of these words by appeals to other supposed truths, they were compelled to take these explicit declarations of our Lord into account and give some attention to the words which Lutherans believed, and on the ground of which they made their confession. The problem which confronted them was to make it appear that they still believed the Lord's words, although they declined to accept what these words so plainly declare.

As the Scriptures so often report symbols and parables and use various forms of figurative language in the presentation of heavenly truth, it was presumed that this recognized fact would help them out of the difficulty. That the whole scene on the night in which our Lord was betrayed was a parable or allegory, though some have resorted to this as an expedient to escape the truth, was too much for men who still claimed to be believers, and the main resort was to figurative interpretations of the words used by our Lord in the Supper which was manifestly designed to be perpetuated in the Church for all time and to show forth in all ages the Lord's death till He come. But neither the words which our Savior used nor the circumstances under which they were spoken gave any comfort to those who hoped that their whole import could be obviated by the effort to explain them as a figure of speech. They tried it, but without success. They tried it by alleging that the subject is figurative, and that the copula is figurative. and that the

predicate is figurative. None of the ingenious manipulations of the words were convincing even to our opponents, who explained and interpreted and reasoned, and yet the words stared them in the face, "This is my body." This, which I give to you, is some thing else than what you see. What is it then?

Evidently it would not do to say that it is anything else than what the Lord says it is. It is His body. "This is" could not mean anything else than what the predicate expresses. It is His body. This is my body could not mean that His body is a figure of the bread which He distributed and which was plain to their view. No rhetorical figure known among men in any language could render a figurative interpretation of our Lord's words plausible. Therefore after all the strenuous efforts of opponents of the Augsburg Confession to overthrow our doctrine, the Lutheran Church still calmly and confidently pointed to the words, as Luther did at Marburg, "This is my body."

And this is in perfect accord with what is said of the Holy Supper in other places of Scripture. Not only do the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, in their account of the institution of the Sacrament, give the same words of our Lord in the distribution of the elements, but St. Paul, who declares, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," again repeats the very same words. Four times we are distinctly told that our Lord declared that which He administered to be His body and His blood — not a symbol or figure or representation that had no life in it and that could give no life, but that very body that was given for us and that very blood that was shed for the remission of our sins. In not one of these accounts of the institution is there a word that gives the slightest suggestion of a figure in the solemn transaction. On the contrary, all the circumstances are such as to forbid any such thought. It is presented as the Sacrament of the New Testament, in which all the types and shadows of the Old have their fulfillment and are done away in the reality that has come in Christ. It was instituted on the night in which He was betrayed, the night of agony preceding the stupendous sacrifice upon the cross, when there was no occasion for fictive representations and no propriety in presuming that there was a play of fancy and indulgence in figures of speech. It was a time of profoundest sorrow, when our Lord imparted His last gift before His work was finished upon the cross — a gift that should sustain them in the coming bereavement and gloom — and could anyone think that what He gave them in His dying

testament was a mere symbol of that which nourishes the soul unto eternal life?

Imagination could not easily devise an argument more futile and more sadly misplaced than that which infers from the command to celebrate this Sacrament and appropriate its gift in memory of Him, that the gift must be an imitation of that which is said to be imparted. No one really supposes that an honest man, in parting from the one he loves, will call the gift which he bestows as a remembrance a diamond, when he knows that it is an imitation in paste, and every thoughtful man knows that the effect of such a statement would be the very reverse of that which was intended. If a man is too poor to give a precious jewel, he will, as an honest man, preserve his honor and not misrepresent the value of his gift. Our Lord was neither poor nor dishonest, and what He imparted as a gift to be received in memory of Him was the precious treasure which He declared it to be. It was not a semblance, but the reality. It was His true body and His true blood, and so it is in all time until He come, when His words are complied with in His Church, "Do this in remembrance of me."

So His words are always seriously taken when spoken of in Holy Scripture. "I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" 1 Cor. 10:15, 16. No believer is presumed to have any other answer to the question but that of course it is. How could it be otherwise when our Lord expressly says, "This is my body, this is my blood?" Therefore the apostle instructs and rebukes the Corinthians by impressing upon them the truth, that "whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." It is not a symbol or figure that is profaned by an unworthy use, but the very body and blood of the Lord is sinned against. Hence St. Paul goes on to say: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." 1 Cor. 11:27-29.

Eating and drinking unworthily in the Lord's Supper is the horrible sin that brings condemnation upon the guilty communicant, not because sacred emblems are irreverently used as such, but because the Lord's body is received without discerning the precious gift which the Lord's words designate and which offers the blessings which it is designed that faith should ap-

propriate, and the holy Sacrament is thus profaned as a mere ceremonial feast of bread and wine.

In view of all that the Bible so plainly teaches and so repeatedly impresses about the Holy Supper, it is a matter of astonishment to the simple Christian believer that so many resisted and continue to resist the Gospel truth which our Confession states as the evangelical faith of the Reformation.

III. Those Who Teach Otherwise

All the less can it surprise or offend the true Christian believer that in this Confession “the opposite doctrine is rejected,” and that the Lutheran confessors “disapprove of those who teach otherwise.”

Who are meant by those who teach otherwise, and whose opposite doctrine is rejected, the history of the Reformation makes perfectly plain. The Romanists with their rationalizing philosophy declared the doctrine of transubstantiation to be an article of faith. They mean by this that the bread and wine, when they are consecrated for sacramental use, are changed into the body and blood of Christ and are no longer bread and wine. Our Church rejected that theory, not only because it is a philosophical speculation which could have no authority in a question of faith, even if it were approved by reason, and not only because it was made the foundation of other errors and abuses, but because it is at variance with the Word of God, which alone decides what is to be received as heavenly truth and what can be an article of Christian faith.

The notion that the bread and wine in the Sacrament is after the consecration a mere illusion, and that what the senses accept as a clear perception is only a deception, is absurd on every ground from which reason can contemplate it: on natural grounds, because the mind can recognize no substance otherwise than by its qualities, the sight and smell and taste determining what the object is; on spiritual grounds, because the believer cannot admit that God could under any circumstances misrepresent a creature for the purpose of deceiving us and causing a clash between our senses and the declaration of His Word. The speculation is a device of man for the furtherance of superstition and hierarchical power, inasmuch as popery has built on it the abominable abuses of the mass as a sacrifice for sin, of the worship

of the elements in the Holy Sup per, and of the system of selling for money the deliverance from the wages of sin, the power for which is alleged to be imparted to the papacy to be administered by its agents throughout all Christendom.

The case is one of the many which manifest the danger of departing from God's Word in any particular. Abominable as were the practices resulting from the departure of the Romish Church from the truth of the Gospel and earnest as was the denunciation of these abominations by the Lutherans, their chief objection was and is that they disregard the Word of God and render this of none effect among their people. For this Word certifies us that what our Lord communicated to His disciples was bread and wine, which their senses discerned, and which was not changed when He said that what He communicated was His body and blood. The one was the medium for the communication of the other, and the one was as true and real as the other. This is what the apostle declares when he says: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" 1 Cor. 10:16. The bread and wine remain bread and wine, but with them as the vehicle chosen of God for the purpose is conveyed the body and blood of our Lord. Hence it is said:

"As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." 1 Cor. 11:26.

The Scriptures speak both of the bread and wine, and the body and blood as realities of the Holy Supper, the one being instituted as the medium for the conveyance of the other, and when the presence of either is denied in the Holy Supper, the Word of God is denied. For the supremacy of this Word the Lutheran Church contends and therefore cannot otherwise than reject the Romish speculation which denies the reality of the earthly elements.

But there is truth in the allegation which has often been brought forward as a reproach to our Lutheran Confession, that the condemnation is directed mainly against the Reformed churches and their opinions. There are two deviations from the Gospel in regard to the Sacrament. One denies the presence of the earthly, the other the presence of the heavenly element in the Holy Supper. Both are equally reprehensible as denials of the truth set forth in the Gospel. But although Romanism has employed its denial as a basis of

great and grievous abuses, Reformism in its denial of the principal element in the Sacrament is guilty of the graver offense so far as the Sacrament itself is concerned. The whole import of the sacred institution is obscured, if not totally denied, when the Lord's words, assuring us that what He communicates is His body and blood, are rejected. With such rejection the whole foundation of the communicant's comfort, so far as this Sacrament is concerned, is renounced, and nothing remains but a ceremonial observance which has no grace for the soul seeking its consolation. Christians are not left by the Gospel in the sorrowful situation, in which they are compelled to choose between two evils. They have the words of truth to guide them and must choose neither.

But we must not wonder that our Lutheran Confessors, whilst they maintained the truth of the Gospel and condemned the departure from it in both directions, laid special stress on the Reformed error in its condemnation. It was that that gave them the most trouble in regard to the Sacrament. The Romanists held fast to the principal element, which is the body and blood of the Lord, and in that regard did not condemn the Lutherans, and these recognized this agreement in the literal acceptance of the Lord's words, notwithstanding the differences in regard to the grounds for such acceptance, the way in which the real presence is effected, and the abuses which grew out of the Romish reasoning on the subject. The Lutherans did not underestimate the importance of these differences and did not fail to set forth the truth of the Gospel concerning them and to wage a vigorous war fare against the errors of Rome. And yet it is true that the negative part of our Confession bears principally upon the Sacramentarians, as all the persons and parties were called who denied the doctrine which our Confession sets forth, "that the body and blood of the Lord are truly present and are communicated to those that eat in the Lord's Supper." The opposition to this faith came from the parties who followed Zwingli and Calvin, who are known in church history as Reformed churches in distinction from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and among whom are to be classed all the Protestant sects who refuse to accept our Augsburg Confession and are not Lutheran.

With these parties the Lutherans had earnest controversies in the days of the Reformation, and Luther and the Lutherans of his day had conflicts with them that were even more harassing than those with Rome, because they were with people who professed to be friends and in reality to be members

of the same household. They joined the Reformers in their Protest against the usurpations and tyrannies of Rome and were thus ranked with the Protestants. But they permitted their reason to over ride the Word of God, which alone gained the victories of the Reformation, and while they professed to accept the Protestant principle in the abstract, they would not submit to its supremacy when its teaching clashed with their reason. All that the Lutherans could do and suffer in this respect, prior to the Diet at Augsburg in 1530, could not induce Zwingli and the sacramentarian party to subscribe our Lutheran Confession, plainly as it is founded on the Word of God, or prevent the presentation of a confession in dissent from the great Protestant Augsburg Confession and in opposition to it. Luther, the great hero whom God chose and endowed for the stupendous work of the Reformation, is often censured for his firmness in maintaining the very words of Scripture against the assaults of errorists, when reason suggests and sentiment insists that concessions should be made in the interest of peace. It all looks plausible enough to the average man that he was at fault. Why could he not yield a little, especially when the persuasive power of tears was brought to bear upon him, in order that the sacramentarian controversies might cease? He was a man of faith and therefore could not. Had he been a man who followed his own reason and was swayed by his own feelings, he could have done it easily. But then there would have been no Reformation and no great Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession. Luther had all the human reason and human sentiment that his adversaries could claim, but he had faith in the Word of God, and the grace which made him the great Reformer made him also the humble child of God who knew no rule and guide, no authority and no certainty in the Church, but the Word of its Savior and Lord. That must stand, whatever else may fall.

And that is the situation still. The Reformed parties still oppose the pure doctrine of the Lord's Supper as the plain words of our Lord teach it, our fathers maintained it, and our Augsburg Confession declares it as the faith of the Lutheran Church. The same objections are raised against it which the Reformers answered again and again; the same appeals are made to common sense and love of peace to break down the barrier of God's Word; and the same answer is given to all arguments and appeals: The Lord alone can decide, and He says, "This is my body."

Article XI. Of Confession.

Concerning confession they teach that private absolution ought to be retained in the churches, though an enumeration of all transgressions be not necessary in confession. For this is impossible, according to the psalm: “Who can understand his errors?” Ps. 19:12.

[Reference]{ smallcaps} is had in this article of our Confession to the Church’s provision made in the early days of its history, and still in use at the time of the Reformation, for the proper pastoral care of souls in their preparation to receive the Holy Supper. The Romish system, which was a gross corruption of the Gospel and which tainted everything that it touched, had reduced the wise and salutary arrangement of Christians in the olden times to the papal institution of auricular confession, with all the oppression that became associated with it. The children of the Reformation renounced the evils of the confessional, and there was some danger that, in fleeing from the priestly tyranny which was practiced in it, some would reject the good which the arrangement was designed to promote. At any rate the Romanists made charges to this effect against the Lutherans, as if these, in declaring themselves independent of the pope, because subject only to Christ and His Word, meant to cast aside all discipline and permit the field of the Church to be overgrown with weeds. Therefore they say in another article:

“Confession is not abolished in the churches among us. For it is not usual to communicate the body of our Lord except to those who have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are taught most carefully concerning faith in absolution, about which before these times there has been a deep silence. Men are taught that they should highly regard absolution, inasmuch as it is God’s voice and pronounced by God’s command.”

This shows what was especially had in mind when the present article was written. Absolution must not be allowed to fall into disuse, and the purpose of the Church’s arrangement of confession and absolution preparatory to communion can be fully attained only in private absolution, when rightly

administered. These are the two points which must especially engage our attention in a further exposition of the article. The one belongs to the integrity of our faith, the other to the proper care of souls in the Church that confesses the faith.

I. Absolution must be retained in the churches.

What is especially had in view is primarily not the institution of the confessional, as an ecclesiastical arrangement for the wise and faithful application of the Gospel, but the preservation and right use of that Gospel itself which it was designed to serve. The main point is the absolution as the certification to individuals that their sins are forgiven, that they might find rest unto their souls. The retention of this in the churches is necessary and must not be classed with things indifferent, which may be retained or abandoned according to the judgment of individuals or congregations. The reason for this is that the Scriptures teach it and the people need it.

1. Those To Whom Absolution Is Distasteful

Those to whom the doctrine and practice of absolution are distasteful are prone to avoid or to evade, rather than to deny the words of the Gospel setting forth the subject. It is plainly written:

“Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” John 20:21-23.

It is the same word and promise and power that is mentioned in Matt. 18:15-18, where it is said: “Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” The power of the keys to the kingdom of heaven is committed to the Church, and its exercise in the name of the King and according to His will is recognized as valid in time and eternity. It is this ministerial absolution that is a stumbling block for so many. They cannot deny

that the words are written in Holy Scripture, any more than they can deny that the words of our Lord declaring what He gives us in the Holy Supper are written there. It is absolution by the Church through its ministers that is spoken of, and that which many find particularly objectionable is made prominent in the Scripture teaching. Of course remission of sin is taught, but it is remission of sin through the ministration of the Church. In the second passage it is the Church, in the first it is the minister; in both it is the power which has been conferred on men to be administered according to His instruction. And that divine provision for the communication of God's unspeakable gift of grace to the sinner through the agency of another sinner is what is so offensive to the adversaries of the Lutheran Church. It is absurd, they argue, to teach that man can forgive sins. No doubt, too, the dreadful abuse practiced by Romish priests, none of whom understood the import of the doctrine, and some of whom were guilty of the most intolerable tyranny in the supposed execution of the commission, confirmed them in their opposition. What these adversaries evidently need is more light on a subject that is of such profound concern to all Christendom and all people.

These opponents do not maintain that the doctrine of ministerial absolution is not taught in the Scriptures. The words are too plain and explicit to lend any plausibility to such an endeavor to escape from the clear meaning of the passages quoted and of others confirming the same truth in similar plain words. They are compelled either to accept the truth or, resisting it, to find some way of evading it. Sad to say, the favorite way has been the adoption of the Romish theory, that the commission and power given the apostles were confined to these commissioners. But from this point Rome parts company with the Protestant opponents of our Confession. These consider the power of the Church as departed, the Romanists insist that such power could not depart from earth without subversion of the entire plan of God to save the world. And on that basis they have manifestly the better of the argument. For if the remission of sins was committed to the apostles as their prerogative, and that commission lapsed with the departure of its hearers from the earth, there was no longer any forgiveness of sins by any established provision for its communication in the Church, and was all left at random. The Romanists were not disposed to accept any such anarchy, but claimed and endeavored to prove that the commission and power belonged to the apostles and that, when they died, their successors in the apostolic office, who were assumed to be the bishops, inherited the prerogative. They

thus retained the power among men to forgive sins. The Protestants who accepted the Romish error that such power was not committed to the Church as a congregation of believers, but only to the apostles, but rejected the Romish claim that this prerogative was inherited by the successors of the apostles in the office of the ministry, thus were left far in the rear of Rome, whom they followed into the mire, but refused to follow into the path by which it sought to extricate itself by an expansion of its former error. Their rejection of the Lord's provision for the proclamation of forgiveness left them without any agency of an assured communication of the absolution which is the condition of peace to the human soul.

What is the real difficulty which the adversaries of the Lutheran Church have with the doctrine of absolution? The root of the error and of their self-deprivation of the consolations of the Gospel is the rejection of the Bible teaching concerning the means of grace. They hold substantially the same error in regard to the efficacy of the Word as in regard to that of the Sacraments. The latter they think of as symbols of something which is indeed precious, but which they do not impart; the former they think of after the manner of the Romanists, as teaching us what we must do to please God, and thus reducing the Gospel to merely a new law instead of a divine gift clothed with divine power for our salvation through faith in the Redeemer. Were this not the case they would not stumble as they do at the doctrine of ministerial absolution so clearly expressed in the commission given by our Lord to His disciples, and would not so vehemently condemn the Lutheran faith in the proclamation of forgiveness of sins to men by pastors in Jesus' name. For what is this absolution else but the preaching of the remission of sins as the great work of the ministry instituted by the Savior of the world?

The words of our Lord as recorded by St. John are but another form of the glorious commission with its accompanying promise given to the disciples: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16:15-16. Let the reader but seriously consider what that means. Sin has come into the world, and the wages of sin is death. Death passed upon all men for that all men have sinned. God is merciful and desires not the death of a sinner. In His infinite love He sent His own dear Son to satisfy the demands of righteousness by living and suffering and dying in the sinners' stead. He came and was made a curse for us, that we through faith in Him might escape the damnation of hell. He graciously finished the

work and the passion assigned Him. He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. And now after His glorious resurrection He commissions His disciples to preach the good tidings to all the world, for all the world is concerned in them, and gives the comforting assurance that all who believe shall be saved from the condemnation that is upon all men because the whole world lieth in iniquity. And now, what does this preaching mean? When men so pervert the Lord's instructions as to assume that every preacher can go where he pleases and proclaim what he pleases, of course it can mean nothing, and in any case no good for the souls of dying men who must appear at the judgment bar of the Holy One. But the Gospel, not its perversion by unholy men, is here under consideration. What does it mean when this is preached according to the commission which alone gives authority to preach? Why, unquestionably, that the good tidings of salvation through the redemption effected by the Lamb of God should be proclaimed to a lost world. And if the thought arises that all this would be in vain, because men are dead in trespasses and sins and can feel no interest in such a proclamation, the Lord has provided for the difficulty by assuring us that the Gospel itself carries with it the grace necessary for its acceptance, so that no preacher needs to be ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the "power of God unto salvation." Rom. 1:16. It brings the good tidings of Christ's righteousness acquired for us. and the gift of the Holy Spirit by which sinful souls are enabled to believe it and rejoice in the great salvation. Only let the Gospel be preached in all its gracious fulness and therefore in all its heavenly potency, and souls will be saved, notwithstanding the seeming impossibility of its success by reason of the desperate wickedness of human hearts. God can save us, although it is plainly impossible that we should save ourselves.

But if our doctrine of absolution is denied and condemned as superstition by our adversaries, it must be apparent to reflecting Christians that the very kernel of the Gospel is denied and rejected. For what can such rejection and condemnation mean but this, that the proclamation and impartation of the remission of sins by men, who are themselves sinners, is an absurdity, and that the claim of authority and power to compass such a divine purpose is a piece of pride and arrogance that is worthy of Romish usurpations? For the sake of the precious Gospel we must patiently bear such railing accusations and still strive to lead even such adversaries to a knowledge of the Gospel truth. Do they mean that, when the Gospel is preached ac-

according to the commission given to the Church, only certain legal directions are given to guide us in our life? That is of little worth to a soul that has a knowledge of its sin and is troubled on that account and trembles at the thought of the coming judgment of God in righteousness. The law has enough instruction about duties to be performed and sins to be avoided and enough of condemnation of our failures to keep it. We need no special gospel revelations to intensify the demands of the law, when once we experience the terrors of its condemnation. What the terrified soul needs is the message which our Lord has commissioned His disciples to convey to all people. That is the good tidings of the remission of sin through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made a curse for us that we might in Him have the righteousness of God. If the adversaries of our Confession reject this precious message, what have they left of the good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people? If they accept it, on what possible ground, having sincerely accepted it, can they still fight against the Gospel doctrine of absolution which the Lutheran Church confesses?

But, it is replied, our Lutheran Church teaches that our pastors forgive sins, whilst it is plain from Holy Scripture that God only can do this. It is certainly all true; we admit it all. But come, let us reason together. When our pastors baptize, they of course do it in the name of the Lord who has given the ministerial commission. They baptize for the remission of sins, as the Scriptures teach. Does the Lord's work lose its efficacy, -or any part of it, because He was pleased to perform it through an agent whom He appointed for the purpose? The agent has in himself no power to forgive sins. On the contrary, he is a sinner himself who needs forgiveness. He is therefore unworthy to be an ambassador of God to proclaim the will of his Lord, who alone can release from sin and its wages of death. But when the Lord of all commissions a servant to carry a precious gift to sinful men, shall that gift be pronounced worthless, because the servant is not rich enough to bring a present of such value as it purports to be? Let men learn to think reasonably. Surely the Baptism administered by a steward of the Lord is His Baptism, and whatever power He puts into it is exercised, and-whatever effects He designs to produce by it are accomplished. The fact that a man baptizes detracts nothing from the divine power of the Sacrament, which bears an absolution from sin. It is the Lord's Baptism for the remission of sin. When the minister of the Church dispenses the Lord's Supper in the Lord's name by the Lord's appointment, 'can that supper be any the less ef-

efficacious to execute the Lord's will because a servant's agency is employed to perform the ministration? Those who trust the Lord's Word are sure that the Lord's body given and the Lord's blood shed are for the remission of sins, and believers therefore rejoice in the absolution received when they eat and drink in the Holy Supper and gratefully show forth the Lord's death until He come. All who use the Sacraments at all recognize the validity of the work done in the Lord's name, and if they do not recognize the absolution imparted, it is because they do not accept the Lord's words in regard to the efficacy of the Sacraments. not because they deny the validity of the work performed by the minister. They deduct nothing from the power of the Sacraments on account of their administration by men, excepting the case of those fanatics who make that efficacy dependent on the piety of the minister and thus render all divine efficacy doubtful.

It is therefore a manifest inconsistency in the sects who reject our doctrine of ministerial absolution, that they in one case deny the principle of divine work through the divinely instituted ministry, but accept it in the other. They admit the validity of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as performed by the ministry, but deny it in the application of the Gospel to individuals in the absolution of penitent sinners. This indicates that the root of their error lies elsewhere than in the simple question of delegating divine authority to sinful men. All Christians agree, at least substantially and ostensibly, that God alone can forgive sins. Premising that according to the Scriptures no one can be a Christian who does not accept Christ as the Savior from sin and death, all virtually agree that the forgiveness of sin secured by His obedience even unto the death of the cross, is dispensed to sinners here on earth, beyond which, as the place and time of probation, it would be too late. Unhappily not all agree that God in His infinite wisdom and mercy has provided for this in the appointment of the means of grace and the institution of the Church for their regular administration. That is essential to the divine plan of salvation as revealed in the Scriptures and is as distinctly and clearly set forth in the Gospel as any other portion of God's gracious and wonderful provision for the salvation of men. And that is the point at which sects stumble, but which the Lutheran Church maintains according to the Scripture as a precious heritage of the Reformation.

Apparently what those wanted who refused to accept the Augsburg Confession, and those want who refuse to accept it now, is that there should be no declaration by divine authority of the forgiveness of any man's sins,

whether by the Word or by the Sacraments, but that each individual should receive such forgiveness, if received at all, directly from God without any intervention of the Church and its ministry, or of the means of grace especially instituted by our Lord for the impartation of such forgiveness and committed to the Church for administration. At the foundation of the opposition to the doctrine of absolution lies not the rejection of the validity of ministerial work in the proclamation of the remission of sins in ministerial absolution, but the fundamental error of the Reformed sects concerning the means of grace employed to effect the Lord's purpose.

The statement of the truth is in the nature of things offensive to those who deny it; but the more dangerous to souls the denial is, the more impressive is the duty of those who know it to maintain the truth, though they perceive that its earnest maintenance will subject them to the charge of bigotry and all uncharitableness. What need Lutherans care for that, if they are intent on saving souls according to the Master's will and appointment? They work and walk under a cloud for a little while on that account, but the result of their fidelity to the Lord's Word is glorious. Our Lord has purchased the forgiveness of sins for all people, and we are glad to communicate the precious truth to all people. When some sects decline to confess the truth of the Gospel with our old Church of the Reformation, we must, as regards the subject of absolution before us, in all sincerity and not without deep solicitude ask what they mean. Is there then no divine provision for the forgiveness of sins upon earth, where sin reigns and troubles the people? Baptism is supposed to be a mere representation of such forgiveness, the Lord's Supper is alleged to be a mere symbol of the grace which we need for our consolation in the sorrows of sin, and the word of the Gospel, which is our comfort and joy, is said to be a mere missive of instruction to tell us what we must do to escape the damnation of hell, being thus only a legal supplement to the Mosaic law, intensifying the commands for whose violation we are condemned, and demanding a righteousness of works which we are conscious of being unable to render, though it be presented as a faint hope of pardon after certain conditions are fulfilled. It is a sorrowful perversion, which leads some souls to a false conceit of having fulfilled it and leaves others in despair of ever being able to fulfill it.

What then is the blessed Gospel which the disciples of Christ are commissioned to preach to all the world? No Christian doubts that it was designed, as the word indicates, to bring good tidings to all people. This is so

frequently expressed in the Scriptures that one must be blind not to see it. But men often see and do not perceive. For when, in the contemplation of the Gospel, it is regarded as a new law, whose glory lies in the excellence of its moral precepts as illustrated in the life of Jesus, the alleged good tidings fail to furnish the great joy which the Scriptures predicate of its power. When a soul becomes conscious of its sin, it can find no joy in the holiness of the law, or in the alleged purpose of the Gospel to enforce that law by rendering it more effective through the explanation of its spiritual sense and the presentation of an example in the life of Jesus, showing how its requirements are fulfilled. There is no comfort and no joy in that; for while the self-righteous soul in its impenitence can see no need for a Gospel of grace at all, the penitent sinner who seeks consolation for his troubled soul can see in a Gospel so presented only a mockery of his misery, because it only increases his hopelessness of fulfilling its requirements and escaping its condemnation. Many who unhappily will not join us in our Augsburg Confession of the pure Gospel still feel that what we confess is what they lack, and are therefore driven to supply the want by alleging immediate inspirations of the Holy Spirit, for which the Bible gives no assurance and contains no promise. But many, on the other hand, unhappily see no need for such a Gospel of grace as we preach, flattering themselves that they are capable of rendering full satisfaction to all divine demands that are just, even to the extent of sinless perfection in holiness.

It is a deplorable situation that is thus presented. The objections to our doctrine of absolution are so plainly objections to the Gospel and its power, that we must wonder how any who are truly Lutherans could be shaken or in any way disturbed by them. If it is unreasonable that God should make His own arrangements for communicating His grace to men by means which His own wisdom appoints, and through which He pleases to exert His divine power unto man's salvation, how can it be reasonable to assume that He will do it when and where He pleases without these means, though the Word which He has given us for our learning and guidance points us only to these means? Of course if the Bible be rejected, our argument can have no force. But we are speaking now of those who profess to agree with us in the acceptance of the Scriptures as the Word of God. If they mean in sincerity to accept the Scriptures as the Word of God, how can they reject the exercise of saving power through His Word and Sacrament, which these Scriptures attest, and yet maintain that as the gracious gift which they are

ordained to impart is plainly necessary for the accomplishment of God's purpose, they are conveyed in some other way than that taught us in the Bible? If it is unreasonable that God should remit sins by the means of His own institution through man's administration, and this assumed unreasonableness is to be regarded as a ground for rejecting ministerial absolution in the Church, what reasonableness could there be in teaching that somehow, in a way of which we know nothing, He will do His gracious work of saving souls from sin and its wages? Manifestly the stubborn ignorance of man is set in opposition to the gracious revelation of God in His Word, that "the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation." Rom. 1:16.

The Lutheran Church was fully aware, when the Augsburg Confession was presented, and is fully aware now, when so many religionists pronounce it antiquated, that the claim that the Gospel announcement of the forgiveness of sins is effectual for the accomplishment of that whereunto it is sent, would be regarded as foolishness. Reason cannot do otherwise. But our Confession was never meant to be an essay towards satisfying reason. It was and is designed to be a declaration of the Christian faith, which knows no rule for its guidance but the Word of God. And Lutheran Christians know no other authority in matters of faith and of the way to eternal life. We do not say or mean to imply that all who reject our doctrine of ministerial absolution by the Gospel are opponents who, with a full knowledge of what they are doing, reject the Gospel with all its good tidings and its heavenly power of realizing them in the hearts of men. But it is needful to warn them of their error, whether they be conscious of its import or not, as an error that implies and in its consistent application must lead to the rejection of the Gospel with its gracious offer of salvation to all men through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. For if the good tidings of remission of sins announced by the Gospel are not effectual for such remission through the faith which accepts them and realizes the great joy which they bring, the Scriptures have no other means of ministering comfort to sinners.

The question is thus one that pertains to the very heart of the Gospel and its power to save. Its fundamental importance is apparent to all who will give attention to its import. For it does not pertain to the human power of the minister, but to the divine power of the Gospel in its divine proclamation of good tidings, that to us a Savior is born who shall save His people from their sins. Is that Gospel true? That lies at the root of the whole subject of absolution. If it is true in itself, it is of course true when the minister of

Christ declares it. The Lord of the Church has called and ordained him for this very purpose of proclaiming the remission of sins through His atoning blood. Before He was parted from His disciples and carried up into heaven He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures; and said unto them, Thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations." Luke 24:45-47. This Gospel, which is preached to all the world, is a precious gift of which Christians are not to be ashamed; "for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek: for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Rom. 16:16, 17. Hence according to the gracious economy of our Lord it could not be otherwise than that, when He sends out ministers to effect His will in imparting to men the benefits of His atonement, the assurance should be given them: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." John 20:23. If these words are not true, and fully true just as they stand, what need is there for a ministry, and what becomes of the Gospel of the remission of sins? The Lord said to His disciples. "Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." John 15:3. When He sends them forth to preach this same Word in His name to all who are willing to hear it, must it have lost its cleansing power? Our Savior gives the impressive answer in His solemn prayer:

"Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth. As Thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their Word." John 17:17-20.

Their Word is God's Word, and is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe it. In Christian minds there could be no difficulty about the doctrine of absolution, as this is administered in the Lutheran Church according to our Lord's institution, were it not that people are so often ready to give audience to the suggestion of Satan that the Word which we declare is merely a human word which carries human power, not the Word of God whose power is indisputably divine. It is of the highest importance that we resist all such insinuations, that we may stand fast in the faith of the Gospel and be found among the faithful Christians whom St. Paul commends when he says:

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye heard the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” 1 Thess. 2:13.

2. The Heavenly Consolations of the Gospel

The people need this doctrine of ministerial absolution that they may not be robbed of the heavenly consolations of the Gospel. No doubt the rejection by Reformed churches of the efficacy of the Sacraments with the promises annexed of the forgiveness of sins, which is simply to be embraced in child-like faith, has contributed largely to the lack of evangelical assurance and comfort observable among them, and to the prevalence of something bordering on contempt for the absolution maintained in the Evangelical Church of the Reformation. It is assailed as a “rag of popery,” whilst in fact it is a rejection of every vestige of Romish superstition that has been hung around it, and its assailants have picked up the Romish “rag,” that the power of absolution was committed exclusively to the apostles, though labeling it as worthless since the apostles died. By their concession to popery they thus evade the force of our Lord’s words, committing the power of the keys to the Church, but with the disastrous effect of depriving themselves entirely of the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation and making it merely a guide to a virtuous life. We have no doubt that this departure from the truth of the Gospel on the part of Protestants who refuse to accept the Augsburg Confession is the principal cause of the unevangelical preaching and conducting of the pastoral office among them, and of the unevangelical attitude of their people toward that preaching and the, ministerial office in general. The Scriptures are not treated as the very Word of God showing the damnation which sin has brought upon our race and the great salvation which has been wrought through the redemption in Christ Jesus; and the good tidings which the Gospel proclaims are as little believed to convey the fruits of that redemption as Baptism and the Holy Supper. The refusal to accept what the Bible teaches concerning the means of grace renders the whole economy of grace a shadow which leaves the soul in uncertainty and doubt and disposes it to criticize and question. Lutherans are not accustomed to go to Reformed or Romish churches to hear the Word of God and worship in His temple. They have their own pastors and their own churches, and their loyalty to the Gospel leads them to find their pleasure and their duty in the public worship

of their own church. But they read and they hear their neighbors talk, and thus learn what is going on in other churches. And much of that which they thus learn is painful to believing hearts. The subjects which are announced by preachers for the Sunday sermons and the reports of such sermons in the Monday morning papers are so saddening that some devout Christians have been induced to pass them by, as they do the reports of Sunday feasts and concerts and dances. And when neighbors and business associates talk about these pulpit productions and express their opinions about them, it becomes evident that the Sunday service is an airing of opinions, some agreeing and some disagreeing with the preacher, but all enjoying whatever seemed to them beautiful in song and sermon and thus well pleased with the entertainment. That the Lord is in His holy temple and speaks to His people there, and His commission to the minister is such that whosoever heareth him heareth the Lord Himself, because the instruction given is to preach His Word, has been so long disregarded that it is quite forgotten, and the sermons are therefore the preacher's promulgation of his opinions on all sorts of subjects, and the hearers judge them as such individual opinions and freely exercise the right of setting their own Opinions against them. No wonder that, if under such conditions the preacher should, for want of an attractive subject and for the sake of variety, conclude to preach the plain Gospel, his accustomed hearers would treat that in their accustomed way as his individual opinion and criticize it as usual. And no wonder that, when Lutheran preachers, mindful of the strict injunction of the Holy Spirit to preach the Word, and bound to this by the pledge which the Church requires that they will not depart from it, insist that this is the truth of God and all who are of God must hear it as a condition of membership in the Church of Him who came to bear witness of the truth, the cry of bigotry and intolerance and uncharitableness should be raised against them. Even if here and there a soul in such liberal congregations should in some way come to a knowledge of its sin and the curse of God that is upon it, the utmost that could be effected by such liberal preachers of human opinions would be that God, in some way that they do not know, and at some time which they cannot predict, may forgive their sins and give them peace. That such souls should recur to the promises of God in their baptism, accept the absolution pronounced in the Savior's name, and joyfully receive the seal put upon it by the communication of His body and blood in the holy Sacrament of the Altar, is altogether foreign to the Reformed theory: so foreign indeed, that

this Gospel of the forgiveness of sins by the minister's act, on the ground of our Lord's redemption, by His commission, and through the everlasting power of His Word, is pronounced a flagrant superstition, notwithstanding the oft repeated assurance that there is mercy for all in Christ and that "whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted."

How much poor sinners need this word of the Gospel which gives them absolution we cannot adequately express. Despair must follow the conviction of sin in its damnableness and helplessness, if the Gospel has no power to bring relief. To us it is a mystery how those who profess to have the same Christian faith which we set forth in the Augsburg Confession as the evangelical faith of the Reformation, though they will not join us in its declaration, can mean to accept the Gospel, but pronounce its absolution void and impotent. As long as the soul is indifferent to God's revelation from heaven we can understand such an attitude of formal profession, but when the conscience is awakened and seeks some refuge from the terrors of the law, only a real absolution which faith can cling to as a divine certainty can satisfy the soul's most crying want. The declaration to the trembling heart, that God forgives sin for Christ's sake, is the very substance of the Gospel, and believing it is the only way of peace, whilst those who reject it know not what justification by faith means.

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Cor. 5:20. 21.

II. Pastoral Care

What has thus far been considered we regard as the main import of this article of our Confession. But this does not cover all that it represents. There were circumstances in the days of the Reformation which brought this doctrine of absolution into close relation with the confession of sins and pastoral care, and if any students of our Confession should argue that this confession of sin is the expressed topic of the article and gave rise to its introduction, we have up controversy with them, but our conviction remains the same, that the power of the Gospel, not the enforcement of an ecclesiastical ordinance, was the object to which the minds of the Reformers were directed in preparing it, and to which their children in later generations should

be directed in understanding it and maintaining it. But it sets before us two points in reference to the application of the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, one of them pertaining to the people and their confession before the ambassador of God who administers the Gospel in absolution, the other to the care of souls in the administration.

1. Confession and Absolution Prior to Lord's Supper Predates the Papacy

The Church institution arranging for a confession of sin and absolution from its curse prior to partaking of the Lord's Supper was not Romish. It existed before the papacy and had its foundation in the Gospel, not in papal ordinances. But popery had laid its leprous hand upon it and contaminated it, as it had upon every arrangement of the Church, and upon every institution of God, rendering everything in the Church subservient to its power. It was especially about the confessional that its usurping forces were gathered and a system of creature merit and papal indulgences was built up which made the pope lord not only of the conduct of his subjects, but even of their conscience. Our Augsburg Confession, true to the principle of the Reformation, that only the Word of God should rule in the Church, renounced all the popish corruptions in regard to the communion and the needful preparation for its reception, but retained the old arrangement that was in accord with the Gospel. Underlying many an arrogant assumption of popery was the unwarranted dogma that the power to forgive sins was lodged not in the Gospel which proclaims it, but in the apostles who dispensed the Gospel. According to this the forgiveness of sins would have ceased, when the apostles were no longer on earth. That is the effect of the agreement with Rome of those Protestants who will not with us confess the power of the Gospel to forgive sins, wherever it is proclaimed, and by whomever it is proclaimed, though our Lord, in pursuance of His will that everything should be done decently and in order, has provided that ordinarily the Gospel with its Sacraments should be dispensed by ministers whom He regularly calls to the office. But Rome maintained and still maintains that the power on earth to forgive sins remains, though the apostles have died, because, as they allege, the apostolic office with its apostolic power to forgive sins is perpetuated in the episcopal successors of the apostles. While Reformed parties, who with the Romanists deny the power of absolution as contained in the

Gospel, are thus confessedly without power to convey it, the Romanists glory over them in the claim that they have retained the apostolate — with its extraordinary endowment. The Lutheran Church too has retained the apostolic office as a holy ministry of the divine Word and Sacrament, through which our Lord Jesus is always present even to the end of the world, to impart forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. But Rome, for its aggrandizement and the support of its usurpation of supremacy in the Church, has limited the power of the Word and Sacrament to its priesthood, or rather robbed the means of grace of their divine power and transferred it to the pope and his agents. As according to Romish decrees the giving of absolution is a matter of man's judgment and subject to human arbitrament, the confession of sin becomes an important factor in the administration. How shall the priest administer his office in accord with the papal ordinances, unless every sin is confessed by the applicant for communion? Only thus can he form a satisfactory judgment of the individual case and of his duty towards the person confessing. If he must apportion penalties according to the sins committed and condition the absolution by the performance of the imposed penance, it is reasonable that he should require a complete confession of all sins. How tender consciences are tortured by such a law, every sincere penitent can understand. The Lutheran Church rejected the error on which this priestly theory was built and renounced the popish ordinance which corrupted the old arrangement of the Church and tyrannized over men by demanding what no man could render. Our fathers pointed out the fact that the deceitfulness of the human heart is such as to preclude the possibility of a perfect knowledge of all its devious windings and hiding places and of a complete enumeration of all its erring. As in all other questions of dispute with Rome, the Lutherans relied not only on their observation and experience which could not be the final test of spiritual truth, but appealed to the infallible Word of Holy Scripture: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults." Ps. 19:12. For us that is decisive, whatever our adversaries may say against it.

2. The Lutheran Church Did Not Reject The Ancient Usage

But the Lutheran Church, true to her conservative principle and her reverence for the guidance of God in the history of Christianity, did not reject the

ancient usage of the Church because of the abuses which Rome had fastened upon it. She rejected the abuse and retained the use. She did this mainly because of the absolution which was associated with the confession of sin and which, as the main import of the Gospel, must be retained at every hazard and at every cost, for if that were surrendered, the great purpose of the Reformation, which Was to restore and maintain the Gospel in its purity, would be abandoned. But our Confession contains something more than this. It says, “that private absolution ought to be retained in the churches.” We do not think it candid when, as against enemies of our Church, some of our friends insist that simply absolution is meant without regard to the qualification expressed in the word private. That would relieve us from some bitter accusations ignorantly and in some cases maliciously made against us; but it would not promote the cause of heavenly truth. Let us rather be content to suffer what may come in the wake of a sincere confession of the Gospel than by a concession to unevangelical opposition, even though it proceed from men who are sincere in their profession that they believe, darken and call into question the meaning of that Gospel as good tidings for the remission of sin which is to all people. Our Confession does mean that absolution shall be retained in the churches; it would not insist on the retention of the principal thing involved in the whole terrible conflict of the Reformation, if it did not insist even to the extreme of martyrdom on that. But the word private was not a slip of the pen and is not to be regarded as meaningless. Our Confession, sober and earnest and solemn in its presentation of the truth revealed from heaven for our salvation, does not play with words without meaning. When it says private it means private, although it would be in violation of all the recognized laws of thought and language to understand this as referring principally to the privacy rather than to the absolution which the word private modifies in this connection. Absolution must be retained in the churches, whether public or private; but “concerning confession they teach that private absolution ought to be retained in the churches.” Nor are we disposed to lay much stress in this connection on the different senses in which the word private has been used. Sometimes it is employed to designate the act of an individual in distinction from the act in the same line of an official person who is publicly authorized to perform it; sometimes it designates the act of a person in privacy in distinction from the act of the same kind in the eyes of all who desire to witness it. The pastor is a person called officially to represent the Church in

the performance of the functions of his office, In this sense every act of the pastor of a congregation is public, though it be a private absolution of a sinner who in private confesses to him his sins, whilst in the other sense the absolution is as private as the confession of sin. The distinction has little bearing on the main point here under consideration. Our Confession evidently means that, when members of the congregation desire to receive the Lord's Supper, they shall make known this desire to the pastor who is called to administer it, and that the interview, as well the confession of the communicant as the absolution of the pastor, though the act of the latter is official and in that sense public, is perfectly private in the sense that no one knows or is entitled to know what has been confessed, and that no one is witness to the confession made and the absolution pronounced but the two who are immediately concerned — the pastor and the applicant for communion. In our Confession an absolution is meant that is private, not because it is given by a private or unofficial person who has no public authorization to confer it, but because it is given in the absence of witnesses to the transaction.

The import of our article is thus manifestly not only the maintenance of the forgiveness of sins by the divine power of the Word of God and the holy Sacraments, but also the inculcation of pastoral care in the administration of these divinely instituted means of grace.

“Private absolution ought to be retained in the churches.”

The reference is to the time-honored practice of the Church that, before the communion at the altar, those desiring to partake of the Sacrament should meet the minister, make confession of their sins, and receive absolution, that so they might be prepared to receive the body and blood of our Lord worthily and enjoy the full blessing which they are designed to convey. Both the communicant and the pastor are deeply concerned in this. For the minister, as a steward of the mysteries of God, must, so far as this is possible, guard against administering the Sacrament to the unworthy, lest they eat and drink damnation to themselves. not discerning the Lord's body, and the communicant must see to it that he examine himself, whether he be in the faith, and is duly prepared for the right reception of the heavenly gift.' The thought that communicants alone have the responsibility, if they eat and drink unworthily, is a human fancy that is unworthy of a pastor who has

learned from Scripture what his office means. It contradicts the divine commission which constitutes him a steward of the mysteries of God and shepherd of the flock committed to his charge. He has plain instructions in this regard from the Lord of the Church, whose minister he is called to be.

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” Matt. 7:6.

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” 1 Pet. 5:2.

“Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” 2 Tim. 4:5.

And corresponding instructions are given to the members of the churches.

“Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give an account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you.” Heb. 13:17.

When nowadays all such instructions are ignored in the interest of a false charity and a false unionism, we hardly deem it necessary to say that this is adverse to the whole teaching and spirit of the Reformation and of the result of its struggles in the Church of the Augsburg Confession. Lutherans wanted everything retained which the ancient Church had adopted in furtherance of the Gospel and its great salvation through faith in Christ. To this end absolution, as the announcement of the forgiveness of sins which our Savior secured and the Gospel proclaims, is essential. That must be, if the Gospel is to be dominant in our churches. The conferring of this absolution in private is not of the same essential import, because it can take place in public as well as in private, and has the same validity in either case. Our Confession does not say, and does not mean, that the absolution of the minister can be effectual only when administered in private. It could not mean that without abandoning its entire contention for free salvation secured by the redemption through Christ's vicarious sacrifice, offered to all the redeemed through the Gospel and the Sacraments, and appropriated by faith. The Gospel proclaims the forgiveness of sins always and everywhere and is the same in public and in private, openly and from house to house. But that

does not show that private absolution is overestimated in our Confession and assigned a place in it which does not strictly belong to the institution in an article of faith. It is relatively necessary. Those who would make use of this fact, that its necessity is only relative and thus of subordinate value, in order to disparage it and pave the way for its abandonment, have need to be reminded that the necessity of the ministerial office in general is not absolute, but only relative, as the grace of God can be communicated without this mediation. But God has wisely ordered that there should be ministers of His Church to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, and the argument to depreciate this ministry because it is only relatively necessary would be subversive of the whole plan of saving souls in God's appointed way. Since the Lord has ordained that there shall be a ministry to preach the Gospel and dispense the Sacraments, His ordinance requires that His people shall accept it as their rule in the congregations and cheerfully accept whatever it plainly implies. The pastor must have the opportunity to "preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." 2 Tim. 4:2. He must be permitted to inquire into the faith and life of those who desire the Sacrament at his hands, for he must give account of his stewardship to his Lord. If the congregation will not consent to this, it must take the responsibility, and he must decline to serve as its minister.

That so many of our churches have permitted this private absolution to fall into disuse is to be deplored, not because it is necessary to the existence of a truly Evangelical Church, but certainly is to its welfare, giving the highest efficiency to the work of the ministry in its care of the souls committed to its charge.

Notwithstanding the difficulties which stand in the way of its practice both as regards the pastors and the people, and especially in our country where the pastoral office is popularly conducted according to principles which are not Lutheran, and our people are largely under the influence of a spirit that is not in accord with that of our Augsburg Confession, we still find abundant reasons to uphold this eleventh article even in the less essential point of absolution as qualified by the term private. These reasons are summarily presented in the following extract from an opinion of the theological faculty of Wittenberg in 1619:

“There are three particular reasons for observing it. 1. It affords the pastor an opportunity for special interviews with each communicant, to ascertain whether he is properly qualified for the Holy Sacrament; that is, whether he has correct views of the nature and design of the Lord’s Supper, whether he lives at peace with his neighbors, whether he is truly willing to renounce all evil ways in which he may have been living, and, in brief, whether any defect may be found in the applicant which might be remedied by instruction and exhortation. 2. It affords also an appropriate opportunity to any member that may have any special difficulties, wants or desires, in reference to which he may long for an interview with his pastor alone. 3. It applies in a personal and direct way God’s grace and forgiveness of sins to the individual and penitent heart, which are offered in the Word to all believers.”

That theological faculty had imbibed the spirit of our Confession. In the first place, the institution of private confession and absolution should be retained in the churches because it gives pastors an opportunity to exercise their pastoral functions conveniently and effectually. We repeat the fact, because we are conscious of the need of impressing it in our days of weakness and cavi, that our Confession sets forth only the absolution of the Gospel as a necessary part of the faith in the eleventh article, while the institution of private confession is retained in the use for which it was designed, without the abuse to which popish error subjected it, and private absolution is maintained for the comfort which individuals may receive from the individual application of the Gospel, the declaration of whose absolution, whether public or private, is essential to the Christian Church. This being evidently the import of the article under consideration, it behooves us to give due heed to the points which, though subordinate, are of such great moment for the attainment of the main purpose of ministerial absolution. The pastor is called to the administration of the means of grace, which by divine ordinance bring to the redeemed world the whole fruit of the redemption through Christ’s obedience unto death. But the pastor is subject to the divine order as well as the flock. He is given the care of souls. He must not cast before swine the pearls committed to his charge, but must rightly divide the Word of truth, which contains the law demanding holiness and condemning the unholy, and the Gospel offering absolution, which is forgiveness, to the penitent who [ice for refuge to the hope set before them in the righteousness of Christ. He sins if he applies the law for the condemnation of sinners who repent and believe the Gospel, or if he applies the Gospel for the absolution of unbelievers who deny or excuse their sins and refuse to accept the righteousness of Christ as their only help and their only hope.

The Lutheran Church, in her happy possession of the Gospel truth unto salvation, was always conscious of this. She wanted and she wants no pastors who take little or no care for souls, but who are content with the honors and emoluments of the office. She is not and can not be satisfied with a pastor who admits to absolution and the holy Sacrament every one that applies, recklessly assuming that every such application is a sufficient confession of penitence and faith, and ignoring all the lessons which the Bible teaches about the deceitfulness of sin, and all that experience teaches about human ignorance and frailty and dishonesty. She wants no pastors who will make no sacrifices for evangelical truth and will seek the glory of gathering a large, rich and influential congregation, though all the swine that come rooting about the vineyard of the Lord are admitted to swell the crowd. Her purpose is to save souls by leading them to Christ who has redeemed us from sin and death, and in whom alone we have the redemption which is in the forgiveness of sin. That those who are thus brought to the Savior should be good people. good fathers and mothers, good neighbors, good church members, good citizens, is a matter of course, but is quite subsidiary. Salvation from the damnation that is impending is the principal concern. If a pastor does not see this and feel this, he lacks an essential qualification for his high and responsible calling. It is this that our Confession has in mind when it urges the importance of private absolution in connection with the ancient institution of the confession of sin.

And it is worthy of being emphasized still as a wise provision for the right and effectual conduct of the ministerial office.

It is true, that what is contemplated as a secondary purpose in this arrangement for the private confession and absolution before communion, can be attained in other ways besides that of meeting the pastor for confession. For this reason we speak of this as not the essential import of our Confession. But the pastoral work for which it wisely provides must be done. Those whom the pastor does not know as sheep of the Lord's fold must not be absolved or admitted to communion. The pastor must do his duty, whatever course may be adopted for doing it.

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the Word at my mouth and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou give him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hands. Yet if thou warn the wicked and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul.” Ezek. 3:17-19:

The pastor who does not see his responsibility in the matter is intellectually or morally unfit for the office and should not remain or be retained in it. If the state of the congregation be so deplorably lacking in faith and love that the members will not come to their pastor for private confession and absolution, they must at least allow those who desire the privilege and blessing to exercise the liberty which the Gospel accords them; but the pastor as one who must give an account is not thus released from the duty of caring for the souls of the rest. He must do what lies in his power to have it established as the order of the congregation that none shall go to the Holy Supper without having given him an Opportunity to speak with them concerning the great salvation which the Gospel offers and the relation in which they stand to the proffered grace. Of course the liberty which all Christians have in their Redeemer, and which recognizes no obligation upon the conscience save that of the Word of the Lord, must be scrupulously respected. even if its assertion should be the result of a conscience that needs enlightenment. But the pastor must do his duty, and the appeals of men who need light as to their Christian rights as free children of God must not be permitted to divert him from the plain path of duty, but only spur him on to its more strenuous performance by affording the light which the appeal shows to be so much needed. Therefore if the congregation makes no regulations to the effect mentioned, he must observe the Lord's requirements all the same, although the absence of a church rule may hamper him in his work. This is not because the Lord's requirements are more obligatory when the church confirms them, or less obligatory when the church declines to accept them, but because men so often err and suppose that only what they agree to accept is binding upon them, and to that only they can be held as a matter of right and duty. The pastor must be presumed to know better and must teach them better, where they have fallen into error. But this can only furnish the conscientious pastor an additional motive for doing his work according to his Master's directions, without yielding to the temptation to prove unfaithful by conforming to the will of an erring people, whom he is called to guide in

the right way, which is the way of the Lord. He cannot command the people under his charge to adopt the ancient and salutary custom of private confession and absolution. He cannot even make laws for the people committed to his charge, that they must all come to him for an interview before they can receive the Sacrament. The congregation is entitled to make its own regulations under the supreme authority of the Word of God and the accepted authority of the Church's Confessions, as in accord with that Word. To this supreme authority the pastor must hold them and cannot adapt his ministerial work to any notions which they may entertain in subversion of that authority, to which he and they are equally bound. His plain duty is to administer his office according to the Word of God; and although it is right to say that he shall administer it according to the faith of the church which calls him to the work, among us Lutherans that can never mean anything else than that he shall administer it according to the Confession of the Church, because this is known and believed to be the pure Word of our Lord. If members of this confessing congregation are led astray, he must lead them aright; if they rebel against the divine authority of the Lord's Word, he must stand by this for his own soul's sake as well as for the sake of the souls of his congregation, and rather suffer all that opponents may inflict upon him than yield one jot or tittle of the Master's words to appease such opponents, who violate their profession of fidelity to the Lord and His Church by asking him to do what faith and love forbid. He must obey the call of duty, whatever the consequences may be. Therefore he will ask people to come and tell him, when they desire to commune, and if they have no desire to make a private confession of their sins and to receive private absolution, but content themselves with the public preparation, to give him an Opportunity to have a private conversation with them, if he has a desire for this in the interest of their souls' eternal welfare. If they will not come to him, he must go to them. If he is to be pastor at all, he must insist on the right to exercise a shepherd's care of the flock which the Lord has given him in charge and for which he is accountable; and if he is not willing to do this work, he should cease pretending to be a pastor and to accept the hire of a laborer for work which he refuses to perform. Those who regard the ministerial office as a sinecure for lazy people who seek an easy living can have no room and no standing in the Lutheran Church.

Our Confession says in the 25th article:

“Confession is not abolished in the churches among us; for it is not our custom to communicate the body of our Lord except to those who have been examined and absolved.”

If it occurs among churches bearing the Lutheran name, this only proves that some churches are not faithful to their confession, as some individuals are not faithful to the Covenant into which they have entered in Baptism and the promises they have made in confirmation. The Church is to blame only if it winks at sin, and fails to do its duty in putting it away, either by leading the sinner to repentance or by excluding him from the fellowship of the Church whose Confession he violates. The Ev. Lutheran Church still maintains its evangelical position as in the glorious time of the Reformation, when Lutherans were ready to labor and suffer in the cause of Gospel truth unto the salvation of souls, and therefore still insists on that truth as it is set forth in the Augsburg Confession. That many in our days have ceased to appreciate the contention and suffering of our fathers and the fundamental import for Christian truth of every article of our Confession, and that some even of those who profess to be Evangelical Lutherans join the opposing party and fight for the wrong, while professedly in the house maintaining the right, does not prove that the Church of the Reformation has changed its adherence to the Word of God and the Augsburg Confession, though it does prove that some professed adherents are not loyal, and that some congregations and some synods foster the disloyalty by their dastardly failure to exercise the discipline which their profession requires, and the absence of which cannot be otherwise interpreted than as an insincerity in their profession, if this is not to be regarded as an indifferent and thoughtless yea to a question of mere formality.

The pastor cannot do his duty by merely preaching the Word in the assembled congregation. Of course, everyone that will may come and hear, and as a Lutheran who has confidence in the divine power of the Word which he preaches, he is happy when multitudes come to hear the Gospel. But he is a steward of the mysteries of God and cannot, if he knows enough of the sin of man and the grace of God to be fit at all for the pastorate of a Christian congregation, or even for a missionary among the heathen or the unchurched multitude in a Christian land, consider every hearer to be a Christian. Among reasonable people it cannot be thought uncivil, especially in a matter of such vast moment, to pronounce it stupidity when such an inference is made. “Many are called, but few are chosen.” Shall the pastor,

then, without further question baptize everyone of the crowd of hearers who may ask the administration of the ordinance at his hands? It is hardly necessary to say to Christian people, who know something of the deceitfulness of sin and of the enlightening power of grace, that the mere hearing of the Gospel, even though it be a respectful hearing, is no sufficient proof that a conversion has taken place, and that therefore the minister of God can proceed at once to absolve and baptize. "It is required of a steward that a man be found faithful." He must examine the applicant, and in many cases he will find that much instruction and explanation are still necessary before Baptism can be administered according to the Master's will. It is a reflection upon the Christian intelligence of anyone who would assume that the mere hearing of the Word is sufficient evidence that the exceeding sinfulness of sin has been realized, and the Gospel of grace has been heartily believed, and that therefore the minister can take it easy and administer Baptism without further trouble about the matter. God pity such a minister!

But the case is different, it is argued, when a Christian congregation has been formed and a pastor is called to administer the means of grace. It is different in many respects, but it is not different in the main respect that the minister is a steward of the mysteries of God and is required to be found faithful. A congregation of Christians, whose faith is declared in the Augsburg Confession, has called him to be their pastor, to administer the means of grace and care for their souls. Baptized and confirmed members are presumed to be entitled to communion in the holy Sacrament of the Altar. So far all is well. But in practice two difficulties arise. One is, that in the course of time some confirmed members become cold and careless, the other is, that some present themselves at our altars who have never been instructed and confirmed in our churches, but are members of churches that do not accept the Augsburg Confession, though claiming to be Protestant Christians. Sin in various forms confronts the pastor in his ministerial work and renders it difficult.

As regards the first of these points, pertaining to the baptized and confirmed members of our own Church, there is some plausibility in the contention that, in view of the other provisions made by the Lutheran Church for securing a membership devoted to sound doctrine and holy living according to the Gospel, and for preserving its members in that blessed estate, the institution of private confession and absolution preceding every communion is not indispensable. In the baptism of children the sponsors are

pledged to see that the duties of parents to train the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord are faithfully performed, so that the children planted in Christ may grow in Him unto the stature of a perfect man. Care is taken that the family life be ordered according to the Gospel, and that every head of a family conduct the office of priest in his household, as the rubrics in our Catechism direct. Schools are established for the proper education of Christian children for the duties of home and church and state. And when they become old enough to enjoy the full measure of grace in the holy Sacrament of the Altar, the solicitude of the Church for their welfare is expressed in the careful provision made for their instruction and examination and the confirmation of those who are approved. If all these things, together with the ever recurring admonitions to pastors to be faithful stewards, are properly attended to as the Church requires, and thus due preparation is made for a worthy first communion, it does seem plausible that great solicitude for the subsequent communions of such a membership should seem superfluous, or at least not a necessity. Probably this had some influence in determining pious men like Spener to abandon the time-honored custom of the Church, although it was evidently not this that induced the Rationalists to follow his unwise example. So much we can concede to this argumentation, that private confession and absolution is not an essential mark of the Church of the Reformation, provided always that the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ, and thus absolution, whether public or private, be retained in the churches, and provided further that the minister be not hampered by congregational enactments which render a faithful administration of the means of grace impossible. But the argument against the need of retaining the ancient custom is lame in more than one respect. It assumes as facts what all experience proves to be fictitious, and what ought to have been known as such from the Word of God without the distressing lessons of an experimental test. The parents do not always do their duty to baptized children; the congregations do not always provide schools in which the Word of God is faithfully taught; the pastor does not always do his full duty in the instruction and examination of catechumens, in consequence of which some are confirmed and admitted to communion who are not established in the faith and are not cordial and earnest in their pursuit of holiness. The confirmed members, even assuming that all was right when they received their first communion, are subject to manifold trials and temptations, and may have undergone deplorable changes since then. It is

not wise to assume that all have grown in grace since then, and that no soul of a confirmed member is in danger and needs the pastor's special care. The fact that some do not present themselves at the next communion, nor at the next, should dispel from any pastor's mind such a delusion. Some are steadfast in the faith and bear its fruits in their lives; but some do not. It is therefore not a sincere concern for the souls committed to a pastor's charge that could lead him to assume that all is well with the members of his congregation, so long as no grave charges are brought against them. In fact such an attitude, considering the weakness of the flesh and the allurements of the world and the wiles of the devil, is manifest recklessness. The pastor must not be suspicious, but he must know the trials through which the children of God necessarily pass, and must exercise his pastoral solicitude in regard to every member of his flock. Some, earnestly examining themselves every day and fleeing for refuge to the hope set before them in Christ, may need little additional "instruction and comfort, and as far as they are concerned and are known to the pastor, there might be reason for the contention that a private interview with him who has the care of their souls would be unnecessary. And yet these are the very people who in their conflicts with sin are desirous of such interview and seek the comfort of the Gospel to strengthen them in their ' struggles. But not all of the members of the Church are of this same character. Some, without consciousness of the fact, are gradually succumbing to the worldly and wicked ways of the people with whom they associate. He is not a faithful pastor who disregards all these things and supposes that all is well as long as his sheep remain in his visible fold, without regard to the wolf that is prowling around them and every moment menaces their life. Neither the pastor nor the congregation can escape the judgment of Him who died to save these souls, if in their carnal security they refuse to run to their rescue in the dangers that beset them.

As regards the second point, pertaining to those who are not members of the congregation, the matter is easier of solution, although prevailing errors have made it more difficult for our people to apprehend the truth in its simplicity. If the Lutheran pastor cannot admit the baptized children of his own fold to communion without having instructed them as catechumens and prepared them for an intelligent confession of Christ in confirmation, and cannot assume that then they are safe for all time and no longer need his pastoral care, but sees the necessity of holding fast "the custom. among us, not to communicate the body of our Lord except to those who have been previ-

ously examined and absolved," it must be evident not only to every Christian, but even to every man of "common sense," that he cannot admit members of other denominations without such precautions. The utmost that any true charity can require of him is that he impartially treat Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, etc., when members of such churches desire communion at his hands, as he treats the members of his own congregation. They must be "previously examined and absolved." That would lead to the necessary conference about the difference between those churches and ours, especially to an examination in regard to the Lord's Supper, which is one of the chief grounds of division between us; and this would lead, if the applicant is desirous to know the truth and willing to receive instruction, to results which the boasted liberality of other churches would consider dreadful, as the result might be the acceptance, by such applicants, of the Lutheran faith and confession. Our calling is not to accomplish that. Our office is to preach Christ and administer His saving ordinances, called holy Sacraments. These are the divinely appointed means of grace, and we trust in their efficacy to accomplish that whereunto God sent them. Of these mysteries our ministers are stewards, and what God requires of them is that they be found faithful in their ministrations; results and consequences are His concern, not ours. But to this faithfulness belongs also the recognition of individual and congregational rights, and consequently the right to call pastors and the obligation which is thus assumed in regard to pastors and people, and their relation to each other. If a Methodist, or a Papist, or a Campbellite, or a Universalist presents himself for communion in the Lutheran Church, the first thought of an intelligent Lutheran pastor will no doubt be, that such person, as a member of another denomination, has another pastor, who has been chosen to care for his soul. Why does he not go to his own pastor to receive the Sacrament? The applicant may be ignorant and not know that there is any difference between his church and the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession. He may be, but the Lutheran pastor is not sure. It may be that, though such applicant stands under no cloud in the community, he is not in good repute in his own congregation, and that he even stands under discipline. At any rate, for him another pastor must give account, and both faith and charity require that he be sent to his own pastor for the Sacrament. If he persists that he wants to commune with us, examination and instruction will be in order until he can be prepared to

commune on the same terms with all other Lutherans. Of course that could be only at a subsequent communion.

In the second place, the arrangement for a private interview affords an opportunity to any member who desires it to confess his sins and receive the comfort of the Gospel, to present the difficulties which he encounters in his efforts to lead a life of faith and charity and receive his pastor's counsel and help, and to state his purposes and doubts respecting them and avail himself of the pastor's knowledge of the Word of God for his guidance. This will no doubt seem a matter of little import to people who have never struggled through fierce trials and think themselves competent to cope with any difficulty which may come in their way. But to many who are growing in grace and are thoroughly in earnest in fighting the good fight in order to make their calling and election sure, the privilege thus afforded is of inestimable value. Even the private absolution is not excepted, notwithstanding that every well instructed Christian knows that the absolution involved in the preaching of the Gospel and the formal absolution pronounced in the assembled congregation is equally valid with that declared to the individual in private. In all cases, when there is faith to apprehend it, the soul has it. And yet every sincere Christian knows how short he comes of that joy and peace which the absolution is designed to convey. The flesh presents all sorts of obstacles, both in our understanding and in our feelings, to the right appreciation of the heavenly blessing offered. Prominent among these is the reflection that the public absolution reaches many who are not Christian believers and do not enjoy its benefits. Am I meant when it is pronounced? With such questions and the doubts which they suggest Satan knows how to trouble Christians. The diffident soul finds comfort especially in the declaration of the pastor to the individual, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." All experience shows that the pastor's application of the Gospel to individuals in private is capable of attaining blessed results that cannot be so easily or so fully attained in his public ministrations.

Of course, all this presupposes that the pastor is a man qualified for his position. We do not refer merely to his general education for his important work. Some pastors are learned enough and even pious enough for the office, but they lack pastoral wisdom and loving discretion which is born of unselfish devotion to the purpose of their calling. Probably this lack has contributed much to the disuse of private confession and absolution. If the pastor is so thoughtless and so unsympathetic that, when a member

earnestly seeking light and comfort, tells him of his failures in the conflict with sin, his discouragements, his troubles, in a simple hearted way confiding to his pastor what he confides to no one else but God, and to him only because he trusts him as God's messenger and minister, he, the trusted pastor, goes to his family and betrays the confidence and makes it the subject of gossip, it is no wonder that those committed to his pastoral care will be cautious in their intercourse with him, and that he loses the confidence of his people which is so important for the efficient conduct of his office.

“A talebearer revealeth secrets, but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.”
Prov. 2:13.

No discreet person will trust a talebearer. And as in the confessions of members to their pastor it is understood that this is done because he is God's minister, and that what is revealed to him is in his capacity as such minister, the offense is doubly great when he acts as a talebearer. Such a person is not likely to be a good adviser of those who seek instruction and consolation in private from their pastor. Of such pastors it might be expected that people would rather report the delinquencies of their neighbors, instead of confessing their own sins, and that he would listen to such reports instead of instructing them, according to the eighth commandment, that they must not bear false witness against their neighbor, and that they must go in private and speak to such sinning neighbor and try to win him from his evil ways before the pastor or any other person can lend an ear to the report. Under such conditions it would be unreasonable to expect our churches to have much interest in the retention of private absolution among them, especially in a land of sects, where the ministry has largely forgotten its commission and been prostituted to secular purposes, and where our people, not excepting the pastors, are in constant temptation to accept the popular notions of a worldly church and ministry, and to forget the Augsburg Confession with its adherence to the Gospel and its consequent work of building a kingdom which is not of this world.

This eleventh article of our Confession is often represented as obsolete. Many have disregarded it, many have been left ignorant of its meaning, and many have been careless in executing what it implies. But it is not obsolete, and we hope for a time to come when it will be better understood and appreciated.

Article XII. Of Repentance.

Concerning repentance they teach that such as have fallen after Baptism may find remission of sins, at what time they are converted, and that the Church should give absolution unto such as return unto repentance. But repentance consists properly of these two parts. One is contrition, or terrors stricken into the conscience through the acknowledgment of sin; the other is faith, which is conceived from the Gospel, or absolution, and which believes that sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, and comforts the conscience and frees it from terrors. Then should follow good works, which are the fruits of repentance. Matt. 3:8.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that men once justified can lose the Spirit of God, and likewise those who contend that some men may attain to such a perfection in this life that they cannot sin. The Novatians are also condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance. They also that do not teach that remission of sins is obtained by faith, but command us to merit grace by satisfactions, are rejected.

MANY OF THE ERRORS and abuses of the Roman Church under the dominion of the papacy grew out of its gradual development of fundamental departures from the Scriptures on the subject of repentance. The doctrine of indulgences, which furnished the occasion for the first step in the great work of the Reformation, is one of the fruits of this error. The Romish system of self-righteousness and human power and authority in things spiritual, could not have gained ascendancy without it, and the various devices by which the way of peace was closed against Christian believers were dependent on it for their efficiency. The confession of the Scriptural truth concerning repentance was therefore an essential matter for the Church of the Reformation. Our article sets forth the main points of the evangelical faith. It presents: 1. The right of absolution to fallen Christians who repent; 2. What is embraced in true repentance; 3. Its proper fruits; 4. The errors which, in accordance with the rule of Scripture, faithful Christians must condemn.

1. The Right of Absolution to Fallen Christians Who Repent

The first part of the article decides a practical question which was much debated in the course of the Church's history, but which in the light of the Gospel declared anew in the Reformation was hardly any longer debatable. The one condition of salvation under the Gospel dispensation is faith in the Savior of the world, who was once delivered for the offenses of all men and raised again for their justification. But some who did not perceive the light in its brightness still doubted. The light was clear, but their vision was not. Some even turned away from it and preferred the darkness. It was necessary that the Church of the pure Word and Sacrament should plainly state the truth of the Gospel on a question of such moment. That statement includes three propositions.

In the first place, it implies that those who are believers may fall and cease to be followers of the Savior. They may abandon the truth of the Gospel and accept falsehoods of Satan, which are made very plausible, but which can give no peace and lead only to perdition; or they may, while they profess to hold the truth revealed from heaven for our salvation, inwardly deny its power and walk in the ways of the flesh to destruction. Thus our Lord teaches us, when in explaining the parable of the sower He says:

“They on the rock are they which, when they hear, receive the Word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe and in time of temptation fall away.” Luke 8:13.

Therefore the warning is given: “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” 1 Cor. 10:12. No man is a Christian believer by compulsion. The grace of God which works faith by His appointed means may be resisted at the beginning of its operation in the soul, so that a person may never become a believer, and it may be resisted at any stage of the Christian life, so that he may cease to be a believer. Only he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

In the second place, it is implied that a person who has fallen may repent and return to the Savior. As many refuse to hear when the Gospel is preached to them, while others gladly receive it and are saved. so also many, after they have fallen away, refuse to hear the Savior's call to them to

return and escape the damnation of hell, while others are brought back to the Shepherd of their souls and led anew into the green pastures of the Gospel. Saul and Judas perished in their sins; David and Peter repented and were pardoned. There are conditions of apostates in which a return to grace and salvation is beyond hope.

“It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers, of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.” Heb. 6:4-6.

The passage shows how vain is the subterfuge of those who maintain that a fall from grace is impossible, and that those who seem to have fallen were never really believers; but it shows also that there are depths of apostasy into which souls may fall, from which there is no rescue. The sin of the soul and the grace of the Savior involve mysteries to which our understanding cannot attain, and the fact that some falls are of a character that precludes subsequent repentance must stand as a warning to intensify the admonition to watch and pray. But not every fall is of that irremediable kind. The Gospel offers comfort to every penitent sinner and calls to every wandering sheep to return to the fold, assuring all that the Lord will in no wise cast them out. It must be kept in mind, too, for the encouragement of such as have strayed away and in deep sorrow for their misconduct cry for mercy, that the Scriptures never, even in the case of those apostates whose restoration to the blessedness from which they have fallen is declared impossible, represent that impossibility as lying in the failure of God’s mercy or in the insufficiency of Christ’s atonement, but always and only in the failure of man to repent and to return to Him in whom alone is our help. “It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance,” not impossible for God to receive them again, as the loving father received the prodigal son, if they repent and return to Him. The grace of God is magnified by the case of many who do see the misery and wickedness of their fall, return in deep contrition to their Father with a full confession of their wretchedness, and do not appeal to His mercy in vain, but are received with open arms as sons that were lost and are found again: and the angels in heaven rejoice over the sinners that repent.

In the third place, our article declares that “the Church should give absolution unto such as return to repentance.” It is not in accordance with the

Scriptures to flout this point as irrelevant. No doubt it would have been a more simple and summary way of treating it to say that the Church has nothing to do with it. But that is the way of fanaticism, which some did pursue in the days of the Reformation and which most of the sects are pursuing now. Our fathers were not fanatics; if they had been, the Augsburg Confession and the Ev. Lutheran Church, and of course the great Reformation of which these are the exponents, would never have come into being. They were humble believers in Christ and therefore heartily subject to the Holy Scriptures. These teach us that the Church has something to do with the subject; for to this Church, as the congregation of believers, our Lord was pleased to give the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He chose not to remain visibly on earth until the end of time, but after His ascension into heaven to entrust the means for the communication of His grace unto salvation to His disciples for administration, and gave them authority to call the ministers who should do the gracious and glorious work of preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments in His name, as the means by which He, who has all power in heaven and on earth, would perform His merciful will among the sinful and helpless children of men. What His chosen people should do, according to His will, as declared in Holy Scripture, should be valid in time and in eternity: which means that His Gospel, when it is preached by His ministers, should have the same power as if He preached it Himself, and that His holy Sacraments should attain the end for which He instituted them as effectually when they administered them as if He Himself administered them in person. In fact He is present always in the Church and really does the saving work through the means which He has instituted and for the administration of which He has appointed His ministers. They can do nothing of themselves to save souls from the curse that is upon their sin; the Lord Himself does all through His appointed means, which His ministers are only called to administer faithfully, according to the directions which He has given them in His Word. But these ministers may err and sin, and people may suffer because of such failure to abide by the Word. Rome erred in the doctrine of penitence, and Romish priests erred in their conduct of the ministerial office according to papal decrees instead of according to the Lord's will clearly laid down in the Bible.

Others have erred in the same way, and the common people have suffered and continue to suffer at the hands of unfaithful ministers. Therefore it was needful that the Church of the Reformation should declare its faith in

the abiding mercy of God upon all men, not excepting such as have fallen and by His grace are renewed again to repentance, and assert the duty of the Church to absolve them and receive them again into the fellowship of the Church. Churches and their ministers must lay aside their carnal thoughts, their prejudices and their doubts and receive back with joy the poor sinner that has fallen and given great offense to' the brethren, but has now by the grace of God been brought to see his error and in humble repentance seeks restoration to his former place in the communion of saints.

2. What is Embraced in True Repentance

The second point presented in our Confession is one of great import for doctrine and for practice. Its purpose is to make manifest what repentance means, and to this end to point out what it embraces. Some things precede it and some things follow it, but do not constitute it. To extricate the subject from the confusion into which many have fallen on this account, our Confession sets forth the two points which are really embraced in it, namely, contrition and faith.

“Repentance consists properly of these two parts. One is contrition, or terrors stricken into the conscience by the acknowledgment of sin, the other is faith, which is conceived from the Gospel, or absolution, and believes that for Christ’s sake sins are forgiven, and comforts the conscience and frees it from terrors.”

1. The Soul’s Awareness of Sin

The first thing necessary for deliverance from the curse of sin is to become aware of its existence in the soul and to feel its deadly power. Since man has fallen the imagination of the thoughts of his heart are only evil continually. But the very sinfulness of his nature, from which his evil acts proceed, obscures his vision in regard to their moral iniquity, and he lives in comparative ease and security, notwithstanding the existence of a conscience within him, the office of which is to rebuke all wrongdoing, but which performs its office according to the light which its subject possesses. Hence sin is declared by St. Paul to be dead until the law enters into the sinner’s consciousness. Some live according to the impulses of their own hearts and are

undisturbed by any thoughts that these impulses, being natural, could be otherwise than right and could lead to ruin. Others, who are of a more thoughtful temper and whose reflections rise above the mere considerations of expediency and concern for temporal welfare, and making account of the moral character of their actions, may have occasional twinges of conscience; but the effect, if it is not a reckless renunciation of its claims, is only a solicitude to make their actions conform to the sense of right and thus to silence conscience and imagine that all righteousness has been fulfilled. In neither case is there that contrition of which our article speaks. Sorrow for actions because they have brought suffering upon a person is not sorrow for sin. This comes only when the law of God' enters. This reveals the true nature of sin and enforces its demands by divine authority. It makes known the righteousness which God requires as pertaining not only to the outward actions through the members of the body, but to the heart as the root of all personal activity, and thus to the actions of the soul in its thoughts and feelings and volitions as well as in its expression in words and works.

“I had not known sin but by the law, for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shall not covet.” Rom. 7:7.

This explains why so many, even including some Christians, think they are all right and satisfy all the demands of righteousness when no reasonable fault can be found with their outward conduct, and some even flatter themselves that they are perfectly holy when their life before men is blameless. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” Rom. 3:20. When this enters the soul with its divine demands and penalties, from which there is no escape, the effect is either rage and recklessness in declaring war against the imposition of intolerable burdens, or the terrors of contrition. “The soul that sinneth it shall die.” When it has realized that it has sinned and read its sentence, whither shall it flee for comfort? Its own conscience condemns it and it can find no solace there. The conscience of all men condemns him in his own confession of guilt and can give him no comfort. His only possible help could be in God, and He reveals His wrath against all ungodliness of men. Condemned of all, helpless and hopeless, whither shall he flee from the hell within him and all around him? That is contrition as the result of an earnest acceptance of the law of God with its righteous requirements and its terrible

denunciations of wrath upon the soul that sinneth. But that could only end in despair, if the law were the whole revelation of God. But the main part of the divine revelation is the Gospel, and the main part of repentance is accordingly faith in the good tidings by which God in His infinite mercy provides comfort for the trembling sinner. “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Gal. 3:24.

2. Contrition is Not Atonement

The knowledge of sin, the consciousness of its guilt, the compunctions of conscience for the transgression of the divine law in its holiness, are all necessary to prepare the sinner for the reception of the grace of Christ offered in the Gospel. They thus constitute an indispensable part of repentance. But the tendency of human nature to self-righteousness and self-glorification often destroys the benefit which God designs to confer through such painful experience, and many have followed the erring ways of Rome by making these the meritorious cause of the righteousness before God which the soul must have before it can have peace. The contrition is supposed to satisfy the law or to pave the way for works which God will accept to appease His wrath and allay our terrors. We will not here dilate upon the abuses to which the Romish theory of satisfactions with its transmutation of penalties and its purgatory and its indulgences have led. By these as mere human devices no faithful child of the Reformation will be very likely to be much disturbed. But we must direct attention to one feature of the error which is so much in vogue even among Protestants as to constitute a menace to the Christian life. It is the widespread notion that contrition itself is an atonement for sin, and that therefore the principal part of repentance, which is faith in the forgiveness of sin through the redemption which is in Christ, is not necessary. The thought is that the regret for a transgression is an adequate satisfaction to righteousness for the wrong done — that sorrow felt fully pays for the sin committed and balances the account. The argument suggested by the natural selfishness of the human heart in its sin is expressed in the question, Have I not suffered enough for my transgression of the law? And this reveals a condition of heart that renders even the contrition dubious, while it excludes the possibility of faith in the remission of sins by denying all need of such remission. It renders even the contrition questionable, because it indicates that the suffering is regarded as the conse-

quence of a mistake that was made, which can be made good by bearing the consequence, and that the offense against God and His holy will and the bearing which it has upon the divine government in time and eternity has not been considered and has not entered into the heart's sorrow. It is a sorrow rather for the experienced consequences of sin in the order of nature than of a terror of conscience on account of the insult to the Majesty on high and the rebellion against the whole reign of righteousness in the universe. That men are sorry for their sin, not because it is sin, but because it brings them suffering, is a common observation, and that many a professed contrition is only of that kind, even among Christians, is rendered the more probable as the claim is made by so many that their contrition, such as it is, counterbalances the claim of the law in its requirement of righteousness. And the worst of the implication is that the need of righteousness is denied, and thus the very purpose of the law in working the knowledge of sin and being a schoolmaster to lead unto Christ, that the sinner may be justified by faith, is defeated. Whoever depends on his repentance for salvation, without fleeing for refuge to the Savior, must remain under condemnation and be lost, because there is no other name given under heaven by which we could be saved but the name of Jesus. The sin remains, even though we be sorry for it, and all thought of atoning for it or making it good, whether by weeping over it, or striving to wipe it out by good works, is only a device of the wisdom of the flesh, which is foolishness with God. We cannot make it good or wipe it out, any more than the murderer or the thief or the adulterer can nullify his act and eliminate it from the process of cause and effect in the government of the world. God pursues His way of eternal righteousness, and men must join His progress through the world to His benevolent end or be crushed in their foolish efforts to obstruct His path. In the order of nature there is no way to escape the reign of righteousness according to which the whole universe was ordered, not excepting man, who was created in righteousness, though in virtue of his high endowments he was capable of opposing the will of his Maker and compassing his misery through failure of exercising his will in righteousness.

But God has made a way of escape from the consequences of man's failure. There was no excuse for that failure, but there was no limit to the love of God, who alone could help His miserable creature in his folly and his sin. "God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John

3:16. The wages of sin is death. From this there is no escape. Not even God can violate this order of cause and effect which He has Himself established. But He can send us a Savior who is able to bear the penalty of all men's sins. He spared not His own Son to accomplish the purpose of His infinite love.

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Gal. 4:4. 5.

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” Gal. 3:15.

“Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29.

“As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12.

“Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day. and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Luke 24:46.47.

The only way of deliverance from death is to embrace the Lamb of God who died for us and rose again, and the only way to embrace Him is by faith. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” He that believeth not shall be damned, whatever he may devise or do to escape the damnation of hell. The assumption that contrition is itself sufficient, when viewed in the light of reason, is absurd; for how could regret for a murder committed or a debt contracted undo the murder or pay the debt? When viewed in the light of revelation, is only a part of that sin of the soul which darkens all counsel and destroys all peace while, in working out the death which is its inevitable result, it practices its deception and flatters the carnal wisdom and righteousness that all is well and the goal of happiness is not far off. All is vanity when benighted sinners seek salvation without a Savior. When true contrition has been effected, that refuge of lies has been foreclosed by the knowledge of sin which the law has wrought, and all that remains is the cry,

“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Rom. 7:24.

And the deliverance comes when the Gospel comes with its proclamation of pardon, and faith receives it as the very word of God against whom we have sinned, who alone can forgive sin, and who announces His gracious will to forgive all who come to Him and give them peace in believing. This is the only comfort possible for the penitent sinner.

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Rom. 3:23-26.

It is a wonderful plan of divine wisdom and mercy, but it is perfectly sure because absolutely divine. The sinner is doomed to death, and the doom is pronounced by the Lord of all, from whose judgment there is no possible appeal. Must we then all die the everlasting death, seeing that all have sinned? So far as man can see, and man can help, there is no escape, and those who in their wisdom, which is as foolish as their sin and all its other products, think of still attaining salvation without embracing it as a free gift by faith in Christ, are arrant fools when they still risk their everlasting happiness upon a hope that has absolutely no foundation and no warrant. Why, the case is desperate. So far as reason can see, not even God can help us, for in His court man has received a perfectly equitable trial and a perfectly just sentence of death. All the more must we admire and adore the infinite mercy and wisdom of God in finding a way by which sinners already condemned and sentenced to death might escape their doom and inherit eternal life with all its blessedness. And this becomes especially amazing when the stupendous sacrifice which it involves is contemplated. God gave His own dear Son into the death which is our due, that we might escape the penalty which He suffered in our stead.

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 4:10.

“When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die; but God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” Rom. 5:6-8.

By that death for us, in our place and for our redemption, it was made possible that God should declare us free from the sentence of death that was pronounced upon us, forgiving all our sins because their penalty was borne in our stead by the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. This is what the apostle means when he says that now God can be just and still a justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. But it must not be overlooked that Christ is “set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood,” and that God gave His Son “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Faith is the only means by which we can become partakers of the heavenly benefits secured for mankind by our Savior’s obedience unto death. Only He that believeth shall be saved. Therefore it is a complete subversion of the Gospel to exclude from repentance the faith which alone can apprehend Christ with His merits and give the conscience peace.

3. The Proper Fruits of Repentance

Our Confession, after having pointed out what properly constitutes repentance, calls to mind also its legitimate fruits, which are the good works that follow. These could not be included as a constituent part in the nature of repentance, as some do include them, without changing the definition of the term and introducing confusion instead of clearness into the subject. In a narrower sense repentance is sometimes taken only for the knowledge of sin and the contrition of heart which follows, without including the faith which alone quiets the aroused conscience and gives the soul peace in Jesus. So the term is sometimes used in Scripture, as when we are told to “repent and believe the Gospel.” But ordinarily it means that turning to God which is identical with conversion and implies the apprehension of the proffered gift of eternal life. This is possible only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to which good works can contribute nothing, seeing that “a man is justified without the deeds of the law.” Rom. 3:28. They are not a part of repentance, but fruits which follow it.

In the first place, it is to be carefully noted that the purpose of our article is not to lessen the importance of good works, but to assign them their proper place in the order of grace. They are necessary by reason of the divine command and by reason of the power in true faith to produce them, but

not as a means of justification and salvation. Repentance is indispensable, but not because there is any merit in it on account of which God accepts us as His children. The sinner can be helped only by fleeing for refuge to the hope set before him in Christ. This implies that he is made aware of his sin and the condemnation that is upon him, and that he trusts in the atonement made by our Savior: in other words, that he comes to repentance, which is contrition as regards sin and faith as regards the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which secures and offers forgiveness. To include good works as a constituent element in the conception of repentance would mean that, before a man can have the peace of God as a pardoned sinner, he must not only acknowledge his sin and the justice of his condemnation, and by faith lay hold of the forgiveness which is offered by the grace of God on the ground of the redemption which is in Jesus Christ, but that he must also fulfill the law with its requirement of perfect holiness and all manner of good works. Thus the whole purpose of the Gospel is defeated, and the peace and comfort to which repentance is designed to lead is rendered impossible; for the troubled conscience which, when the Gospel is preached in its purity, is quieted by the absolution which it gives through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, is doubly disquieted when the false doctrine is impressed upon it, that such absolution is valid only in the case of those penitents who fulfill the divine demands of righteousness. The more sincere and earnest a penitent man is in his efforts to meet these demands, the more he will feel his shortcoming, and the less can his soul find rest. The poor human devices to remedy this error by teaching that God will not hold us strictly to the letter of the law, that He connives at many violations of His commandments on account of His pity for our infirmities, and that we can ourselves make atonement for many of our sins, are only errors born of errors, that can give no relief; for the troubled soul easily perceives that, when the curse is upon it because of failure to fulfill the law, all the urging to do the deeds of the law for our rescue can only make the matter worse, because even if obedience henceforth were perfect, it could not atone for past disobedience, and its conscious imperfection only adds to the accumulated burden of sin that is crushing it. The false doctrine of repentance is a doctrine of despair, doing away with all the consolation which the Gospel brings to penitent souls by assuring them that the Lamb of God has borne all our sins and suffered all their penalty, and that now for His sake pardon full and free is brought to us in the Gospel. Surely no further payment or atonement can be required of

us, since the Lamb of God has offered Himself as our substitute and made in our stead a payment and atonement which is complete and perfect, and which faith embraces in all its completeness and perfection.

But, in the second place, this does not disparage good works or in any sense render them indifferent in the divine plan of saving our lost race. They can merit nothing before God. In the unconverted they do not exist at all, because the deeds of the law performed by those who are at enmity with God are not good works at all, but only have the outward appearance of such, being only the performance of prescribed acts, while the heart is not in them, and therefore not fulfilling God's requirement. In the converted they are tainted with the sin that still dwelleth in us and therefore lack the perfection which the righteousness of the law demands. They can do nothing for our salvation, and trust in them only diverts the soul from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which does everything. But the will of God which is our sanctification, is not altered by His provision of divine grace for salvation through Christ alone, by faith alone. On the contrary it is at the same time a divine provision for the realization of the divine will that we should be holy, for God is holy. For whilst of ourselves we are able to do nothing good and all our works are only evil continually, that grace which saves us by faith purifies our hearts and renders us meet for His service. Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Tit. 2:14. He delivered us from the curse that sin has brought upon us, that freed from the bondage of sin we might live under Him in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:8-10.

The fact that we are not saved by good works does not mean that we are dispensed from doing them, but that, being saved by faith through the blood of Christ, we should now give Him all the praise, and honor Him by ordering our lives according to His good will. Hence our article says: "Then should follow good works, which are the fruits of repentance."

We must become children of God by faith before we can live as His children: the tree must be made good before it can bear good fruit. "Bring forth

therefore fruits meet for repentance.” Matt, 3:8. These fruits will follow as the proper utterance of the life that has been imparted. The turning away from sin and fleeing to Christ for its forgiveness will manifest itself in the good works which are pleasing to God and by His grace have been made pleasing to him who repents, so that they are no longer the bond servant’s deeds of the law, but the fruits of the Spirit yielded by the free child of God.

4. The Errors Which Faithful Christians Must Condemn

Our article condemns those who teach false doctrines concerning repentance. Prominent among these are the Anabaptists, the Novatians, and the Romanists.

[Our churches] “condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that men once justified can lose the Spirit of God, and likewise those who contend that some men may attain to such perfection in this life that they cannot sin.”

The error here condemned is not confined to the fanatical sect that rejected Infant Baptism and thence derived its name. That name was repudiated by later Baptists, not only because it was associated with the fanatical notions for which they had no desire to be held responsible, but also because it did them injustice in imputing to them the doctrines of a second baptism, whilst they only denied the validity of the baptism administered to infants. But that is not the point here under consideration. The Anabaptist name historically covers other errors which did not pass away with the repudiation of that name, and which our Confession condemns as unscriptural, wherever and under whatever name they may appear. The doctrine that a person once justified can never lose his title to salvation, in other words, that he can never fall from grace, has been adopted by all churches, such as the Presbyterian, that accept the Calvinistic system. The contention that a person “once in grace is always in grace,” and that a true believer can never cease to be such, is rejected, because the Bible teaches otherwise, to say nothing of the danger to which such an error subjects those who entertain it. Many have perished because they were secure in the false belief that they were still be-

lievers and needed no repentance, when Satan had ensnared them in sins which are irreconcilable with continuance in the Christian faith.

The other error that is expressly mentioned, that a person may advance to such perfection in holiness as to be unable to sin, is akin to this. It also fosters carnal security and closes the way to repentance. For when a man once gives way to the delusion that he has become incapable of sinning, he can fall into sin without twinges of conscience and imagine that all is right, though he lives after the flesh and therefore must die. Seemingly it is harsh to condemn people who are so holy as even to surpass in professions of holiness everything that our Lutheran people can claim. But our Lutheran Church is intent first of all to save souls in the way which the Scriptures reveal, in the assurance that this is the only possible way, and is prepared for the uncharitable judgments of men who know not the Scriptures, and for bearing the cross which is thus imposed. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1:8.

Such self-deception is possible for a believer, though Satan's purpose in bringing it about is plain to those who give earnest heed to the Scriptures. The enemy of souls designs to lead such persons away from Christ by the fatal delusion that they need no repentance, and no Lamb of God to bear away their sins, and no Gospel proclamation of pardon wherewith to comfort their hearts through faith. What seems so harsh and uncharitable in our Confession to many a sentimental soul is the loving and tender concern of Christian love for those who are entrapped by Satan's snares and whom it would release even if the rescue causes pain.

"The Novatians are also condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance."

A sect by that name does not now exist. They were a heretical party of the third century who made some trouble in the Church by refusing to absolve and admit to communion such persons as had fallen away from the Christian faith though they repented and desired to return. That was real harshness which, refusing to receive the penitent sinner, was in conflict with the faith and love of the Gospel. The sect has long since disappeared, but its spirit still stalks abroad among Christian people and leads in many churches to unevangelical treatment of poor souls that have fallen, but seek by repentance to recover their lost estate and standing. The Lutheran Church, which

to many seems so unloving in its condemnation of human error in its resistance of the Word of God, pleads for the evangelical love which, while it denounces all stubborn opposition to the truth revealed in the Bible, tenderly welcomes the vilest sinner that repents.

“They also that do not teach that remission of sins is obtained by faith, but command us to merit grace by satisfactions, are rejected.”

The reference is primarily to the Romanists, whose doctrine of repentance is largely a doctrine of penance and indulgences, in which the Church imposes satisfaction for sins and releases from the punishment denounced upon them by the Lord of all, thus arrogating to itself the authority which belongs exclusively to God, and setting aside the only saving truth of Holy Scripture. It is all an outgrowth of Rome’s fundamental error of human power in spiritual things, and its consequent rejection of the supremacy of Holy Scripture and of the doctrine of justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law. Certain of its faith, and sure of those things which the Scriptures declare with such clearness that every child of God can have the full assurance of faith, the Church of the Augsburg Confession, in its devotion to Christ and its solicitude for the salvation of souls, can make no concessions to Roman error, whether advocated and practiced by Papists or Protestants, but in the name of God rejects them.

Article XIII. Of The Use Of The Sacraments.

Concerning the use of the Sacraments they teach that they were ordained not only to be marks of profession among men, but rather that they should be signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, set forth unto us to stir up and confirm faith in such as use them. Therefore the Sacraments must be used so that faith is joined with them, which believes the promises that are offered and declared to us by the Sacraments. Wherefore they condemn those that teach that the Sacraments justify by the work done, and do not teach that faith which believes the remission of sins is requisite in the use of the Sacraments.

WHEN OUR CONFSSION speaks of the holy Sacraments of the New Testament with their blessings of grace, they always mean Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Church under the Roman pontiff had added five others, so that there were seven. What our Confession declares of the design of the Sacraments does not apply to all the ceremonies which the Romanists place in that category. Some of these were not even divine institutions and some do not belong to the order of grace unto salvation. Our fathers were not disposed to dispute about words, but they were deeply concerned to have the truth which the Scriptures teach brought to the knowledge of men and to secure its acceptance as a merciful message from the God of heaven. Therefore they could not be indifferent when a term was misapplied in such a way as to mislead people and inculcate error. They rightly maintained in the Apology:

“If we call the Sacraments ‘rites which have the command of God. and to which the promise of grace has been added,’ it is easy to decide what are properly Sacraments. For rites instituted by men will not in this way be Sacraments properly so called.”

The reason is obvious. Men cannot prescribe laws that will bind human consciences, and they cannot promise grace that will acquit transgressors of God's laws. Only two of the rites in use in the Church under the name of Sacraments had the elements named in the definition, and only these two were retained in the Lutheran Church as Sacraments. Other rites that had the warrant of Scripture were reverently maintained, but not as Sacraments. Accordingly only the two Sacraments mentioned above are had in view in the article before us, which sets forth the design of the Sacraments, the use that is to be made of them, and condemns the abuse which arises from the false conception of their nature and purpose.

I. The Nature and Design of the Sacraments.

Our article shows, first, the nature and design of the Sacraments. In doing this it sets forth what is not the specific and proper end for which they were instituted, and then points out the gracious purpose for which our Lord ordained them, that we may thus be enabled to use them according to the Lord's will.

1. Not Only Marks of Profession

Our Church teaches concerning the use of the Sacraments "that they were ordained not only to be marks of profession among men." Incidentally they certainly are this. When a person is baptized he is the subject of a Sacrament which is distinctively Christian and which marks him as a member of the Christian community; and when he receives the Holy Supper he declares himself to be a disciple of Christ who publicly performs an act designed to show forth the Lord's death till He come. Only Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper, and its reception is a mark of their profession. So plain is this that no intelligent person fails to recognize the communicant at the holy altar to be professedly a Christian. Nay, so manifest is this that in the present divided state of the visible Church the partaking of the Sacrament in a Roman Catholic church marks the communicant as a Romanist, and communing in a Lutheran church marks him as a Lutheran, so that intercommunion between different denominations is impossible without impeachment of the honesty of the person who communes with a church with

which he could not with a good conscience consent to be identified. But to be such marks of profession among men is not the chief end of the Sacraments. Therefore those who teach that this is their only purpose are grievously in error. The truth which the Scriptures teach and the Church of the Reformation confesses is so distasteful to many that, in their endeavor to escape it, they can think of no better purpose for which the holy Sacraments were ordained than that of being marks of recognition as Christians. All the power and grace of these divine institutions is thus denied, and the holy Sacraments with their potency and mystery and heavenly comfort are reduced to mere labels by which the observer may know who wants to be regarded as a Christian and who does not.

2. Their Higher Purpose

Therefore our Confession, after declaring that such note of confession is not the only end of the Sacraments, shows their higher purpose, “That they should be signs and testimonies of the will of God towards us, set forth unto us to stir up and confirm faith in such as use them.” They are part of the Gospel, and thus blessed means of grace, revealing to us the thoughts of peace which God has towards us forlorn sinners.

“For these rites,” [says the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. 13, § 4. 5,] “have God’s command and the promise of grace which are peculiar to the New Testament. For when we are baptized, when we eat the Lord’s body, when we are absolved, they ought certainly to assure us that God truly forgives us for Christ’s sake. And God at the same time, by Word and by rites, moves hearts to believe and conceive faith, just as St. Paul says, ‘Faith cometh by hearing.’ Rom. 10:17. But just as the Word enters the ears, in order to strike hearts, so the rite itself meets the eyes, in order to move hearts. The effect of the Word and of the rite is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is ‘a visible Word,’ because the rite is received by the eyes, and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Wherefore the effect of both is the same.”

When our article accordingly says that the Sacraments are “signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us,” the purpose is not to suggest that they are symbols of some absent good which may at some other time and in some other way be imparted to us, but which here and now are only represented, as was taught by Reformed parties, who declined to join our Lutheran confessors at Augsburg, and is usually taught now by denominations of the Reformed type. They are not empty signs, whose effect would

be only to arouse the imagination and awaken expectations which have no warrant and which offer nothing of which faith could lay hold for the soul's comfort and peace, but valid and infallible signs and testimonies of God's will towards us, just as the Word of the Gospel preached carries with it the things which the words signify. It is marvelous that, when we speak of the Sacraments as signs, any Christian should think of signs that have no content and therefore only mock and deceive those who place any confidence in them as signs which testify what the will of God is. They are signs and testimonies which are as sure and true as God is true, and which God gives us to the end that we should believe them and rejoice in the consolation. They show us the gracious will of Him who seeks our salvation and who is able to save, as the Gospel shows it in words. When therefore Baptism by the application of water in the name of the Holy Trinity signifies the washing away of our sins through the blood of our Savior, and the Lord's Supper presents His body and blood as a sign that the remission of sins is secured by His sacrifice, the signification is a testimony of God to the person receiving them that the thing signified is a reality of the Gospel at that moment administered, and that may absolutely be depended upon and confidently believed as unfailing testimonies of God's will towards us.

We are miserable sinners and have nothing to expect but the death which is the wages of sin. Following our own thoughts, when we have been brought to the knowledge of our sin, we, knowing the revelation of God's wrath against the ungodliness of men, are prone to presume that the utmost sign which God could give us in such circumstances would mean mercy, as soon as future fruits of repentance in some measure atoned for past violations of divine law. But that means that we permit the sin that is in us to be a barrier in the way of the Gospel light and consolation, so that the good news of our redemption through the blood of Jesus is not trusted, whereas the very purpose of the Sacrament is to give us a sign and testimony and pledge from God Himself that the forgiveness of our sins has been acquired by our Savior's sacrifice and is now offered without money and without price. This sign and testimony is given to each individual soul that comes to the Sacrament and is designed for the peace and comfort of all. Of course those who do not believe it cannot realize the blessing that is in it. Alas, that so many, even so many Christians, by their false doctrine concerning the Sacraments, help to maintain the barriers which sin erects against the entrance into souls of the precious Gospel with its tidings of pardon!

God has left nothing undone that could bring the great salvation, which was secured at an infinite sacrifice, to the hearts of the redeemed. Those holy Sacraments, which to so many are a stone of stumbling when presented in their evangelical meaning and purpose, are still means of grace and a joy to those that believe. And we must not be surprised to find that many regard the whole doctrine of sacramental grace a mere superstition. It is the treatment which the world accords the Gospel in general and in every form.

“We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” 1 Cor. 1:23.24.

Even the Christians among those who reject the Sacraments as means of imparting the forgiveness of sins, and who pronounce our evangelical doctrine an absurdity, as it no doubt is when judged by man’s poor reason, are generally found to reject the absolution offered in the Gospel as well when it is declared in the Word as when it is presented in the Sacraments. But the divine will of grace and peace remains the same, whether men will hear or forbear, and those who believe the proclamation of pardon have the grace and peace, though many should pity them for their trust in “the foolishness of preaching.” The sacramental “signs and testimonies of the will of God towards us,” as well as the declaration of that will in words, are “set forth unto us to stir up and confirm faith in them that use them.” They are means by which God imparts His grace unto salvation. Their purpose is the same as that of the Gospel preached, and their power is the same. When a heathen hears the Word, its design is to work faith in his soul; when he believes, he is baptized and further hears the Word for the confirmation of his faith. When a child of Christian parents is baptized, the design of the Sacrament is to regenerate and work faith in its heart. and the Word continues the work of grace which was begun in its Baptism. The Holy Supper is a constant stream of grace for those whom Baptism and the Word have brought into the communion of saints, and confirms them in their blessed estate as believers. In all these merciful provisions which we call the means of grace, the divine will is to bring souls to Christ by faith and to keep them in that faith unto eternal life. God commends His love to us not only in giving His beloved Son to die for us, but also in providing so richly for the communi-

cation of His grace by means of the Word and Sacrament, that the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins may be constantly renewed, that our faith may be sustained, and that our calling and election may be made sure.

II. The Necessity of Believing The Gospel

But it is the principal object of this thirteenth article to emphasize the necessity of believing the Gospel for the attainment of its gracious purpose.

“Therefore the Sacraments must be used so that faith is joined with them, which believes the promises that are offered and declared unto us by the Sacraments.”

It might seem needless to lay so much stress on this point, because it could justly be regarded as self-evident, that if a divine promise is to be of any benefit, it must be accepted as true and effective, in other words, it must be believed. Faith is the only possible way of appropriating a promise, and when the Word and the Sacraments convey to us the precious gift of life and salvation with the promise that he that believes shall possess the gift, there is no conceivable mode of availing ourselves of the gracious treasure but that of believing the divine testimony. But plain as this is, the Church of the Reformation was confronted by a papistic theory of human error that deceived the people, and was all the more effective in maintaining the error because it had long been in use and had the advantage of established custom in its favor. That theory was that the Sacraments are divine ordinances committed to the Roman Church for administration, conferring the blessings of the redemption to all upon whom that Church thought proper to bestow them. Subjection to the papal decrees and ordinances was thus secured, and the work done by the authorized agents of the Church was accordingly thought invariably efficacious to put its subjects in possession of the blessings which the means of grace were designed to confer. The work performed by the priest was held to be all-sufficient, without any regard to the faith or unbelief of the person to whom the Sacrament was administered. And to this was added, according to the doctrine of human merit and work-righteousness which was in vogue in the Romish Church, the vain fancy that the work performed in going to church and taking part in the priestly administration is meritorious, so that the people were led to think them-

selves safe from the curse of their sin, if they only did what the Church prescribed and could obtain the Sacraments. In view of such fundamental errors in doctrine and consequent ruinous abuses in practice, it was necessary that our Church should, in accordance with her Scriptural doctrine of justification by faith alone, set forth the right use of the Sacraments.

How necessary this was and still is appears not only from the fact that Rome still adheres to her unscriptural theory, but that many even among the intelligent of our day have so little insight into the plan of salvation revealed in the Gospel that they charge upon the Lutheran Church the very errors of “sacramental religion” which she took such pains to expose and warn against in her glorious Confession. The mind of man is very dull in comprehending evangelical truth. Not the work which man does, whether priest or layman, but the work of grace which God does through Word and Sacrament saves the soul.

The Church of the Augsburg Confession, sincerely and absolutely subject to the King as He rules by His Word, and therefore always intent upon confessing and maintaining the truth, avoiding all extremes which run into error on the right hand or on the left, could not be faithful to her principle and constant in her solicitude for the salvation of souls without insisting on the efficacy of the means which God has appointed for man’s regeneration through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and which secure the forgiveness of sins and bring peace to the troubled conscience. But she could not be faithful either if she overlooked or failed to impress the necessity of faith for the apprehension and enjoyment of the blessings which the grace of God, communicated in the Word and Sacraments, conveys for our redemption.

Faith that believes nothing is nonsense. Those who talk about faith in matters of the soul’s salvation, without having a sure Word of God to rest upon as its object, are chasing an illusion of their own fancy. They are fanatics that people can follow only at their peril. Only God can release us from the curse that sin has brought upon us, and even He can do this in consistency with His righteousness only because of the unspeakable sacrifice of His Son for our redemption. How stupid, how thankless, how insulting to the Divine Majesty it is then to aver that all is well if only the condemned sinner will brace himself up, and perform some acts in conformity with the law, and flatter himself that this will pay his debt and establish himself in the sight of God as one who has fulfilled all righteousness. Why, even in the

sight of men this would be a miserable farce, at which infidels and devils might laugh, but believers and angels would weep.

When God asks us to believe, this always means that we are to believe the assurances of His Word. He gives us something to believe, and offers His testimony as trustworthy. If anything in heaven or on earth is reliable, this surely must be. Hence the unutterable gravity of the sin which refuses to trust this infallible Word of Him who knoweth all things.

“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” 1 John 5:10-11.

There is much that men are pleased to call faith which is mere opinion without even rational, much less Scriptural foundation, and which in the sense of the Bible is not faith at all. The Scriptures present things that are sure; and on the testimony of God, who cannot lie, His children believe them, because they are sure. This is Christian faith, which it does not lie in the power of man to create, but which the Holy Ghost works and which clings to the Gospel as the sinner’s only hope for salvation. “For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Eph. 2:8.

The thought that any religious belief will save, if it only be sincere, is one of the follies of the flesh. The only faith that can save is that which embraces Christ, who is presented in the Gospel, and in whom we have remission of sins through His blood shed for us. Saving faith has for its object the record which God gave of His Son, with the testimony of the Holy Spirit given in that record, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. All the benefits secured for us by our Lord through His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, are graciously presented to us in the means which He has appointed for the purpose, that the remission of sin, life and salvation, which He secured for us, might be brought to us. These means are the Gospel with its accompanying Sacraments, to all of which He has attached His promise that they shall accomplish that whereunto He sent them. They are the bearers to us of the remission of sins and eternal life acquired for us upon the cross. When the Gospel is preached, and the Sacraments are administered, God the Holy Spirit is by them doing His saving work. The blessings offered are not merely typified or signified

or held out in future prospect, but are really present then and there as gracious gifts upon which faith can lay hold and have in possession. If God gives nothing, we can take nothing. As in the Gospel preached, so in the Sacraments administered, He gives what Christ has acquired for us. No one can have it and hold it unless it is brought to him. To convey it to us is the purpose of the means of grace. But it does not follow that all to whom it is brought are really in possession of the life and salvation thus conveyed to the very doors of the soul. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.

“Therefore the Sacraments must be used so that faith is joined with them, which believes the promises that are offered and declared unto us by the Sacraments.”

These are what our Lord has ordained them to be and bring to us the grace of our Savior, who loved us and gave Himself for us, whether we believe it or not. Our faith does not make and our unbelief does not unmake the means of grace, which the Lord has instituted for our salvation. The Sacraments are not means of grace when we believe the promises, and when we do not believe their testimony, mere empty signs. As man cannot save himself in his sinful impotency, it is unworthy of a Christian to assume for a moment that he can make a divinely appointed rite effectual for his salvation, though he affirms that such rite is powerless to effect it without the potency which he imagines himself to confer by giving it the sanction of his belief. The Church of the Augsburg Confession had too much concern for the salvation of souls to dally with superstitious notions about the efficacy of human beliefs in the counsels and courts of Heaven. God alone can save our lost souls; He has provided for that salvation by the mission of His Son to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of us all; He has sent the Holy Spirit to dispense in Word and Sacrament the salvation thus provided, so that he who believes it may have it. Faith now is the only condition of the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life, not because the redemption is completed or the gift is made more valid by our faith, but because the blessing secured by our Savior's obedience unto death, and offered by the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament, can be appropriated and realized in the individual only by the divinely wrought faith which accepts the divine testimony. Therefore there is and can be no salvation without faith in the Lord Jesus, by whose grace forgiveness of sins and eternal life are freely offered

in the means of His appointment. The natural effect of beliefs on soul and body are not here under consideration and are not relevant. No doubt beliefs, whether rational or irrational, have a weighty influence upon our life, as is evinced in the manifest power of superstitions among the people, and also of scientific opinions, many of which could be fairly ranked among superstitions. But the influence of subjective conditions on the human soul cannot with any reasonableness be transferred to God, who is not subject to human moods and fancies. He knows the truth, and with him only the truth can prevail. If a man entertains an error under the conviction that it is truth, it may influence him, but it cannot influence his Maker. Man can believe a lie and may regard it as true, but its power as a lie will never change the truth of God or change His government of the world in truth and righteousness. Belief of a falsehood, whatever may be its influence on man's mind or body, will never secure his salvation, because it cannot in any manner or degree affect the mind of God. The plan of salvation which His infinite wisdom has devised, and which involved the whole mystery of the incarnation and the death of His Son for our rescue from sin and death, can be changed by no thoughts and feelings of the lost souls whom He has redeemed. And so it is with the application of the redemption through the means of grace. They set forth the unchangeable truth, and only that truth in Jesus can make us free. He that believeth shall be saved. If that truth is not accepted by faith, which is the only way in which its acceptance is possible, the salvation offered is rejected and the soul remains, notwithstanding all that God has done to save it, in its sin and its helplessness, and must die. "He that believeth not shall be damned." From this divine decree there is no possible appeal. The grace offered in the Sacraments can be appropriated only by faith, which believes the promises they set forth.

III. Not The Work Done

What follows in our Confession is necessarily implied in the preceding statement of our Lutheran faith in the Gospel promises. Our churches, adhering in sincerity to the Word of God and confidently clinging to its instructions and assurances, "condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify by the work done, and do not teach that faith which believes, the remission of sins is requisite in the use of the Sacraments." As the Romanists

with their *opus operatum* theory, which means that the administration of the Sacraments by the priest effects their purpose of saving souls, without regard to faith, are the party that maintains the error in view, the condemnation refers especially to them. Their controversy with the Lutheran Church is mainly against the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith. In their opposition to this most consolatory teaching of the Gospel, they seem to maintain the supremacy of grace, whilst in reality they contend for salvation by human power. What they claim is not the absolute impartation of the benefits of the redemption to every man that hears the Gospel and receives the Sacraments, but rather that the power of the Church, to which their administration is committed, makes the discrimination, so that those to whom the priest administers the Sacrament have its blessing; whether they believe or not, whilst according to the Lord's Word he that believeth shall be saved, and no others, whatever men may say, or do, though these men may call themselves the only saving Church. The Sacraments, according to Romish notions, always produce their gracious effects in virtue of their rightful administration, but they control the dispensing and therefore limit their gracious effects to those whom they are pleased to regard as fit subjects. The Roman error works badly from every point of view, but the root of the evil is the rejection of salvation by grace alone. But it is just this fundamental truth which Romanists reject that the Church of the Reformation contended for and still insists upon as the way of peace in believing and joy in the Holy Ghost. Romanists declare a precious truth when they teach that the Sacraments convey the grace which they signify, but they grievously err when they teach that man may possess this grace without faith.

The Reformed churches teach a precious truth when they maintain that grace is appropriated only by faith, but they grievously err when they teach that grace is not communicated by Word and Sacrament. The Lutheran Church condemns the errors of both and confesses the whole counsel of God.

Article XIV. Of The Ecclesiastical Office.

Concerning the ecclesiastical office they teach, that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the Sacraments unless he be rightly called.

ALTHOUGH IN A PREVIOUS ARTICLE the doctrine of the ministry was set forth, this article is by no means superfluous. Its contents are not a repetition of the truth there confessed. They pertain to an entirely different phase of the subject. There the necessity of the means appointed by our Lord for the communication of His grace unto salvation and the administration of these means is set forth; here the order is prescribed in which the public administration should take place according to the will of the Lord revealed in His Word.

In order rightly to understand this article the fact must be kept in mind, that for the purpose of applying to man the benefits and blessings which have been secured for all by the redemption through the sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God, certain means were appointed to this end. These are the Word and the Sacraments. We can be saved only by faith, which is a gift of God as well as the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation in Christ which this faith appropriates. The redemption of all men does not imply the salvation of all men. By grace are ye saved through faith. The gift of eternal life is forced upon no man. Only he that believeth shall be saved.

“That we may obtain this faith the ministry of teaching the Word and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For by the Word and Sacraments the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith.”

The plan of God’s wisdom and love is complete. He has redeemed us and provided for the communication of the benefits of that redemption to all the world by the institution of effectual means to accomplish this end. These

means never fail. Their purpose is always attained unless men reject them, or using them reject the salvation which they offer. And as that salvation can be accepted only by faith, He has endowed these means with the power to work such faith in the subject of these means, at the same time that they bring to the soul the heavenly gifts which faith is to appropriate. That some do not believe and are not saved is owing to no lack of divine mercy or of divine provision for their salvation, but only to their stubborn resistance of the grace which saves others and would save them if they did not willfully and obstinately reject the gracious gift. God will not by coercion save the creatures endowed with will, who declare themselves unwilling to be saved and wage war against all the efforts of His mercy to save them.

The means by which the Lord sends His Holy Spirit to bring souls to Him, that they may rejoice in His salvation through faith in His name, must be administered. This is self-evident. The Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to all them that believe, cannot exert its saving power on those who never hear it; and the Sacraments, which convey the grace of God to regenerate sinful man and promote the new life thus imparted, cannot confer the blessings which they were appointed to convey on people who are not brought to Baptism and do not come to the Holy Supper. If these Sacraments are not administered, they practically do not exist and can effect nothing, as the Gospel can effect nothing when it is not read or heard. Therefore our Lord not only ordained certain means of grace, but also commanded their administration. "Go ye therefore," He said to His disciples, "and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." This administration, performed in His name, accomplishes His work. He is always present in His means, and by His power the promises which He has given in connection with them are fulfilled. They have the same efficacy when administered by His disciples as if He administered them directly in His own person, for He has ordained them that they should communicate forgiveness of sins, life and salvation which He has purchased with His blood, has given His solemn promise to this effect, and is Himself present always to insure its fulfillment.

These precious means He has committed to His disciples for administration. Others have not the qualifications necessary to be found faithful in a work of such importance and could not be entrusted with its performance. If

men are not willing to follow Jesus and profess themselves willing to be His servants, they cannot be presumed to be honored with such a noble stewardship. Our Lord committed the great work to His own people, whom His grace has made capable of appreciating its greatness and its glory.

“Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you; as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” John 20:21-23

God alone can do the gracious work of saving souls; He does it through the means of grace which He has instituted for the purpose; the administration of these means is entrusted to believers. When the believers in any locality have organized a congregation and made provisions for the public administration of these means, it is a matter of course that some one is called publicly to perform the work. The whole congregation cannot as a body preach and administer the Sacraments. Individuals must do that, otherwise confusion and trouble must ensue; for as all are brethren and all are equal, one has just as much the right and the duty to preach and to baptize as the other. Thus there could be no decency and order in the public ministrations of the church. Even if our Lord had made no provisions for the need arising from the conditions presented, the judgment of Christians would have impelled them, in the exercise of their liberty, to appoint some agency to act, for the sake of order, in behalf of all, and thus to establish a public ministry. But God in His wisdom and mercy did not leave this to the discretion of His people. He ordained that proper persons should be chosen for the important work. The public office of the ministry was instituted. To this office His people should call men whom they find qualified, and no one should then presume to discharge the functions of such office in the church without a regular call.

Various theories of this ministry have been promulgated among Christian people, and much mischief has been done in consequence of human errors. The results of the errors which became dominant in the Church of Rome are manifest in the struggles of the Reformation. The opinion gradually became current that, as certain persons were to be called to administer the means of grace committed to the church, these persons themselves were the exclusive possessors of these means and lords of their administration, so that the forgiveness of sins and eternal life could be given or withheld at

their will or pleasure. One opinion was that the power to administer these means effectually was given only to the men chosen for the purpose and therefore only to the ministers; another was that it was bestowed only on the apostles, and then upon those whom they chose as their successors; and still another was that all power of administration was conferred upon the Apostle Peter and his successors. Connected with all these unevangelical speculations was the fancy that the efficacy of the divinely appointed means must be dependent on the appointed human ministers. Thus it came to pass that an episcopal and a papal system came into vogue in the Christian Church, and that the forgiveness of sins was made dependent on the will of the bishops and the pope, and the poor people were brought under the tyranny of their authority. The Lutheran Church had a formidable opponent in a hierarchy that was long established in its error, and not only had tradition in its favor, but had all human power "at its command. Against such errors our Confession is humanly at a disadvantage when it declares in regard to the whole subject of church government, which means the administration of the means of grace by which our Lord does His saving work and rules His saved people as a congregation of believers, that the minister should be rightly called by the Christian people.

It is implied that this call must be extended, of course, by the believers who have received the commission, as witnesses of the great salvation which the grace of God has bestowed upon them, to tell others of this grace, mercy and peace. They alone, not a special order or class, have the means of grace and can administer them according to God's will, and they alone, when public ministrations become necessary in organized congregations, can appoint ministers to officiate publicly in their name. No one has a right, without the authority of the people to whom the Word and Sacraments were committed, to administer these means of grace publicly in the church. He sins if he undertakes to do it, without a rightful call from the congregation of believers, whose rights he is publicly to exercise. It is certain from the Word of God that the administration of the means of grace belongs to all believers, and no other authorization to do this publicly is required than the will of the congregation to do it in the name of all the brethren, to whom the right and the duty originally belongs. Faith ever moves to confess Christ for the glory of His name, and love ever prompts to share with others our joys and hopes. The first believers, whose faith came by hearing the preaching of Jesus, told others of the Savior they had found. Andrew told Simon about

the Messiah's advent, and Simon found Nathanael and urged him to come and see the promised Christ. The consoling truth of His resurrection was first proclaimed not by persons holding an office in the Church, but by the women to whom it had been made known by angels at the empty tomb. The Gospel thus declared was and is the power of God unto salvation just as fully as when it is publicly preached in the congregation by those who hold the ecclesiastical office. "The Sacraments and the Word," our Confession rightly says in the eighth article, "are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ," not at all by reason of any moral superiority of those who administer them. Men are deluded by a carnal fantasy when they dream of higher rights and nobler powers than those of the children of God by faith, or of bestowing efficacy upon the divinely appointed means of grace by the imaginary heavenly virtue of ecclesiastical dignities. The saving of souls by the administration of the means of grace, through which alone it can be effected, is the work of the Church, the congregation of believers, not of an exclusive class or caste in the Church. Primarily and immediately the means of grace are given to the whole Church with the high commission to administer them for the accomplishment of the Lord's beneficent purpose, to the glory of His great name and the salvation of men's souls.

That does not imply that there is no special office of the public ministry in the church, for the rightful discharge of which a call is necessary. There is such an office, and no one should assume it unless he be rightly called.

"Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?" 1 Cor. 12:29.

"How shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?" Rom. 10:15.

"He gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Eph. 4:11.12.

"The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth laborers into His harvest." Matt. 9:37.38.

But to such public ministry a special vocation is necessary, that the Lord's complaint against the false prophets of old may not apply to the ministers of the Church:

"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." Jer. 23:21.

There is a public office of the ministry which our Lord has instituted, but "no man taketh this honor to himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." Heb. 5:4. This is what our article means-when it declares that no one should publicly in the church teach or administer the Sacraments unless he be rightly called.

The question of fundamental import here pertains to the source and mode of such a call. Who has the right to issue it, and when is a pastor rightly called? Seemingly the answer is easily given. God alone has authority to call His ministers. All Christians recognize that, and so far all Christian churches agree. But that does not settle all controversies in regard to the ecclesiastical office. The pope claims that all divine authority is vested in him, and that without his approval no one has a right to officiate in the Church; the fanatic can see no reason why any ado should be made about a regular call, when a man or woman that feels called by the Spirit has all the vocation that any converted person can think of asking. The Lutheran Church, in her profound reverence for the Word of God in Holy Scripture, can subscribe to neither of these extremes nor to any intermediate human opinions that disregard the revealed will of the Lord. He alone calls the public ministers of His Church, but He calls them through the Church, to which He has committed the means of grace with the commission to administer them in His name, that the person called may be the minister of the Church and publicly discharge her duty at the same time that he is the minister of the Lord and does His will in the administration of the means entrusted to His congregation of believers. He alone is rightly called, whom the' congregation calls to exercise in its name the rights and duties entrusted to it in the gift of the means of grace.

In view of the teaching of the Bible in regard to the high prerogatives of Christian believers, the fanatical notion that every person who is or professes to be a disciple of Christ is, in virtue of his faith, a minister of the Church, seems a venial error, if it is to be regarded as an error at all. Is he

not called of God, when he is converted, to strengthen his brethren by confessing the Savior's name, and to spread His truth and His praise abroad? This is so manifest that no Christian should think of denying it. And the Lutheran Church has no thought of entering such a denial. On the contrary, she emphasizes the fact and sees in it the whole foundation of the doctrine of the ecclesiastical office which the Scriptures teach and which she confesses. To the believers the means of grace are entrusted. They are commanded to administer them for their own edification and for the extension of the communion of saints. Their precious gifts must not be disparaged, and their holy rights and privileges must not be disregarded. But the Lord's order must be observed, else confusion and strife will ensue, and the Church will suffer. Our Lord has provided that everything shall be done decently and in order, that the Church may be edified and the disciples may dwell together in unity and peace. They are all kings and priests unto God, each one rejoicing in the great salvation which he has received through grace, and each one intent upon glorifying the Savior by confessing Him before all men and using the means given him to bring others to the faith which imparts peace and the hope of glory. But when these people unite in a congregation they readily acknowledge that the gifts which they have received are the gifts which, others have received also, and that when they are to be exercised in the assembly of believers, not all can at the same time exercise their individual rights and duties as believers. Others are endowed with the same gifts and the same rights and duties. The only way to preserve order and peace is to call some properly qualified individual to act as the representative of all and to discharge the rights and duties common to them all in their name and in their behalf. That is the way of the Lord's appointment and that is the rightful call to the public office of the ministry.

If then one claims the right to arrogate to himself the ecclesiastical office of the public ministry in the Church, he violates the order and command of God and tramples under foot the equal rights of others, violating at once the law of God and the faith and charity of the Gospel.

“Since Christians have all things in common,” (says Luther,) “as we have shown and proved, it could not be right for one to push himself forward and appropriate to himself what belongs to us all. Let him maintain this right and exercise it when there is no other person who has also received it. But this is required by the rights of the community, that one, or as many as the congregations chooses, should be elected and accepted, who shall administer the office publicly in the place of all those who have precisely the same rights.”

Among errorists who call themselves Protestants without accepting the Protestant principles of absolute submission to the authority of Scripture, the Opinion often prevails that every Christian, having as such the means of grace and the right to administer them, may, if he thinks himself Qualified and feels so inclined, assume the duties of the public ministry, alleging that he has the call of the Holy Spirit which alone is necessary. How much trouble this makes it is easy to perceive, and the history of sectarian operations manifestly demonstrates. Reason and experience confirm the wisdom of the divine order, that the minister should be called by those who have equal rights in the public administration of the common property of the congregation, and that disorder and confusion, strife and contention must follow the assumption by any individual of an office which belongs to all alike. He cannot be rightly called if his brethren do not want him as their representative in the administration of their common possessions for the attainment of their common ends. Their assumption that they are the proper persons for the work discredits their pretensions. It rather proves that they lack the necessary qualifications for an office of such magnitude and responsibility. Nor does their appeal to the will of the Spirit within them help their fanatical attempt to override the Scriptural claims of the other Christians to the public administration of their common property. Protestant believers must resent this as the tyranny of popish rule in another form. If it were so that the Holy Spirit manifested His will that they should be public ministers of the Church, He unquestionably would have manifested this will to the rest of the brotherhood concerned and secured for them a regular call.

To the subject of our article it is vital to determine wherein such a regular call consists; for only thus can it be decided who is rightly called and is therefore authorized to minister in the public office of the church. In the appendix to our Smalcald Articles, which forms a part of our Lutheran Confession, and which is designed to vindicate the right of the Church to elect her own ministers, it is declared:

“Where the Church exists there is always the command to preach the Gospel. Therefore the churches must retain the power of calling, electing and ordaining ministers. And this power is a gift which God has, in the proper sense, bestowed upon the Church and which cannot, by any human power, be taken away from her, as St. Paul testifies: ‘He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.’ Eph. 4:8. Among these gifts which belong to the Church He enumerates pastors and teachers, and adds that these are given for the edification of the body of Christ. Hence it follows that where there is a true church there must also be the power to elect and ordain ministers; as in case of necessity a mere layman can absolve another and become his minister. So St. Augustine relates the case of two Christians in a ship, one of whom baptized the other and then was absolved by him. Here belong also the words of Christ which testify that the keys are given to the whole Church, not to a few particular persons, as the text says: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.’ Matt. 18:20.”

It will be observed, that the Christians are a priesthood to whom all instructions for the maintenance and spread of Christianity are given, and to this end the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed to them, that their work may be effectual for the accomplishment of the Lord’s gracious purpose. All the rights and duties of the children of God by faith are theirs. Therefore when they assemble for worship and work, theirs is the duty and the privilege, since not all can perform the requisite public functions without creating confusion that would defeat their object, to elect some one to act in behalf of them all in conducting the worship and administering the means of grace. To him is thus committed the public office of the ministry of the church, and whoever presumes to usurp this ecclesiastical office, without being thus rightly called, sins at once against the divine institution and the rights of the Christian people.

The members of the congregation thus calling a minister to perform the public functions necessary in their corporate capacity do not abdicate or forfeit the gifts and privileges which they possess as kings and priests, to whom the Lord has entrusted the means of grace and thus the keys of the kingdom of heaven. They retain all their rights and powers, in virtue of which they call a minister for the public discharge of the duties which these involve. They have signed away nothing when they have elected a pastor. They never had the right to infringe upon the equal rights of others, and never were appointed to the ecclesiastical office. When the work of the congregation is to be done according to the Lord’s direction they appoint some one to do it in their behalf, because it is impossible for each individually to discharge the duty directly in his own person. But the work which is thus done according to the Christian people’s call is their work, for the public

performance of which they have made the minister their agent. For the right conduct of such ecclesiastical office they hold him responsible to the church, whose representative they have called him to be; and as the work which they have called him to do is that which the Lord has primarily and immediately consigned to them and for which He has given the necessary instructions, He holds them responsible to Him for its performance according to His revealed will. He is thus at once the minister of Christ and of His Church. As the congregation is thus responsible for the discharge of the public office according to the Lord's will, it is manifest why the Church must insist that no one should publicly in the church preach or administer the Sacraments unless he be rightly called.

Article XV. Of Ecclesiastical Rites.

Concerning ecclesiastical rites they teach, that those rites shall be observed which may be observed without sin and are profitable for tranquility and good order in the Church; such as are set holidays, feasts, and such like. Yet concerning such things men are admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as if such services were necessary to salvation. They are also admonished that human traditions, instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning food, and days, and such like, instituted to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.

rites and ceremonies have occasioned not a little trouble in the churches. Considering that we have in the New Testament no ceremonial laws imposed upon the Lord's people, and that no ordinances of men can bind the conscience of Christians, such trouble appears needless. But that does not prevent its occurrence and recurrence. If all men saw and believed the truth which the Holy Scriptures teach, the situation would be different. But not all men know the truth, and not all men have faith. Hence our Confession in a former article referred to the subject in a connection indicating the mistake made in estimating the value of such ordinances. "Unto the true unity of the Church," it says in Art. 7, "it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by men, should be alike everywhere." This shows the purpose of returning to the subject in the present article, which points out the difference between rites and ceremonies, and the consequent difference in their worth and treatment.

I. External Rites are Unavoidable

As all activities in which men engage to do the work which the Lord has committed to them in the Church on earth must needs take form in space

and time, external rites and ceremonies of a religious character are unavoidable. We cannot preach, baptize or pray without doing this in some mode or form. It is therefore merely an unreasonable attempt to rid ourselves of the inevitable when it is argued that, as rites and ceremonies only make trouble, the way of wisdom is to eschew them all and live a Spiritual life without material manifestations. That would mean that such spiritual life must be doomed to death for want of air. The Christian Church cannot exert its powers and do the work enjoined upon it without some ceremony or form of activity in which its life becomes manifest. Hence the need of distinguishing between the ceremonies in which the Christian activity is expressed, or alleged to be expressed, in order thus to apply the Scriptural criterion to the rites and ceremonies appearing in the Church and their claims to observance.

1. Distinguishing Between Divine and Human Rites and Ceremonies

All Christians may be presumed to admit at once the importance of distinguishing between those rites and ceremonies which are of divine appointment and those which are of human origin. But as the Bible is the only rule for testing the correctness of the distinction and its proper application in the various cases that arise, there is room for differences of judgment in this regard. And as the ceremonies of human origin are not all of the same character, there is large room for differences of opinion in regard to their value, and consequently in regard to their observance and the grounds and conditions of such observance. The subject which at first sight seems so easy to elucidate thus becomes complicated, and the questions which seem so easy to solve are involved in difficulties which only a strict adherence to the Scriptures, such as characterized our confessors in the days of the Reformation, could disentangle and remove.

In the first place the distinction between ceremonies which God has ordained and those which men have devised and chosen is evident, and it remains so even when human error has put into one category what according to the Scriptures belongs to the other, thus muddling in the concrete a question which in the abstract is universally admitted to be settled.

God's authority and man's authority are not presumed to be the same by any persons who may still be recognized as Christians. Even the papacy,

with all its overestimation of human ability, does not claim for man equal authority with God when it endeavors to bind human ordinances upon the consciences of Christians, but pretends to be doing this in the Lord's name and at His behest.

God has, at different times, prescribed certain observances, in addition to the moral law of the Decalogue, for the accomplishment of His gracious purposes with regard to fallen man. Such are the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. These ordinances in regard to persons, places, and times and seasons, all served as types and foreshadowings of the redemption which the thoughts of God had provided and which were realized when the fulness of the time had come, and they served as a preparation for its coming in the advent of Christ. "The first covenant had also ordinances of divine service and a worldly sanctuary." Heb. 9:1. But all this was only a temporary arrangement, limited in its obligations to the Jewish people who were chosen to receive the promises of the Messiah and thus be prepared for His coming. It was all:

"...a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings and carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building: neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Heb. 9:9-12.

It is implied in the whole plan of these ceremonial ordinances that when the Savior came and their purpose was fulfilled, their obligation should cease. After the foreshadowed reality had entered into the world and accomplished the divine purpose, it could only be a hindrance to the appropriation of the great salvation to divert attention from this by directing it still to the foreshadowing ceremonial observances. But that we may make no mistake in this regard the Holy Spirit directs the Apostle Paul to write to those whom Judaizing errorists were trying to deceive:

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." Col. 2:16.17.

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Rom. 14:17.

Since the New Testament promulgates no ceremonial laws, as in the nature of the new covenant by faith in the vicarious obedience of Christ even unto death it could not, there are now no rites and ceremonies obligatory by direct divine command. The holy Sacraments have been cited as an exception. But there is a twofold error in the citation. They certainly are instituted by our Lord and commanded to be administered. But the obligation is not imposed as a ceremonial law, and there is no prescription of a special ceremony to be observed. In the first place, if a church observes the divine ordinances of Baptism and the Holy Supper merely because this is commanded as a ceremony and thus merely in obedience to a ceremonial law, it has absolutely missed the design of the Sacraments and so far exposed its ignorance of Scripture or its unbelief in regard to the truth which is there revealed. There is no ceremonial law requiring the use of the Sacraments, as there is no ceremonial law in the new dispensation requiring the use of anything. Believers who are justified by the faith which apprehends the righteousness of Christ's obedience and sacrifice are a free people who can recognize no other righteousness as necessary or required for their salvation and no observances as obligatory that are not tributary to the apprehension and preservation of this righteousness in the heart by faith, or utterances of this faith in a life of holiness according to the will of God, that we should live righteously and godly after the example of Christ. The Sacraments necessitate a rite or ceremony in their administration, but they are instituted as means of grace unto our salvation by imparting the merits of Christ, not to impose on us a ceremonial law. They bring us the forgiveness of sins, as the benefit of the redemption effected by our Savior, and they move us to accept the proffered gifts of grace, without imposing on us a legal obligation to observe the rite if we do not want the gift. Hence, in the second place, the Lord has prescribed no ritual, by the punctilious observance of which any person may imagine himself to be satisfying all the demands of righteousness and thus sure of securing the blessings promised. The administration of the Sacraments is necessary; for the Lord has been pleased to institute them as bearers of His grace unto the salvation of the sinful race that He has redeemed, and has committed them to the Church with instructions to administer them. The use of the earthly elements of water and bread and wine,

and the application of the former in the name of the Triune God and the use of the latter as separated from their ordinary use and consecrated to the higher purpose of being vehicles of His gracious gifts, is necessary, because thus only is the Sacrament constituted in distinction from the ordinary use of these elements as created and ordained for the needs of our physical life. But aside from this there is no appointed ceremonial, and the differences in the mode and attendant ceremonies are of no essential account, so long as the Sacrament as our Lord instituted it is administered. There is no ceremonial law in the Church of Christ.

2. Distinctions in Human Ordinances

Nevertheless a difference must be recognized in the rites and ceremonies which in all ages have existed in the Church, although they may all, in distinction from any specific divine command ordaining them, be called human ordinances. There are some whose utility and relative necessity cannot be questioned. The revealed will of the Lord that His people should join together in public worship, and that everything in their assembly and work should be done decently and in order, gives the divine sanction to human regulations designed to comply with that will. It is this that often causes difficulties in the life and government of the Church, and has led to needless and therefore sinful ruptures in her external organization. The subject of ecclesiastical rites is not as simple as those who decide all questions pertaining to it at a mere glance are prone to suppose. Certain ends are to be attained according to the Master's will. But He in His goodness and wisdom making His disciples workers together with Him, and by His Spirit working in their souls the same mind which was also in Christ, has given them no ceremonial laws, but given them the liberty to exercise their own choice in regard to the best means of effecting His end. We have thus the plain will of the Lord expressed in His Word, to which all Christians as such recognize their subjection, and the freedom of Christian believers, which may transgress its limitations, to reckon with. That there is room for human error on the subject is thus manifest. There are two forms of such error. One is the mistaken judgment as to the necessity of particular rites and ceremonies for the attainment of the divine purpose, the other is that, when they are conducive to the attainment of the divine will, they must be divinely obligatory. Thus it comes about that human arrangements are often regarded as binding

on the Christian conscience, in many cases even without a thought of imposing on Christ's free people a human ordinance by divine authority. The error is not always one of conscious disregard of God's Word or substitution of a choice made in human liberty for the obligatory will of the Lord. Hence while the question in the abstract is easy to decide, whether human ordinances respecting spiritual matters are binding upon the Christian conscience, the application of the decision to practice in special cases presents difficulties enough to warn against rash judgments in regard to those who err, as if they could antecedently be declared either irrational or unbelieving people. When grace and reason and sin get into tangles, all Scripture and history admonish us to be circumspect in our judgments. The Church of the Augsburg Confession, which by Reformed denominations is usually stigmatized as the most strict and unyielding, is the most liberal of all churches within the limits of the Christian faith. She holds fast the Word of her Lord, even though her fidelity should provoke adversaries to separation. Neither their appeals to reason in behalf of their heresies, nor to her charity in behalf of their departure from the Word of God, can move her. For our part we do not wonder that men who do not endorse her principle of subjection only to the Word of God, but to that a subjection that is absolute, because it is the sinner's only help and hope, think us bigots. The Word of God must stand, though states and churches pass away. But where that Word guarantees liberty to Christians, there liberty must stand. The Lutheran Church insists on that not because that seems to her beautiful or comfortable, or conducive to peace, but because it belongs to her faith. Therefore she teaches and practices the largest liberality in all things that the Lord has committed to His people for regulation according to their best Christian judgment as individuals and as congregations.

But inasmuch as the flesh keeps up a constant conflict with the spirit in Christian hearts, the disciples of our Lord cannot consider every human ordinance in the Church right and proper. Liberty is not license to each individual to do just as he pleases and to each congregation to do just as it pleases. The liberty is limited by the declaration of the Lord's will given in His Word. Only within these limits is there Christian liberty. Outside of this sphere there is nothing but the slavery of sin, and all boasts of liberty are vanity. Only Christ makes us free by faith in His name and this faith clings only to His Word, and the liberty can last only while the faith lasts. The individual Christian goes wrong when the flesh leads him to think his liberty

absolute, and thus unlimited by the Gospel, through which alone he possesses it, and therefore presumes that he may indulge in all the impulses of his nature without endangering his soul. This is but an instance of the wiles of the devil, who would lead us to think that when we are once Christians and have the Spirit of God to guide us, everything that we think or will or do must be right under the law of liberty. Too many forget the solemn warning:

“Brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Rom. 8:12-14.

O how deplorably often children of God are led by Satan into his trap by mistaken reliance on their liberty as children of God! How gracious is the injunction that believers should watch and pray! And the warnings and admonitions that pertain to the individual Christian of course apply to them in their corporate capacity as a congregation. There grace and sin are in the same antagonism, and the spirit and the flesh are in the same conflict. The Church is governed by the Spirit, but it can never be independent of the Word in which the mind of the Spirit is revealed. It is composed, in its earthly form, of individuals who are not yet rid of the corrupting and erring influences of the flesh which characterizes our fallen nature. Therefore the rites and ceremonies instituted in the Church by men, even though they be Christian men, may not be in accord with the mind of the Spirit, but rather products of the mind of the flesh which is not subject to the Lord's will.

This not only justifies us in making distinctions among human ordinances, but makes such distinctions necessary in the interests of truth and righteousness. There are some rites and ceremonies, whether human ordinances have prescribed them or not, that are necessary. They are implied in the divine command that certain things shall be done, and the doing is therefore an act of obedience to the divine ordinance. When Christians obey their Lord's commission to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments as His appointed means to communicate the grace of salvation to the souls of men, for whom He suffered and died and rose again. they have no prescribed rule to show them where and in what form that preaching shall take place, how much water shall be used in Baptism, or when and how often the Holy Supper shall be administered. So it is in regard to prayer and

public worship. The confidence in the divine promises and the implied dependence upon God, in whom alone is our help, which is characteristic of Christian faith, impels to prayer in the name of Jesus, as the Lord commands and the apostles exhort; and the command to confess Christ before men and worship Him as Lord of all, involves the duty of assembling ourselves together, which is also expressly enjoined; but there is no law given us in regard to the forms in which this shall take place. There is a large domain for the exercise of liberty. The thing enjoined is obligatory, not as a ceremony, but as a means of grace, as in the administration of the Word and Sacraments, or as necessary implications in the Christian life, as in the confession of Christ and the continuance in prayer for daily supplies of grace and continual guidance and help; but the form is free, because nothing depends upon that, but everything upon the matter enjoined. As some form must be adopted, individuals and churches easily glide into the error that when a free choice is made of a mode to perform a divine command, that mode is as obligatory as the thing itself, which can be performed as well in some other mode. But there are other ceremonies which have no such divine basis, though not on that account to be avoided as conflicting with the exclusive authority of the Word. Pertaining to matters which lie within the sphere of liberty, and chosen for the purpose of promoting the interests of the Church, they may be observed or avoided according to the judgment of individuals, and they are lifted out of that sphere and become matters of conscience only when the endeavor is made to impose them upon Christian people as necessary observances, and the neglect or refusal to observe them is pronounced and treated as sin. That puts such human ordinance in the place of divine commands and subverts the exclusive authority of the Word of God. And some ordinances are laid upon Christians by human authority as Observances declared to be necessary to merit grace, and are thus in their very conception adverse to the Gospel, whether they pertain to things divinely instituted or to things devised by men for alleged purposes of promoting human salvation. Much depends upon a correct discernment of these differences in order to be able rightly to test their worth and take the right position in regard to their use.

II. Admissions In This Article

Hence our article gives some cautious and admonitions which are important for the expression and preservation of our evangelical faith. Some rites are useful and may be observed with profit; some are contrary to the Gospel and should therefore be rejected.

1. Liberty and Love

Our churches teach concerning ecclesiastical rites

“...that those rites are to be observed which may be observed without sin and are profitable for tranquility and good order in the church; such as are set holidays, feasts, and such like. Yet concerning such things men are admonished that consciences are not to be burdened. as if such service were necessary to salvation.”

In the first place, the important principle of liberty and love, which must govern so large a portion of the activity of Christians in their individual and ecclesiastical life, is recognized and applied. It is a sound principle that is far-reaching and that removes many a difficulty with which those who ignore and reject it painfully wrestle, and often seek to settle by judgments whose consequences, theoretical and practical, are more painful still. When the doctrine is taught and confessed that the government of God, who rules over all His creatures, in providence and grace, leaves no room for the exercise of the high power of will with which He has in His wisdom and goodness endowed angels and men, all the testimony of Scripture as well as of human consciousness is set aside, in order to sustain a philosophical theory according to which man is a machine which his Almighty Maker runs by an absolute will that can take no account of the human will; which, in such a view, presents itself indeed as choice with alternative power, but is only part of the machinery that carries the deceived soul along with it as absolutely as it does the body and the rest of created things. In such a theory there is of course no room for any liberty of men to make a choice, not even after they have by the grace of God become Christian believers. But such believers as those who confessed their faith at Augsburg, who had gone through fierce struggles and won glorious victories by faith in the Word of God, were not men who could be deceived by human philosophies and diverted from their trust in the Scriptures by human theories, but who trusted in the Lord and knew their responsibility, and therefore were determined to abide by the

Scriptures in their explicit statements, whatever reason, though professedly and even seemingly subject to the Scriptures, might say about the matter in hand. The Lord made known His will in the written Word of Scripture. That was their guide and rule, as it must always be of all believers in Christ and all true disciples of the Savior. What He expressed as His will is cordially accepted by His people, who by the grace conferred upon them are ready to do His will and happy in doing it. But there are many things in regard to which it did not please His wisdom to give us specific directions. He gave us liberty and ample room for its exercise. What He has declared to be His will, believers are glad to accept, as their heart's desire is that His will should be done. But when His will has not been expressly declared in regard to a matter that concerns them as His disciples, they must depend upon the guidance of the Spirit given them to find the right course. If the matter had been of essential import, as in the case of the Sacraments, the Lord would certainly have given them the necessary directions. His love assures us of that. But when it is only a matter of modes, a number of which are possible, the Lord is pleased to make it a matter of liberty, leaving it entirely to His people to choose the mode, as long as they recognize His will that the thing in question should be done, whatever mode of doing it may be chosen. For example, the Gospel is commanded to be preached to all nations. No individual and no congregation can directly accomplish this. But His people recognize the duty. By the grace of God all His people do it. But shall they send missionaries to Asia or Africa or the Islands of the great Pacific? That the Word of God does not decide. The children of God must have enough interest in the question to decide where the interests of all of them could be best subserved. That decides the question; the Word of God decides it only mediately by setting forth the object to be attained, and Christian believers decide only how the purpose shall be accomplished. The principle will probably be understood by Christians generally by referring to the case of the public assembly for hearing the Gospel. The Lord has commanded the public preaching and the assembling of Christians to hear it. Where and when and how shall that preaching take place? The Scriptures prescribe neither the place nor the hour nor the mode of the preaching. The Christian people must decide that, as the Lord of the Church has given them liberty in that regard. Whether we shall have a church building of our own, whether we shall meet at 10 or at 12 o'clock on Sundays, or whether we shall meet only on Sundays and only at certain hours, that is not essential.

But it is known to be such, only because the Lord has given us no orders in that respect. He has left that to our Christian judgment, and expects us to be guided by the love which follows upon our Christian faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts and moves us in accord with the Holy Word which He has inspired for our learning.

Our Confession lays down two tests in regard to ecclesiastical rites and their observance. One is that they may be observed without sin; the other is that their observance may be profitable for tranquility and good order in the church. The children of God have ample liberty in the choice of agencies to accomplish the work for which they have been fitted by the grace of God communicated through Word and Sacrament. But they must exercise that liberty within the limits of Holy Scripture, so as not to conflict with the divine will, and they must exercise it in love, so as not to conflict with the equal rights and privileges of other Christians. The Church may make ordinances under these conditions, and its members should then in the exercise of their liberty observe them. It need not be specially urged that neither individual nor congregation has a right to sin or lead others to sin. Every Christian knows that, and he would not be a Christian if he claimed such a right. When rites and ceremonies are in conflict with the Word of God, they must be rejected, by whatever authority the attempt may be made to bind them on the people. While every member of a congregation, for the sake of peace and order, should observe the established regulations and usages as long as he can do so with a good conscience, he must refuse to submit when an ordinance is sinful and compliance makes him a partaker in the sin. That the authorities do not regard the ordinances as sinful does not change the situation. A congregation may err in its judgment, and however painful it may be to be looked upon as a disturber of the peace, the surrender of the individual's conscience for the sake of peace would be fatal to his spiritual life. We must not do what we must condemn as sinful, whatever the consequences of our refusal may be. On the other hand, the sincere Christian will always be ready, in matters that really lie within the sphere of liberty, to submit his own preferences to the judgment of the majority. To this Christian love moves the true believer, because it is the only way of harmony and peace where ordinances are made and traditions are maintained by free people in matters which the Lord has left to their free judgment, for the exercise of their spiritual wisdom and their brotherly love. The congregation to which I belong may decide a question in opposition to my judgment of wis-

dom in the case. I have used my rights and presented my reasons for the expediency of a certain course, but the majority was against me. That is a common occurrence in the Church of the Reformation where the Word of God alone rules and the rights of conscience are everywhere respected. What shall I do then? The answers to such question are of a motley sort, and worldly-minded men pile error on error, because they regard not the mind of the Spirit as revealed in the Gospel and operating in the souls regenerated by His grace. There is but one answer that the child of God who is fully aware of his possessions and rights by faith in the Lord Jesus can give. This is to consider others better than themselves and therefore to defer to their judgment and peacefully acquiesce. Those who regard this as the servile abandonment of Christian rights and slavish subjection to human arrogance, do not understand the situation. There is nothing slavish or degrading or cringing about it. On the contrary, it is the noble declaration of equality in the possession of glorious gifts of which the world knows nothing, and therefore of the humble refusal of an attempt to domineer over those who have equal gifts and equal rights. Not even the renunciation of individual judgment is implied. If the congregation to which I belong decides to build a church of a style that does not suit my taste and does not accord with my estimate of its ability to, meet the cost, I am sorry that my reasons failed to convince my brethren, but my conscience is not troubled by the result, and I can contribute and cooperate in the work as well as if my opinion had prevailed, bating only the conflict with my flesh which the result imposes. My judgment is not altered by the decision of the majority against it and the argument presented to sustain it. My brethren do not ask me to renounce that judgment, and I do not agree to renounce it. The rights which I possess by nature and by grace are all preserved. But love prompts me to seek peace and pursue it, though it be at the sacrifice of human Opinion, though by no means of the faith which clings to the Word of God and therefore can make no concessions.

“Yet concerning such things men are admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as if such service were necessary to salvation.”

The Church can institute rites and ceremonies that are tributary to the work which the Lord has commanded and are conducive to the attainment of the divine end, but cannot elevate its ordinances to the dignity of divine com-

mands. The domain which our Lord has assigned to Christian liberty lies between that which He has prescribed and that which He has forbidden. Sin, the wages of which is death, can never be permissible in God's sight. Holiness, which is the Lord's will, can never be indifferent in the sight of God's people. Human ordinances, which in the Christian mind can lie only between the things which God has commanded and the things which God has forbidden, can never be obligatory on the Christian conscience. They can only appeal to Christian love, which desires the welfare of the community. Therefore when the attempt is made, whether by a Romish pope or a Protestant pastor, to impose a human ordinance as a divine command on Christian people, they resent the ungodly imposition. Knowing their rights as the children of God, they will not be the slaves of men. The preservation of their Christian liberty is never with them a matter of indifference. In the exercise of such liberty under the guidance of Christian love one may cheerfully forego the use of meats or drinks which cause a brother to offend. It is an act of charity towards weak brethren, and he is prompted to it by the same grace which makes him free. But he can obey no ecclesiastical ordinance which attempts to force upon him as a divine obligation what God has left to his choice, even though in the exercise of his love he would do freely what the ordinance endeavors to bind upon him and thus to deprive him of that liberty wherewith Christ has made him free.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ.” Col. 2:16,17.

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Rom. 14:17.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Gal. 5:1.

The worst aspect in which error in regard to human ordinances touching ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies is presented, is that of imposing them as meritorious of grace and salvation. Hence our article says in conclusion:

“Men are also admonished that human traditions instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace, and to make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning meats and days, and such like, instituted to merit grace and make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.”

This condemns the Romish system of work-righteous vows and fasts and penances and indulgences and alleged meritorious deeds and self-denials of every sort, and of course all sectarian notions in imitation of Rome, even though they may be promulgated and practiced under the Protestant name. When the Romish principle of divine power delegated to the Church, beyond the power of the Word and Sacraments as the means by which the Lord builds and preserves and governs His Church, is accepted, and consequently other yokes than those which our loving Savior has laid upon us and which are easy and light because His grace has made them so, are imposed upon the Lord’s disciples, the spirit of antichrist becomes manifest to those who abide by the Word of the Lord and will hearken to neither reason nor sentiment in conflict with the plain instructions of that Word, which stands when all things else must fall. The Lutheran Church teaches the people, as the Gospel revealed from heaven teaches — “blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it!” — that the redemption which is in Christ Jesus is complete and perfect. Nothing more is needed, nothing more is possible to finish its work. “It is finished.” Now he that believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. Nothing else is necessary. The Gospel assures us of this and makes our hearts glad in the good tidings. There is no authority that can make the Word of the Lord doubtful to the believer and no rite or ordinance which can be necessary to merit what our Savior has merited for us all.

Article XVI. Of Civil Affairs.

Concerning civil affairs they teach, that such civil ordinances as are lawful are good works of God; that Christians may lawfully bear civil office, sit in judgments, determine matters by the imperial laws and other laws in present force, decree punishments according to law, engage in just wars, act as soldiers, make legal bargains and contracts, hold property, take an oath when the magistrates require it, marry a wife or be given in marriage.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who forbid Christians these civil offices. They condemn also those that place the perfection of the Gospel, not in the fear of God and in faith, but in forsaking civil offices, inasmuch as the Gospel teaches an everlasting righteousness of the heart, while it does not abolish civil government or the domestic state, but urgently requires the preservation and maintenance thereof as of God's own ordinances, and that in such ordinances we should exercise love. Christians therefore must necessarily obey their magistrates and laws, save only when they command any sin; for then they ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29.

CIVIL AFFAIRS needed elucidation in the days of the Reformation, and the work of Luther in this respect did much to clear up the subject. Interference with secular governments was no part of his calling, largely as their right conduct is promoted by the promulgation of the pure Gospel. The Reformation was not a political movement. But light was needed in regard to God's institutions and Christian rights and duties, and the circumstances made it imperative on the teachers of God's Word to let it shine also upon the affairs of the world, in which the children of God live and labor and suffer until they obtain their heavenly inheritance, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." 1 Tim. 2:2. The Romanists had so corrupted the doctrine of Christ's kingdom as to render the Church a secular government, arrogating to itself all civil authority and as the highest of all earthly powers, claiming superiority and jurisdiction over all States and Empires. The papacy thus constituted and, though shorn of much of its power for evil, still constitutes a menace to all civil governments. The fanatical sect of Anabaptists, who began their nefarious work soon after the Reformation was in progress and who imagined that their fanaticism was a fair deduction from the principles of the Reformation, were making mis-

chief in Germany by teaching a disregard for civil order and practicing communism and rebellion. The Lutherans therefore were impelled to lay down for all time in their Confession the truth which they had learned from the Scriptures concerning civil affairs; and we have reason to be thankful in our day also that they did such noble work to make a subject clear in regard to which Rome continues to mislead the people and many Protestants still need light.

It will be observed that our article refers not only to civil government, but to civil affairs in general; for that which causes difficulty in many minds is not only the existence of a State as well as a Church on earth, but also the life of Christians, who are members of a kingdom which is not of this world, in a world that lieth in wickedness. The fundamental error into which men fall in this regard is that, instead of exercising their faith which overcomes/ he world and fighting the good fight of faith against the powers of darkness which rule in the world, they run away into the seclusion of monasteries, and instead of manfully doing the work of their calling in an evil generation as a light and a salt of the earth while they keep themselves unspotted from the world, they slink away from the work and the conflict, or at least think it necessary to stand aloof from all secular employments and enjoyments without which the secular calling necessary for the natural purposes of our earthly life cannot be attained, and all society is thrown into disorder and disaster. Our article sets forth our Lutheran faith in regard to civil government and to our duties as Christians in the natural order of the world.

I. Civil Government Is A Divine Institution.

Legitimate civil ordinances are good works of God. It behooves us to recognize and understand this according to the Scriptures.

1. Human Equality and Individual Liberty

The doctrine of human equality and individual liberty is popular. It appeals to man's natural judgment concerning himself, and it has an element of truth in it that commends it to our reason. Men are individually responsible for their thoughts and deeds, which they could not feel themselves to be if

they had no liberty of choice; and all men are equal as human beings possessed of such freedom. But when men think along this line and seek to bring order into the confusion of this world on the basis of this principle alone, they uniformly fail. Their teaching misleads and their efforts-miscarry because they overlook the fact of sin that corrupts all human thinking and willing and doing, and vitiates all human plans and institutions, when no account is made of it as a factor in the problem to be solved and the work to be done. Absolute liberty cannot be conceded to the individual, and the absolute equality of all men cannot be admitted. Such a theory would make our earth a bedlam in which only the brawniest could live and from which even they would generally be glad to escape with their scars and their dread of tomorrow's blood. For to concede to every man liberty to do just as his flesh lusts and the devil prompts, would be to uncage the wild beasts to tear and devour one another; and to admit that all are equal while each is free and independent, would be admitting that all control of the beasts in their riot and carnage is impossible. Fortunately even those who refuse to hear the Word of God, but proudly maintain that humanity with its lamp of reason is abundantly able to govern itself and secure peace and prosperity in the social state, practically admit that individual liberty must in some measure be restricted if civil governments are to exist, and that so far the alleged equality must be limited as to make a distinction between those who rule and those who are ruled. But when this restriction is supposed to be a voluntary surrender of equal rights for the common good, the sin that is in our nature and which the theory ignores, again must make itself manifest in practice, and peace and prosperity, so far as it is possible at all, is secured only by a series of inconsistencies which virtually abandon the theory without furnishing any safeguard against tyranny and oppression. A civil government which exists only by a compact among those who propose to live under it must soon disintegrate and fall; for there is nothing to prevent the assertion of individual freedom from the compact when the individual will turns against the terms and refuses to accept the ordinances. As a matter of fact there never were civil governments of such a character, and their supposed existence is a mere fiction. A people cannot live together in unity as a nation when there is no authority to make and enforce laws beyond that of the human will exercised in individual liberty: A State that is built on such a foundation of sand must fall when the rain descends and the floods come and the winds blow and beat upon it.

2. Civil Government is a Divine Institution

The Scriptures teach us better, and happily the wisdom which they teach appeals to the reason and conscience of men, even when they decline to accept the doctrine that civil government is a divine institution. It is this, whether men believe it or not, and its maintenance by those who believe the Scriptures is important for the welfare of nations as well as for the preservation of a good conscience among Christians as citizens.

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers,” (writes St. Paul.) “For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.” Rom. 13:1-5.

This text gives us explicit instruction on the subject of God’s will respecting the government of men in their external relations as they live together in this world. Each individual cannot be allowed to do as he pleases. The moral law protects all in their life and limb, their person and family, their property and good name. But not all men respect and obey the law, though it has the sanction of their conscience. In some the lusts of the flesh break through all moral barriers; and while many have sufficient regard for their honor to avoid such outrages as would disgrace them before the world, others seek gratification of their appetites with little or no regard to conscience and reputation, if they can only escape the pains and penalties of wrongdoing. The Lord of heaven and earth has not in His wisdom chosen to visit immediate and direct punishment upon each individual for his sin, but has instituted temporal governments for the purpose of curbing wild passions, and punishing violations of righteousness, and depriving the reckless wicked of their power to injure their neighbors. He has ordained that men shall live in families, that the father shall be head of the house, and that the children shall honor their parents, on whom He has conferred the power to enforce obedience. And as the families multiply and form a larger community He has provided that a larger government shall be constituted and has conferred authority to rule over it and enforce righteousness. The apostle does not

teach that such rulers shall apply moral suasion and beg people to quit their meanness and live righteously and godly and soberly in the present world, but He has given authority to command and the sword to enforce the command. The idea that the civil government, instead of making just laws and executing them by force, should simply issue appeals in behalf of rights, and that when such appeals are disregarded, it should send the police to the burglar or adulterer or murderer with entreaties to amend their evil ways, is simply ridiculous. So unworthy of the consideration of intelligent people is such a theory of civil government that we would not think of mentioning it, were it not that some people, who evidently mean well and think they are doing God service by their absurd teaching, in substance advocate such a theory, and imagine that it is the proper application of the Gospel to civil affairs. It is the old and ever recurring failure to distinguish between Law and Gospel, which is the source of so much error and mischief in the world, and which is the root of the confounding of the Church and State and their respective powers. The Church has no sword but the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. If men will not hear that, she can only regard them as heathen men and publicans with whom she can have no church fellowship. She disowns them. She has no other means to secure herself against their sin of unbelief and no calling to persecute them with temporal punishments. The State has no Gospel to preach and no Sacraments to administer and no regeneration to offer. It has only justice as the natural man can discern it to guard and maintain, and the sword to enforce it against all unrighteous men who violate the law. When a policeman is sent to arrest a criminal, his duty is plain. He should be pervaded by the Spirit of the Gospel because every man should be a Christian; but this, instead of interfering with the performance of his duty, will only make him more strenuous in its performance. If the criminal appeals to his right of freedom and resists arrest, he applies physical force sufficient to overcome the resistance; if the criminal acknowledges his guilt and penitently cries for mercy, he pities him and assures him that there is mercy in heaven for every sinner that repents, but he does his duty and arrests him all the same. So jury and judge and governor are expected to act. If they are Christians, all the better, because the likelihood is greater that justice will be done; but they will execute the law, whatever pleas or professions or promises the criminal may make. The Gospel, which makes good men who work by love, will not make bad rulers who fail in the duties of their calling, though their impure

love to man should seem to conflict with the pure love of God, which requires them to sacrifice their personal feelings in the interest of obedience, to divine righteousness. Meantime they have the consolation of knowing that God's purposes are all purposes of love and that its ends are best attained by pursuing His ways.

3. Scriptures Do Not Prescribe The Form of Government

While the Scriptures distinctly declare the civil government to be a divine institution, they do not prescribe any particular form in which such government may exist as the only one that is legitimate. "The powers that be are ordained of God." It is not said that the form of their being must be patriarchal or democratic, monarchical or aristocratic. The forms are different in different countries; but whatever may be the existing form, the will of God is: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God." Whether we live in a republic or a monarchy, "whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." Divine providence directs the affairs of nations as well as of individuals, but in one case as in the other leaves large room in matters of temporal concern to human choice. Liberty has a wide field of activity under the limitations which the Lord of all has fixed by creation and providence, by nature and revelation. Man is endowed with reason and in the things of this world he is designed to use it for the promotion of his welfare. His failure to use the Opportunities which the leading of Providence presents and to adapt himself to the circumstances in which he is placed will necessarily affect his condition. Men are not equal in natural endowments, in station, in opportunity for advancement, as they are not equal in moral powers. Hence the condition of individuals and people are not the same and their forms of government differ. In our highly favored land we enjoy and prize a republican form of government, and esteem this better than a monarchy. But it would be a grave error to conclude from this, that our form of government alone is of God, and no less grave an error to infer, that it is the wisdom and will of the people that confers authority upon the rulers and renders it our duty to be subject to the powers that be. These are of God in our republic, where the people are empowered to rule, and are none the less so in countries where kings reign. In both cases the government, notwithstanding the difference in its form, is a divine institution. "For there is no power but of God." This is universally

true. It is a principle that is applicable in all cases and under all circumstances. For when one man is to exercise dominion over others, the question is always appropriate, By what authority do you presume to make us subject to you? In that respect all men certainly are equal, because no one has a natural right to lord it over another, and no one has the natural obligation to be subject to such arrogated lordship over others. There are rulers and subjects, masters and servants, and there is the obligation laid upon us to submit to the powers that be. But that is because God, who alone has authority over men and to whom alone all men are absolutely subject, has ordained certain powers and commanded us to be subject. They have the rule over us not because of any inherent superiority, but only because of His ordinance who rules over all. When children are commanded to honor father and mother, servants to obey their masters, citizens to be subject to the powers that be, the ground of such subordination is never the natural difference between man and man, the one lower or higher than the other, but always and only this, that God has in His wisdom so ordained for the government of the world that lieth in wickedness. In numberless cases it would be difficult to convince children that their fathers are wiser and better than they and therefore they must submit to their will, or to convince citizens that their rulers are intellectually and morally their superiors and for that reason they must needs be subject. On that basis no government could long exist. The powers that be are of God by His ordinance, and those who resist the ordinance sin not against a superior authority which some men have over others by nature, but against God's method of governing the world and therefore against His ordinance. Were it otherwise the child's obedience would not be limited to the authority in his own house nor the citizen's subjection to the laws of his own country. The Russian feels no obligation to be subject to the laws of France, because the latter by God's ordinance has no dominion over the former. The human conscience could not be bound by any other authority than that of our Creator, to whom alone man must render final account. It is no doubt true that the nations for the most part and the people generally are directed rather by tradition and habit in their subjection to the civil government, and in their obedience to the laws of the land are to a very large extent moved by the fear of the sword which is borne by the powers that be, rather than by their conscience rebuking the disregard of God's ordinance. But that does not reach the essential point which our article sets forth. It is the faith of the Church that is here confessed, not the results which human

reason has reached in regard to civil affairs, the forms of government which under the providence of God have become historically established and the motives by which men have been actuated in their maintenance of existing States. What the Word of God teaches and Christians accordingly believe is here confessed, and that is of vast moment to the Church and her work and to the world and its welfare, although only Christians believe it. They are to practice the love which the Holy Spirit works in them through faith and to do this in civil affairs as in all other respects and relations

4. An Ordinance of God

As the human element necessarily enters into the administration of civil government, a further remark must be made in behalf of its correct apprehension as an ordinance of God. Men make mistakes. Those who are called to administer the ordinance of God are no exception. In some minds a difficulty is thus created which starts doubts respecting the divine authority of civil governments. The Scriptures fully recognize the human elements, but meet the difficulty not by modifying the doctrine or teaching us to ignore the authority, but by directing our attention to the one only source of authority in the One God who rules over all His creatures, who instituted temporal government for the accomplishment of His purposes, and who holds His ministers responsible for the conduct of their office according to His instructions,

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.” 1 Pet. 2:13.

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” Matt. 22:21.

It is important to keep in mind the obvious distinction which is made between Church and State and their respective governments. The one deals with the soul’s eternal interests, the other with things that are external and temporal. No power is given to the ministers of the Church to make laws which could bind the conscience of its members or to inflict punishments upon them for violation of such laws if they presumed to make them. The Lord alone is King in His Church, and its only law is that which is written in the Scriptures. Men have no right, whether we call them popes or preach-

ers, councils or congregations, to add one word to the Bible or take away one jot or tittle from it. In the State it is entirely different. That has for its purpose to regulate society in the affairs of this life. and to secure the temporal welfare of the community by maintaining justice and protecting people against the lusts of evil men. As a secular institution it has not the means of grace committed to it for administration, nor are the Scriptures prescribed as its constitution and law, great as is the benefit to the people when those who administer this ordinance of God are Christians, who love righteousness and are thus qualified to deal justly. But civil government must exist and does exist among peoples who are not Christians, and the powers that be are ordained of God the same everywhere. Because the State never was intended to occupy the place of the Church and is limited to temporal affairs and civil righteousness as reason may apprehend it in the light of nature, it always operates injuriously when men in a zeal for Christianity without knowledge endeavor to make the Scriptures the law of the State as well as of the Church. Intelligent Christians should not fail to see that this is entirely at variance with God's plans as revealed in the Bible, and that such a substitution of human opinion for divine revelation can only work harm to both Church and State. For the effect of such confounding of distinct institutions, both divine indeed, but each with a distinct purpose and each with distinct powers corresponding to its purpose, can only be that the Church will be burdened with human ordinances under the yoke of which at least enlightened Christians will not consent to place their necks, and the State will endeavor to impose duties which only Christians can recognize as such. The result can only be tyranny and persecution, and ultimately schism in the Church and revolution in the State, or a reign of despotism that must gradually undermine all divine order and thwart the whole purpose of divine institutions for the government of this world and the preparation for the world to come. The minister of the Church wields no authority but that of the Word, in which the Lord Himself speaks and from which there is therefore no appeal. The State is a divine ordinance, in which men receive authority from the Lord to make laws according to their human sense of righteousness as rational beings, and to execute them for the temporal well-being of society, and therefore makes no appeal to Scripture for their sanction and never can justly claim anything more than civil righteousness or appeal to any higher sanction than the consciences of men and their natural sense of justice and equity. By the ordinance of God the civil government is empow-

ered to enact and enforce laws for the external peace and order of the State, without implying that in its enactment and enforcement it will never err.

5. Subjection “not absolute”

Hence the required subjection to “the powers that be” is not absolute. It does not extend to spiritual things or abrogate the rights of conscience. Where the Word of God has spoken, the civil government has no authority to interfere. It has no right to revise, much less to reverse the declarations and decrees of God. Christians cannot otherwise than insist that the Lord’s Word shall stand, whatever the consequences may be. But these consequences can never be harmful, because that Word which binds the conscience is always promotive of righteousness, whether in Church or State, and thus serves the interests of the latter as well as the former. Nor can the two institutions according to God’s ordinance come into conflict with each other, because their domain is different and the sphere of each is clearly defined. The State cannot dictate what we must believe as a matter of religion, nor even what we must think as a matter of right. Its domain is the external world and it deals only with human actions. What lies back of that in the soul of man is not directly its concern. As far as it is concerned citizens may be Jews or Gentiles, Christians or Mahometans, as regards religion, if only they obey the laws and support the government. Intolerance and persecution are irreconcilable with the design of God’s ordinance creating the civil government. Not even with violations of the law in the heart, so long as they do not become overt acts, have the civil powers any call to meddle. A person may be guilty before God of murder or adultery in his heart without being amenable to human law. The State takes cognizance of the crime, not of the sin. So a man may be a good citizen while he is a great sinner. And he need not cease to be a good citizen if he thinks otherwise than the legislators think, disapproves of some of their enactments, and even expresses his deep dissatisfaction with them because he regards them unjust. As long as he obeys the laws and upholds the government as the rightful authority over him his good citizenship cannot be justly impeached.

6. Sometimes Christians Must Refuse

But in the course of human events, cases have occurred and may occur again in which the Christian, as an individual whose conscience is bound by the authority of God's Word as revealed in Holy Scripture, must refuse to do what the law requires of him. This is not because his judgment, in a matter subject to the decision of human reason, differs with that of the government. Such cases are of daily occurrence, as there are probably few laws in regard to the justice or expediency of which all subjects of a government are coincident in their opinion. Evidently there is nothing to be done when persons dissent from the enactment but to obey, meantime using the common right to produce what may be thought the better reason to bring about a change for the better. But there are cases of more serious import. Governments have gone beyond their warrant and authority, and may do so in any evil time. Thus they have endeavored to impose a yoke which no intelligent Christian can bear without renouncing his allegiance to God and His Word. The martyrs under Roman tyrants are a glaring example. No civil government has a right to command its subjects to do what God forbids in His Word, or to forbid what God expressly commands. If it presumes to do this, it transcends its powers and the Christian maintains the supreme authority of God even against the authority of a divine ordinance which has been abused by the appointed agents. The rule in such cases is explicit and clear: "We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29. This gives no encouragement to the proud and self-conceited spirits who think they know everything pertaining to the order and prosperity of the State better than the government, and who therefore think themselves entitled to rebel when their opinions are not adopted. If they desire to live as Christians they have no choice but that of being subject to the powers that be, which are ordained of God: "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." Only when God commands one thing and the State commands the opposite, is it clear that we are exempt from obedience to the human law because we are held to obey the divine. And even then our obedience to the supreme authority must not be rebellion against the powers that be, which are ordained of God. They are still God's ordinances, though they are not faithful in their administration of the powers conferred. Therefore resistance by force can never be the resort of Christians who are wronged by the maladministration of power. They will not oppose wrong-doing by wrong-doing, but will simply abide by the right in obedience to the Word of God, and patiently suffer the consequences of such obedience. If the government for-

bids them to pray in Jesus' name and worship Him as their Savior, they will joyfully go on in their Christian faith and practice; if it commands them to worship idols, they will go on in the worship of the living God as the Bible teaches them. What the result may be they will commit to the Lord whom they serve. If they have the opportunity to emigrate to another country where Christian faith and Christian life are not forbidden, they will gladly leave their fatherland to secure liberty of Christian worship; if they must suffer imprisonment or even death for their loyalty to their Lord, they will patiently suffer that in the blessed assurance that God will make all things work together for good to them that love Him, and that being faithful unto death they shall receive a crown of life after earth's troubles are past.

II. More Regarding Civil Affairs

But this does not exhaust the contents of our article concerning civil affairs. There is a number of specifications that yet require notice. These may be divided into two classes, one of which pertains to the Christian's relations to the civil powers, the other to domestic relations in earthly life.

1. False Notions of Holiness

To the first of these classes belong the fanatical opinions of the Anabaptists and other errorists, whose false notions of holiness led them to seek seclusion from the work and worry of social life, and whose idea of keeping unspotted from the world was that of shunning all civil duties in order to escape its temptations, as if the world and the flesh and the devil could be escaped by seeking refuge in a monastery. Therefore our Confession "condemns the Anabaptists who forbid these civil offices," and whose errors would result in anarchy and make life on earth intolerable, while they obscure and block the way to a better life in heaven. They deny that Christians "may lawfully bear civil office, sit in judgments, determine matters by imperial laws and other laws in present force, decree capital punishment according to law, engage in just wars, act as soldiers," and, as belonging to the same category, "take an oath when the magistrates require it." Our article declares, in opposition to all such fanatics, who manifestly confound the

spiritual and the secular, that Christians may rightfully do all these things and therein practice the love by which faith works.

In the first place, as the civil government is an ordinance of God for the regulation of men living in communities on earth and for the preservation of order in their intercourse with one another, it is lawful to bear office in this divine institution for man's earthly welfare. It is not necessary that the officers of the government should be Christians in order to constitute it a divine ordinance. It is such an ordinance, whatever may be the religion or irreligion of those who are called to administer it. Let the fact be kept in mind that it is not an institution for man's salvation and that it is not based on revealed truth which can be apprehended only by the faith which the Holy Ghost works, but that it is a divine ordinance for the external government of men while they live together in this world, and that its basis is the natural justice and equity which all men can recognize, though they may be heathens. The powers that be are ordained of God among the pagans as well as among the Christians. These may desire to see the administration of its offices in the hands of Christians, who may be presumed to be better qualified than others to carry out the divine purpose of the institution in the promotion of civil righteousness and good order, but they cannot without ignoring or denying the very design of civil government proclaim this to be essential, nor decline to bear office in it because revealed truth is not declared to be the rule for its administration. Therefore when a Christian declines to accept an office because he holds this to be inconsistent with his Christian duty, he errs egregiously; for he declares the ordinance of God to be in conflict with the spirit alleged to be ruling in his heart, but which can only be an evil spirit when it sets itself in opposition to the Holy Scriptures, which are given by inspiration of God. A Christian may decline to accept an office, as any other citizen may, but not, if he be an intelligent and sincere Christian, on the ground that Christianity and civil government are incompatible. The fundamental error of the Anabaptists and all similar fanatics is that they are incapable of distinguishing between the kingdom of God, which is not of this world, and the kingdoms of this world, which have no authority over the consciences of men and no power to save from sin and damnation, but which have authority in the external world and are a terror to evil doers. According to their wild fancies the State should be a Church and the Church' should be a State, with the result that all God's ordinances would be set

aside and the whole become a Babel in which there could be no peace and order on earth, and no secure guidance to glory after the confusion.

In the second place, Christians may not only bear office in the civil government, but need not shrink from discharging duties under it which are not in accord with natural sentiment, as the father is sometimes required to perform duties toward his children which are far from being pleasant. They may “sit in judgments, determine matters by the imperial laws and other laws in present force, and decree capital punishment according to law.” They must do nothing against the Word of God, which is their rule as Christians, but according to that very rule they may accept office under the civil government, and their endeavor must be in that as in every other position or calling to be found faithful. If in such calling they must act as judges in a court and pronounce sentence against criminals according to the laws of the land, nothing could hinder them as Christians from being subject to the powers that be, which are of God, but the Word of God requiring in specific cases what the human administrators of the divine ordinance have erroneously forbidden: It is neither a question of expediency nor of sentiment, and the agent of the government must not arrogantly set up his judgment against the constitution and laws of the State, but faithfully execute them. If he cannot do this he can resign; if the Word of God explicitly forbids what they require of him, he can obey God rather than men and suffer the consequences, still recognizing the ordinance of God as every true Christian must. And if his loyalty to the government requires of him to decree capital punishment according to the laws of the land, he only shows himself to be a faithful Christian by refusing to let the pity which he feels for the criminal or for his family that may be innocent, hinder him in the discharge of the duties of his office which, according to the divine ordinance, has the welfare of the whole community in view. And for this the Christian should be all the more prepared and faithful because of the general law of the Lord: “Whosoever sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” Gen. 9:6. The Gospel teaches and qualifies believers to perform their duties in love, but not to shirk these duties when they become painful to the flesh.

In the third place, Christians may lawfully “engage in just wars and act as soldiers. War is an evil. The suffering and misery which it brings upon the people is universally recognized. Christians would be glad if it could be abolished, and thus so much of human wretchedness be banished from the earth. But that can be said of all the evils which in has brought into the

world. The followers of Christ would rejoice if sin and all its consequences were destroyed, and they look hopefully forward to their eternal home in heaven, where sin and sorrow shall be no more. There of course there can be no wars and no sickness and death. But here on earth conditions are different. Here sin abides and suffering must follow in its train. Hence policemen and soldiers are as necessary as the civil government and for the same reason. A government that cannot or will not maintain itself and to this end apply the physical force necessary, cannot stand, and citizens who will not stand by it in such maintenance are not dutiful and not loyal. For they fail in the performance of a duty which should be plain especially to Christians, who know that the powers that be are ordained of God, and that the magistrate "beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Therefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." Rom. 13:4-6. One cannot be faithful to God without being faithful to the government which He has ordained. The Christian should be thankful for the protection which the goodness of God affords him through this divine ordinance, and should not permit the thought of shrinking from the duty which it imposes. Wars should be avoided so far as possible; but when the question at issue is once reduced to the alternative of taking up arms or sacrificing the rights for whose maintenance the government was established, the Christian cannot consistently hesitate in his choice. He will stand by the ordinance of God, and be assured that he is serving God when he supports the government in its effort to defend itself by the sword. Should the powers that be engage in a war that is not just, the Christian will be governed by the same principles which must direct him in all cases of governmental wrongs. He cannot do what God has explicitly forbidden, though He seems to have explicitly commanded it when He requires us to be subject to the powers which He has ordained and who command the contrary. But a rebel he will not be; for while he will not violate his conscience to satisfy erring rules, he will still support the government in all other respects, and even in this respect by recognizing it as a divine ordinance whose ministers have seriously erred, who may be better informed and led to abandon their error, and whose authority is sustained by unresisting submission to the penalty imposed for declining any active participation in the wrong-doing. Meantime it is proper to remind the reader that our article

gives no countenance to the other erring extreme, which results from the same confounding of the spiritual with the civil, that the soldier's death in the service of his country is a sure passport to the blessedness of heaven. He that believeth shall be saved, and only he: no good works of any kind can take the place of faith, which alone embraces the perfect righteousness of our Savior.

In the fourth place, the Christian is free to "take an oath when the magistrates require it." Many sincere believers think this wrong, and their scruples merit respect because they seem to stand on Scriptural ground. The Bible enjoins us, "Swear not at all." On the other hand it tells us that not only holy men of old, but even God Himself employed the oath.

"For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath." Heb. 6:16.17.

This renders it certain that in the nature of an oath there is nothing inherently sinful. When therefore our Lord forbids swearing and tells us to let our communication be simply yea or nay, "for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil," (Matt, 5:33-37), there must be something else had in view than simply the essential nature of the oath. The context shows that this was the case. The frequent forswearing, the multiplicity of objects by which oaths were made, and their needless repetition and consequent profanation in men's communication with each other, were abuses which came of evil. The ideal of holy living which the sermon on the mount presents had no place for them. Strictly speaking it has no place for oaths at all. Were the kingdom of God fully realized on earth they would of necessity disappear, because men would trust each other and all the needless appendages to our yea and nay would seem ridiculous. As that is the ideal towards which all true Christians are directing their endeavors, oaths are not needed and not wanted among them. They mean what they say, and do not presume that their brethren will require anything more than their bare word to render their statement trustworthy. And as people are so prone to take the name of the Lord in vain, they do well, in order to sustain the Christian character and shun the evil of useless and profane swearing, not to swear at all. But not all men are Christians and not even all are trustworthy adherents of civil righteousness. The world is full of wickedness and selfishness, and the gov-

ernment cannot take every man at his word in the charitable presumption that all are truthful. It deals with all men alike, and can make no distinction between those who are Christians and those who are not. When magistrates therefore require an oath to guarantee the truthfulness of witnesses, Christians have no reason to refuse obedience or desire to be treated differently from other citizens. They would feel injured if brethren required them to confirm their testimony by an oath before it could be regarded reliable, because it would imply the suspicion that their profession of Christianity is merely a pretense; but this can not apply where the oath is required by the civil rulers, where no religious profession is in place and men are dealt with only as citizens, not as Christians. Because truth and righteousness are promoted by putting some witnesses under oath, and can lose nothing in cases where this is not needed, Christians should not object to be treated like all others and should have no scruple to take the ordinary oath where magistrates require it and it benefits the cause of truth. This in no way interferes with the scrupulous avoidance of all needless and frivolous oaths.

2. The Affairs of Life in General

The same fanatical spirit which leads to a disregard of the divine ordinance for the government of this world and consequently of the duties laid upon us in this regard, manifests itself in the wrong attitude assumed towards the affairs of this life in general. Surely those who deny the right of Christians to “make legal bargains and contracts, hold property, marry a wife or be given in marriage,” have not learned their doctrine from the Holy Scriptures. Neither are their aberrations harmless, so that it might seem needless and ungracious when our churches “condemn also those that place the perfection of the Gospel, not in the fear of God and in faith, but in forsaking civil offices; inasmuch as the Gospel teaches an everlasting righteousness of the heart.” In the meantime it does not abolish civil government or the domestic state, but requires urgently the preservation and maintenance thereof, as of God’s own ordinances, and that in such ordinances we should exercise love.

The errors condemned are gross and grievous. Their tendency is to destroy the whole order of God in the regulation of man’s relation to his fellow-man. When the sinner is converted he does indeed see things as he did not see them before: all things have become new. The vanity of the world,

and all that is of the world, does not seem as it did when he was of it and used it for the gratification of his selfish desires. He unquestionably does well to heed what this implies, and cease to lay up treasures on earth as if this were his eternal home and to seek his happiness in making bargains, holding property, and marrying a wife. But his conversion has a flaw that may prove disastrous. if instead of now serving God in love towards his fellow men in all his relations to them, he runs away from the field in which he has grand opportunities for the exercise of his gifts in loving service, and thus stands all the day idle. It may seem in the visions of his imagination a sincere contempt of the wickedness in which the world lies, and a desire to lay up treasures in heaven and have his conversation there that moves him to such a course; but he is not faithful to the Lord who has called him and in His Word instructs him what he shall do, that his faith may work by love and prove a blessing to others as well as to himself, and he should, if he was truly converted at all, take heed lest he fall. For putting our fancies, though they seem pious, in the place of God's Word, is the way to ruin. There is corruption in every sphere of earthly life, and there are temptations besetting us in every calling. But the Christian is not to go out of the world in order to escape its pollutions and to quit the field in order to escape the battle. When the Lord wants us to retire from the work and the conflict of life, He provides for our retirement by disability or death. While He gives us life and strength His order is that we should faithfully labor and patiently suffer in the vocation which He has assigned us, and thus, our faith giving us peace with God and working by love toward our neighbor, serving our Lord and our fellow men, and in all giving glory to Him whose we are and whom we serve. And it is a serious and dangerous fault to exclude from this service our earthly calling and its duties. Of course the heavenly calling is the more important, and our temporal interests must always be subordinated to the spiritual. But that cannot excuse the neglect of any temporal duty, much less the vain fancy that the Christian has no longer any temporal calling and any duties to perform pertaining to man's earthly welfare. Cultivating land, bringing produce to market, buying and selling, marrying wives and establishing homes must go on when we have become Christians as well as before. It is God's order of providence, and the more we learn and revere God's ways the more we honor Him in the observance of His ordinances. The difference that is made by our admittance into the communion of saints is. not that now we are no more in the world and are freed from all duties in

civil affairs, but that now we no longer live unto ourselves. but unto Him who died for us and rose again, and that now, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we, do, all should redound to the glory of God. All doctrines forbidding Christians to engage in business, to hold property, or to marry or be given in marriage, are devices of Satan to render life on earth not worth living, to prevent Christian work for its amelioration, and to undermine all divine authority, with the ultimate design to destroy the soul as well as the body.

The will of the Lord is that His followers should be a salt in the earth and a light in the world, so that while they humbly pursue their pilgrimage to the land of promise, they do the work of their calling in the Savior's name, serve their neighbors in doing the work necessary for their earthly welfare, letting their light shine as well by their service in love as in their confession of Christ, and ever heeding the divine admonition:

“Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Rom, 12:2.

While the evil that so easily besets the making of bargains, the holding of property, and the marrying of wives and establishment of earthly homes, is' thus scrupulously avoided in the purpose to serve. the Lord in subjection to His ordinances, the opportunity will be welcomed, in these spheres appointed and regulated for the activity of His people, to do His good and gracious will and show forth His praise. Against this idea that there is another and a higher holiness than that of obedience to the Lord's revealed will and appointed ordinances can have no standing in the minds of enlightened Christians. God's will is holy; beyond that there is no holiness, but at best a phantom of it by which visionaries have been misled. No doubt the impression can be made on multitudes that a life of superior sanctity is attained by choosing monkery and poverty and celibacy, because man's natural pride is flattered by the thought that, as these are not commanded, their voluntary adoption would be specially meritorious, as the Romanists have not wearied in teaching. But it is just substitution of such human thoughts and fancies for the will of God revealed in the Scriptures, and of human merit for the merits of Christ embraced by faith, that made the Reformation necessary; and Protestants are looking back to Sodom and lusting again for the flesh-pots of Egypt when they give ear to the reasonings and, pleadings of An-

abaptists and Perfectionists and other advocates of Romish theories about a more complete sanctification through abstention from all participation in civil affairs. It is the vaulting ambition that overleaps itself. Men in their pursuits of greater heights of holiness by leaving the plains of common life neglect their common duties in the lowlands to fall from the rocks which they vainly endeavor to climb in the hope of attaining something better. There is nothing higher and better than the perfect righteousness which Christ acquired for us by His obedience unto death, which is offered to us in the Gospel as a free gift of grace, and which is made ours by faith alone, and there is no holiness of life that can be superior to the life of love in our place and station under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as He speaks to us in the Scriptures. "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it."

Article XVII. Of Christ's Return To Judgment.

Also they teach that in the consummation of the world Christ shall appear to judge, and shall raise up all the dead, and shall give unto the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys; but ungodly men and the devils He shall condemn unto endless torments.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who think that to condemned men and the devils there will be an end of torments. They condemn others also who now scatter Jewish Opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being everywhere suppressed.

WE HAVE HERE no abiding city. The things of this earth change and have an end. He who came into the world in lowliness to save it will come again in glory to judge it in righteousness.

“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” 2 Pet. 3:10-12.

To those who reject the blessed Savior of the world a day of wrath and dread is approaching and may break in upon us at any hour as a thief in the night. But Christians, whose salvation is secured by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus and made their personal possession by faith, have nothing to dread and see no wrath approaching them. On the contrary, they lift up their heads, for their redemption draweth nigh. When the Judge of all the earth comes, their deliverance from all the ills which sin has brought into the world will be complete and all the blessed hopes which their faith has inspired shall be realized. But to this end the preservation of their faith in

regard to the last things is necessary. Of this our article treats, setting forth these last things according to the Scriptures and condemning the errors which men have devised against the divinely revealed truth.

I. The Consummation is Not Yet

The consummation of our Lord's purpose in regard to this world is not reached by His advent as the Lamb of God to offer Himself as a sacrifice for its sin. The redemption was finished when the Lord of glory was crucified and the dreadful penalty of human sin was paid. But the great salvation which was thus secured for all people must be made known to all the ends of the earth, the kingdom of Christ must be established as a blessed congregation of believers, and the work of the Holy Ghost in applying the benefits of the redemption to lost souls must go forward in all the world before the gracious plan of God is fully realized. A long history has therefore intervened between the time when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and the time in which we live. The consummation is not yet, but it is promised and will surely come. Our article declares the Christian faith in regard to the last things, that we may be ready for them and rejoice in the hope of glory.

1. The Lord Will Come Again

The Lord will come again — there shall be a second advent of the Son of God who became Son of Man for our salvation. Not that He has been absent from us ever since the days of His humiliation for our deliverance from death and the power of the devil. The Church could not have celebrated the triumphs which its history records on its march through a hostile country had He not been with His people. He kept His gracious promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." He to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth is with us still, and our hearts need not be troubled, neither need we be afraid. But visibly He is not present with us now as He was with His disciples in the land of Judea, when He went in and out with them and ate bread with them. They saw Him with their bodily eyes and heard Him with their bodily ears. In that sense He has withdrawn His presence. They saw Him ascending into heaven. "and a cloud received Him

out of their sight.” This must needs be, as He told His disciples when He yet walked among them: “It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you.” John 16:7. That is part of His marvelous plan to save this fallen world. He is present alway invisibly to do His work of grace by His Spirit through His Word and Sacrament. But He will come again before the eyes of all people.

“While His disciples looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall — so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” Acts 1:10, 11.

He will come again visibly as they saw Him ascend. But He will not appear in the lowliness accompanying His first advent, when He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger at Bethlehem because there was no room for Him in the inn, and when His whole life was that of a man of sorrows suffering for the sins of the world that He came to redeem.

“They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” Matt. 24:30, 31.

The time of His humiliation is past now, and He comes in the glory of His Godhead with all His holy angels attending the majesty of His advent. Manifestly the situation is not the same now that it was in His advent to assume humanity in the womb of the Virgin Mary and become the Man of sorrows in behalf of humanity suffering under the curse of sin; and the purpose is not the same, though part of the same gracious and glorious plan of salvation. Now the end has come and the harvest is to be reaped. and the affairs of earth are to have a final accounting. The Lord of all the earth comes for the consummation of the world according to His eternal purpose. Terrific things are in prospect when heaven and earth shall pass away. And yet Christians are taught to long for the coming of the promised Messiah. Why should we not, seeing that our goal is not yet reached while we are journeying as pilgrims and strangers through the wilderness of this world, rejoice to think of our Lord’s coming to put an end to the labor and suffering of this earthly life and take us to our everlasting home, where there is no more sin and death? We have not heartily entered into the present blessings and fu-

ture hopes of the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, if we cannot appreciate the words spoken to the believing children of God, that when the wreck of matter comes in the consummation and men's hearts fail them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, they should lift up their heads because their redemption draweth nigh. Believers are safe, and they must know it as those who hear the Word of God, and keep it, and therefore love His appearing.

2. The Object of His Coming

The object of His coming is to judge the quick and the dead, as all Christians confess in their Creed. He will assuredly come, though we know not the day or the hour, and then the day of judgment has come. This is the day of final reckoning with which the world's history closes. And He by whom the world was made and who became incarnate to redeem it from the ruin which sin had wrought, shall occupy the judgment seat. God "hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained." Acts 17:31. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father." John 5:22, 23. He shall judge in righteousness. No wrong can be done by Him who is righteous altogether and who loved our fallen race even unto death, but no wrong can be concealed from His all-seeing eye, who not only knows the works of' all men, but searcheth the hearts and knows all the inner springs of action.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. 5:10.

The things that men have hidden from the eyes of their fellow men were known to Him and cannot be hidden from His sight "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my Gospel." Rom. 2:16. We are not to presume that during the whole course of the execution of God's plan in the ages of the world and in the...

[Note: Original pages 820 and 821 are missing from the source book. — Ed.]

3. The Resurrection of the Dead

The opinion of heathen philosophers, ancient and modern, who speak of the body as a prison in which the soul is incarnated, which is to be treated with contempt, and from which we are fortunately liberated when death ensues, has no place in the Christian system. Our joy is that we shall reach our journey's end in this world of wickedness and woe and reach the eternal city where sin and death cannot enter, where we shall be forever with the Lord, and where ultimately, in the consummation of the world, in our flesh we shall see God. Nor need we trouble ourselves with the captious questions which idle unbelievers, for lack of better occupation, so often start in order to perplex us or to mock us. A sufficient answer to them all is: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." Matt. 22:29. He will find the parts which belong to each one's body and restore them to the soul to which they belong, though we do not understand how the wonderful work will be done. He who has promised it has the power to do it, and that is sufficient for us who trust His Word. And He has told us enough about it not only to make us sure of the resurrection of our bodies, but also to comfort us with the light imparted. Christ our Lord arose from the dead, therefore we shall rise also when the set time has come.

"Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen." 1 Cor. 15:12, 13.

The resurrection of our Savior is the guarantee of our resurrection. He is the resurrection and the life, and because He lives we shall live also. Hence the denial of the resurrection is a fundamental error.

"Their word will eat as doth a canker; of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some." 2 Tim. 2:17, 18.

The attacks made upon this article of our faith are meant to undermine its entire foundation, not only in that they would take away our dearest hopes of eternal blessedness in heaven by our bodily entrance into the mansions prepared for us in our Father's house, but also in that they reject the resurrection of our blessed Savior, on which these hopes are founded.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Pet. 1:3-5.

The power of God shall fit our mortal bodies for the glory which He has prepared for us.

“For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Cor. 15:52-54.

4. The Full Enjoyment of Eternal Life

Then the believers shall enter into the full enjoyment of the eternal life with which they were endowed when they put on Christ. “He shall give unto the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys.” That is the consummation of God’s plan with regard to those who by faith accept the offers of His boundless grace in Christ.

“As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12.

“And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” Rom. 8:17.

The inheritance is ours by faith, here and now, and we rejoice in the hope of glory even during our pilgrimage to the promised land. The great salvation is ours: we are “saved by hope.” We have eternal life in Christ now.

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” John 3:36.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” John 6:47.

And yet the Scriptures and the Church speak of the eternal life and endless joys which it involves as a gift lying in the future. Our inherited possessions lie in heaven, and their perfect enjoyment is possible only when we are removed from this world of sin into our heavenly home.

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” 1 John 3:1-3.

The glory and the crown and the unalloyed bliss lie in the future: in the present we are heirs indeed and have the joy and patience of hope in the prospect before us, but the full fruition and the beatific vision shall be ours when the Lord comes again to judge the quick and the dead. That is what St. Peter means when he tells us of the glorious inheritance, unto a lively hope of which God hath begotten us again, “reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Pet. 1:3-5. In the following verse the apostle shows us why in our present state, though we are now children of God and heirs of heaven, we look for blessedness mainly to the future, when in reference to that which is reserved for us in heaven, he says: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” The children of God enter into the inheritance through tribulations, and they must fight the good fight of faith and bear the cross before the final victory is won. When they have been found faithful unto death they shall receive the crown of life. The blessedness of this eternal life and these unending joys cannot be conceived in our poor thought, much less expressed in our poor language. The reality lies in a region to which our imagination; limited to the things of eye and sense, cannot soar even in its sublimest flights. The Scriptures sometimes represent it in images which the mind can conceive and by which the heart can be moved to gladness in its contemplation, but they do not fail to remind us that it transcends all human conception.

“Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God prepared for them that love Him.” 1 Cor. 2:9.

Men tried to represent in their imaginations the life of the redeemed in heaven, and endeavored to paint a picture of alluring attractiveness. Little is gained by the effort. What attracts one may have but little attraction for others. And some have concluded that the pictured delights continued forever would become monotonous and saints would weary of them. The Bible makes no such representations, but only speaks of the radiance of glory and the bliss beyond compare, which appeals to every sober mind and which only the Christian, who knows the misery from which he has been delivered and the blessedness he has reached in the forgiveness of sin through faith in Christ Jesus, can rightly appreciate. The saved shall forever be with the Lord, they shall see God, and they, with the holy angels and the saints that have fled for refuge to the hope set before them and have escaped the damnation of hell through faith in the Redeemer's blood, shall never grow weary in giving glory to God in the highest, and wherever the place of their abode which is called heaven may be, and whatever may be their other employments and enjoyments, they shall be forever happy in the presence of their Lord and their blessed vision of God in the place where He reveals His glory, where sin and sorrow can never enter, and where all the air is love and every breath is happiness.

“In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Ps. 16:11.

5. Eternal Torments For The Ungodly

“But ungodly men and the devils He shall condemn unto endless torments.” This is a hard saying, but so the Scriptures teach, and so therefore the Church believes and confesses. Human reason and sentiment under the dominion of a nature corrupted by sin and rendered incompetent to think and feel aright in things spiritual and eternal, staggers and shrinks from such a declaration. Accustomed to think of punishment only in its relation to time and environment under the law of expediency and therefore unable to understand any need for it beyond the reformation of the culprit and the protection of the community, carnal reason rebels against the severity of divine justice, and sentiment resents its eternal duration. But Christians, who have learned from the Scriptures something of God as the Holy One and of His government in righteousness in this world and the world to come, see things

in a better light. “Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Thee.” Ps. 5:4. God hates sin because He is holy; the wages of sin is death, because rebellion against the Holy One must be crushed and the rebel rendered impotent in his effort to overthrow God’s government of righteousness and thus to dethrone God Himself.

“Unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” Rom. 2:8. 9.

The misery of the wicked is the result of their own choice. It is not the pleasure of God that any should perish. When man fell and brought sin into the world and death by sin, He interposed His power to rescue our race from the dreadful consequences of the fall.

“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:17.

The Son of God was made flesh and dwelt among us, suffered the penalty of our sin, fulfilled all righteousness in our stead, rose from the grave triumphant over sin and death, and made all necessary arrangements, by the institution of the Church and its means of grace, to make all men partakers of His glorious victory for our salvation.

“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” Isa. 5:3, 4.

The gracious way of salvation is proclaimed to all nations, and the Gospel proclamation of salvation is itself the power of God to effect it, so that all are without excuse if they refuse to accept it. But not all men have faith. Some in their indifference neglect it and some in their stubbornness reject it. If all that God in His infinite goodness can do has been done to save the people from their sin, and men still persist in choosing to serve sin rather than righteousness. what can the Lord do but maintain His holiness and execute His righteous judgments? He that repents of his sin, believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for his forgiveness, and thus has his heart purified by

faith, by the unspeakable grace of God escapes the just penalty of his sins; and his heart and mouth are full of praise; for he recognizes the justice of God in condemning sin and glorifies the mercy that saves the sinner through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

“But he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only begotten Son of God.” John 3:18.

On him who refuses all the gracious offers of God to release him from his sin and its everlasting condemnation, the wrath of God abides. And when such an impenitent soul is removed by death from this earthly state of probation, the day of salvation is past, and his choice to continue in sin rather than to accept deliverance in Christ is eternally fixed, and the wrath of God must abide on him forever. In spite of all warnings to turn from the error of his way and of all appeals to accept the great salvation in Christ, such a soul departs as the slave of Satan, and is now consigned to the place prepared for the devil and his angels, who wage their unholy warfare against the Holy One and His reign of righteousness. It is a dreadful doom, but sin, unrepented of and persisted in, has rendered it inevitable in the reign of righteousness if to continue forever, and the Spirits of the just made perfect through the blood of the Lamb are to have everlasting peace and blessedness in heaven, where sin and death can never enter to molest them and mar their happiness. Therefore the impenitent are banished to a place adapted to their wicked will, where they can do no harm to the kingdom of God and reap their just reward in the realm of Satan, whom they have chosen to serve.

“The Son of man shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend... and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Matt. 13:41, 42.

Their rebellion has not ceased and their banishment in their impotent rage is sure.

“To you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of our Lord and from the glory of His power.” 2 Thess. 1:7-9.

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son; but the fearful and unbelieving and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Rev. 21:7,8.

“Then shall He say also unto them on His left hand, ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.’ Matt. 25:41.

The doom eternal is dreadful; but it is impossible that devils and men who refuse the salvation in Christ should escape the damnation of hell.

II. Two Specific Errors Condemned

Two errors which conflict with the faith confessed in our article are specially condemned, one being that of the Anabaptists, the other that of the Chiliasts.

1. Anabaptists

“They condemn the Anabaptists, who think that to condemned men and the devils there will be an end of torments.”

Many have been the theories devised by Rationalism and Sentimentalism to overthrow the doctrine of eternal punishment and abolish the terrors of the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, to which the wicked are doomed in the consummation of the world. Such were those of the fanatical Anabaptists of the Reformation period, who are expressly mentioned in our article. But these have had many followers in other sects, and are in this particular represented especially by the Universalists and Unitarians of our times. They seem to think that their reason and feeling must stand as a higher authority than the Word of God, which all true Christians recognize as supreme and by which all men will be judged on the last day. Hence

these sects are noted for their departure from the Scriptures in other important respects, denying the fundamental doctrine of the Divinity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and of the Holy Trinity, thus placing themselves outside of the Christian Church. We need not follow them in their arguments from reason and expose their fallacies, or their appeals to human sympathy and show their irrelevancy: for we are writing for Christians, whose consciences are bound only by the Word of God. When that Word declares that in the final settlement of the affairs of this world the ungodly “shall go away into everlasting punishment. but the righteous into life eternal.” (Matt. 24:46), that the wicked shall be “cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:45, 46), and that “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever,” (Rev. 14:11), believers gladly hear the promise of their eternal blessedness and humbly adore the divine justice that dooms the enemies of all righteousness to eternal punishment. They can not have great respect for the carnal sophistries by which unbelievers endeavor to destroy the sense of words that are so plain, and certainly should not allow themselves to be troubled by them, as if there could still be a justifiable doubt in regard to their plain meaning. If it is possible at all to express the divine decree that to condemned men and devils there shall be no end of torments, the Scriptures repeatedly and in a variety of forms express it. And those whom the devil’s wiles may lead to hesitate, because of the alleged variety of meanings to which the word eternal is subject, must be reminded that the same word which assures us that our heavenly bliss shall be everlasting is the word used to declare that the torments of hell shall be everlasting. When men pretend to be more just and merciful than God and presume to wrest the Scriptures in accordance with their carnal fancies, we may be sure that they are not friends of God and His people, and they are justly condemned as deceivers.

2. The Chialists [Millenialists]

Another party finds fault with the consummation as described in the Scriptures in another respect. Our article goes on to say that our churches

“...condemn others also, who now scatter Jewish opinions, that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being everywhere suppressed.”

The Jews, as is well known, expected a Messiah who would come in all the pomp and gorgeousness of earthly kings and make Israel a nation of wealth and magnificence and power that should be the glory of all lands. What the prophets said of the kingdom of truth and grace and salvation, which He should set up in this world of sin and death, was misinterpreted to mean that the Jews should be a great nation that should rule the world and make all people tributary to its splendor. When the Messiah came, His lowliness of outward circumstances was an offense to them. “He came unto His own, but His own received Him not.” They rejected the hope and consolation of Israel, and in consequence were themselves rejected. So they continue still, wanderers on the earth, without a country, a standing proof of the everlasting truth of prophecy. In their blindness they have not abandoned their hopes of earthly glory in the kingdom of the Messiah, whose coming, notwithstanding the fulfillment of all prophecy in the advent and reign of Christ in the great kingdom which is not of this world and in which He shall reign forever, they still vainly and foolishly expect. But their notions have something attractive for the human imagination. The Romanists have endeavored and still endeavor to realize the Jewish vision by setting up a papal kingdom of this world whose pomp and power shall exceed all kingdoms in greatness and glory and to which all nations and peoples shall be subject. And among those who refuse subjection to the Antichrist of Rome the dream has not entirely vanished. There are some among those who have accepted the great Reformation as the work of God and who call themselves Protestants, that still entertain it. They are usually called Chiliasts or Millenarians, because in general they think of an earthly reign of Christ on earth with His chosen people for a thousand years. They differ in particulars, as it cannot be otherwise with dreamers, but in the main thing, that there shall be a reign of Christ with His saints on this earth before the final glory of heaven is reached, they are agreed. Generally it is supposed that this shall be after the resurrection and that it shall continue for a thousand years, in which the elect shall be unmolested in their happiness by the wicked. This happiness is conceived in a variety of forms, from the grossly carnal to the highest refinement of human pleasure, but always earthly. These theories ignore the Spiritual character of the Church as a kingdom

which is not of this world, which cometh not with observation, and which follows Christ in His humiliation, patiently bearing the cross and in faith preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments for the salvation of men until the Lord shall come again in glory to judge the quick and the dead, and receive His saints into the glory prepared for them in heaven.

Article XVIII. Of Free Will.

Concerning free will they teach, that man's will has some liberty to work a civil righteousness, and to choose between things that are subject to human reason: but that it has no power to work the righteousness of God, or a Spiritual righteousness, without the Spirit of God; because that the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. 2:14. But this is wrought in the heart, when men receive the Spirit of God through the Word.

These things are in as many words affirmed by St. Augustine, Hypognosticon, lib. iii: "We confess that there is in all men a free will, which has, indeed, the judgment of reason; not that it is thereby fitted, without God, either to begin or at any rate to perform anything in matters pertaining to God, but only in works belonging to this present life, whether they be good or evil. By good works, I mean those which are of the goodness of nature; as, to will to labor in the field, to desire meat or drink, to desire to have a friend, to desire apparel, to desire to build a house, to marry a wife, to keep cattle, to learn the art of divers good things, to desire any good thing pertaining to this present life; all of which are not without God's government, yea, they are, and had their beginning from God and by God. Among evil things, I account such as these: to will to worship an image, to will manslaughter, and such like."

They condemn the Pelagians and others, who teach that by the powers of nature alone, without the Spirit of God, we are able to love God above all things: also to perform the commandments of God as touching the substance of the actions. For although nature be able in some sort to do the external works (for it is able to withhold the hands from theft and murder), yet it cannot work the inward motions such as the fear of God, trust in God, chastity, patience. and such like.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WILL and its freedom has perplexed human minds ever since they have engaged in thought on man and his relation to the world and its Maker. Our Confession has no purpose to enter into the speculations of philosophy. It has a higher and a better aim, which is to give utterance to the Christian faith. But when we endeavor to understand the contents of this faith it is necessary to give some attention to the will and its powers, for the souls that believe are souls that think and feel and will, and these activities are intimately associated with the faith which apprehends the salvation in

Christ, and exert their influence in the whole Christian life from the beginning to the end of our earthly pilgrimage. It is not the philosophical nor even the theological speculations on the liberty of the will that concern us here, but the teaching of the Scriptures as the object of the faith which our article confesses.

It must be observed, preparatory to an explanation of the contents of our article, that not what the human will could do before the entrance of sin into the world, nor what it can do under the power of grace after the new life in our blessed Savior has entered the soul, is the point of inquiry, but what its powers are in the state of corruption consequent upon man's defection from God through the introduction of sin. The condition before the fall and after regeneration are relevant to our subject only so far as they give us light on the nature of man in general and thus on his powers as a creature who is fallen into sin and whom God has devised to save by grace. The question is concerning free will in man as we find him now in this world which lieth in wickedness and which Christ came, not to condemn, but to save. There are accordingly two points which require elucidation as regards the powers of man's will in his state of corruption, one of a positive, the other of a negative character. What can he do, and what can he not do?

I. Civil Righteousness

Concerning free will they teach that man's will has some liberty to work a civil righteousness, and to choose between things that are subject to human reason.

1. Man's Essential Attributes

Man by the fall has lost none of his essential faculties or attributes: that is to say, he remained man notwithstanding the depth of depravity and degradation to which he was seduced. He was endowed with the power to know and feel and will, and after his dreadful fall into sin he had this endowment still. It did not destroy his intellect nor his sensibility nor his will; he could still get knowledge and exercise his reason; and he could still have emotions of love and hate, of pleasure and pain; he could still choose to eat or not eat the food within his reach, to cover his nakedness or not to cover it. His natural power, as a creature distinguished above all other creatures by the gift

of reason, remained to him still, though now he was a noble creature in ruins. It is true, he had another gift that was higher than even these and that was essentially lost by the catastrophe in Eden. He was created in the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, and that noble gift was forfeited in the fall. But that eminent gift was not his reason or his feeling or his will. It was that which rendered these gifts capable of noble work in the Creator's service and praise. These gifts of mind were holy and were meant for holy employment. When sin entered they were not destroyed, but they were rendered useless for the Creator's purpose, and man was a pronounced failure. The faculties of man remained when he fell; but the image of God which rendered them blissful for their possessors and pleasing to the Creator and profitable for His purposes, was lost in the ruin. Man was thus left in the world, into which he had brought sin and sorrow, without God and without guidance and without hope. But he still was man, with all the faculties that belong to man's created nature, but man in sin and misery.

2. The Will Is Still Free

The will, which man still possesses after the fall, is still free in its action. It would not only be no human will, but no will at all, if it had not the power of choice between alternatives. When men speak of fate, or what in the terminology of men who decline to be called heathen is equivalent to fate, they overlook the plain fact that a faculty or power of man that is determined by some other power to do just the one thing that it does and cannot do otherwise, is not will and can only deceptively be called by that name. Our digestive organs do their work accurately, as the spider weaves its web and the bee builds its comb with accuracy that human ingenuity cannot attain. It is admirable, but it is not will in the creature that makes it do so. It is the will of another, not of the instrument, that is used for the accomplishment of the work, as the pen that is doing this writing is executing my will, not the will of my pen. To attribute it to the pen is a fiction: it has no will. Man has a will yet after the fall, else he would not be man; and any theory of fatalism, by whatever name it may be called, must be renounced as inconsistent with the nature of man and his continuance on the earth after the fall. If man has lost the power of will, he has lost what is essential to his place in the order of creation and has lost his humanity; if he still has a will, he must be able to make a choice between alternatives as they are presented

to his judgment. He may hesitate, he may procrastinate; he may remain in the valley of indecision until his best opportunities are past; he may make a wrong choice: but he has a will, and all men agree in holding him responsible for his action, whether good or bad, and for his inaction as well. He is held responsible because by common consent he has a will, which means that he could choose his course.

3. Man's Freedom To Act Limited

But this freedom is limited. As the will is not an independent entity, but a faculty of man, who has other faculties with which it is associated as an integral part of his created nature, the liberty of his will can not be rightly understood without taking into account his other powers and their relation to each other, as together constituting the nature of the human creature. Freedom of the will is properly the freedom of man in the exercise of his faculty of willing. He is not free when his activities are merely the motions of a machine set in operation and controlled by powers outside of himself, for which he can feel no responsibility. But his willing is largely dependent on powers within himself, whose influence, although not coercive and inconsistent with his freedom, still forms an important element in the problem presented. What the intellect pronounces desirable, the heart may not desire; what the heart desires the reason may set itself against as ultimately hurtful. What man wills would no doubt, if all were well within him, be expression of his personal life, the intellect deciding what right and good, the sensibilities conforming to the judgment and the will acting in harmony with both. As man is constituted now, this is not the fact, which indicates that not all is well within, but that there is internal disorder and discord. In consequence the action willed is often not at all the proper component of the person's heart, but may be and usually is incompatible with his better judgment or his strong desire, or even with both. Add to this that even in the best possible case of human volition, supposing that what is willed conforms to a man's reason and desires, the question must arise in the Christian mind, is that which is willed the thing which ought to be willed by a creature made in the image of God to be happy in willing what God wills and fulfilling his mission and securing usefulness in time and blessedness in eternity by conformity to the Creator's will and adaptation to His benevolent purpose. When the ineffable calamity occurs that a creature endowed

with will to glorify his Creator cannot fulfill the mission on which he was sent nor attain the happy destiny for which he was made, his material liberty is at an end. He has become subject to some nefarious power outside of himself who keeps him, soul and body, in chains. That is the condition into which the devil, bitter foe of God and man, has brought our human race. The fall of man is the fall from the glorious liberty of the children of God into the ignoble slavery of sin and Satan.

But in a certain subordinate sense man in this fallen condition still has liberty within the limits of his prison. His soul is enslaved by sin, but he can still know and feel and will; and within the boundary lines which sin has fixed to the activity of these faculties they can act untrammelled, as the culprit can act freely within the length of his chains. If this were not the case vulgar Rationalism and horrid Sensualism would not have made such inroads on the moral life of communities, and Pelagianism and Pharisaism would never have been such a power among the people. A man can choose between making a trip or not making it, or, deciding to make it, between going to the mountains or to the sea, between going to the west or to the east. He is conscious of perfect freedom to will as his judgment or his desires may dictate. There is no outside power that determines him in his volition. Within the possibilities of his circumstances he does as he pleases. And this extends also to matters that are not in their nature morally indifferent. "Man's will has some liberty to work a civil righteousness." May not man in compassion on his fellow-man feed the hungry and visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction? Deeds of kindness are done all over the world every day by men who know nothing or care nothing about the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The fellow feeling of man with man is natural even in his state of corruption under sin, and a natural morality that is helpful to humanity in suffering is constantly exemplified throughout the world, and its denial only shows the ignorance or prejudice which makes no account of facts that are patent to all men. Not only do individuals distinguish themselves by their beneficence, and societies reap glory from their deeds of sympathy with the poor and needy and suffering, but Satan even uses the common occurrence of such civil righteousness as an argument to controvert the claims of divine grace for man's regeneration and salvation; and many who profess to be Christians are thus confused and misled.

The will of man in his state of sin is not regulated by a knowledge of the truth, which has been lost by the fall, nor by the love of God and holiness,

which has also departed from the soul in its defection from God. Man has accepted the satanic lie that he shall be as God when he declares his independence of Him, and shall reign as absolute lord over his own destiny. He is therefore an imaginary monarch in his selfishness and thinks his own will to be sufficient for his self-chosen purpose, in consequence of which he follows the dictates of his own mind in moral as in other respects. The result in many cases is what men call righteousness in distinction from obedience to the lusts of the flesh whose actions are pronounced wickedness. It is a righteousness in form and appearance, because in the outward act it is the same as that which the commandments of God require. He does not know God and spiritual things, his desires cannot have for their object these things which lie beyond his horizon, and therefore he is barred from activity in that domain. He can will yet after his fall, but he cannot will the things from which he has fallen and which lie in a field from which he is banished. The liberty of willing is restricted to that which he may know and desire. And that is the earthly and temporal. He can know something of the world, of which he forms a part, and can desire many things which the world contains and which appeal to his appetite and affections. And in all these things his will is free: he can choose to act or not to act in any given case, or to choose one thing or course in preference to another. He can choose between things that are subject to human reason, and in making this choice he sometimes excels the children of light in the adaptation of means to his purpose. But it must be remembered that these purposes are of the earth, earthy, and that the ends as well as the means lie not in the heights from which, but in the depths into which, he has fallen. There he still has liberty. He can choose between the expedient and the inexpedient, and even between that which is beneficial to the community and that which is injurious, although the lusts of his flesh are hindrances to the frequency of the former choice, frequently as the selfish end in view would be best subserved by its adoption.

In this way a civil righteousness is attained, although the righteousness of God by faith is entirely lacking and the righteousness which is better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees is unattainable. In their natural state men are not only capable of choosing between one sin and another, and between works enjoined by reason respecting the things of this life, such as adopting one occupation rather than another, marrying or not marrying, building a house or renting one, eating meat or confining themselves to vegetables, working or playing at certain hours, but also between actions required by

the decalogue and thus commonly pronounced good. Some who do not profess to be Christians are acknowledged to be good neighbors and estimable citizens. In our community there are many who recognize no power of grace and own no allegiance to the Savior and yet lead upright lives. Nor can this be attributed wholly to the influence of Christianity upon the people generally where the Church has become a power in the land, great as this influence is beyond her immediate membership. The same fact is apparent in heathen lands. There is a difference morally as well as otherwise among heathens. Generally speaking, some are good and some are bad men. History tells us of heathen philosophers who were so earnest in their pursuit of righteousness that even some Christians have been induced to believe that they were virtually Christians, and have drawn conclusions that are subversive of the Gospel revelation. The facts are not confusing to those who search the Scriptures. These give us all needful information about the abilities of man in his natural state. They acquaint us with the faculty of choice still remaining in the fallen, and of the power of conscience to sanction the right and condemn the wrong. They tell us of the civil righteousness of which our article speaks and how it comes about, notwithstanding the total depravity which has resulted from the great catastrophe in Eden. Man is no longer righteous and good, but he can recognize the claims which righteousness has upon him, and can imitate the forms in which it manifests itself among men. He cannot cleanse his heart of its selfishness and the consequent subordination of all other men's interests to his own, but he can refrain from the outward act of murder, adultery, stealing and slandering; though his depraved nature may prompt him to the perpetration of such acts, and only his reason restrains him from the external commission of sins which he has already internally committed. He is free to perform acts that are not in accord with his wicked impulses and to refrain from acts that would gratify the lusts of his flesh. Reason dictates that living according to his selfish nature is imprudent and often tends to make the attainment of his selfish ends impossible. In matter subject to reason he is still free, and he may choose honesty the best policy, though dishonesty might at first glance set the shortest way to his goal. And he may thus keep his desires under the discipline of his judgment with such constancy as establish the character of an honest man. He has thus attained civil righteousness without regeneration and without the righteousness which is of God by faith and which alone can avail on the judgment day.

The civil righteousness is the more delusive because it tends even to the actions proper to the first table of the decalogue. Indeed, all attempts to distinguish the Christian from the unbeliever by such external actions are as vain as they are unscriptural. The natural man may go to church, join outwardly in the holy worship, even confess Christ and be received in the external congregation, go to communion, and perform the offices to which he may be appointed as a member. It is a hard case for those who judge all such matters by reason and who refuse to hear the Word of God, the entrance of which giveth light. Their actions may be all right, but their hearts are not, as long as they reject the grace which is offered in the Gospel and the righteousness which Christ has acquired for our salvation.

II. The Righteousness of God

These elucidations will make it easier for us to understand the second proposition of our article. This is that, while man's free will has some liberty to work a civil righteousness and to choose between things which are subject to human reason, it has no power to work the righteousness of God, or a spiritual righteousness, without the Spirit of God; because that the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. 2:14. But this is wrought in the heart when men receive the Spirit of God through the Word.

1. Spiritual Righteousness

This civil righteousness is not the righteousness which God requires. It is not Spiritual righteousness, though often mistaken for this. It is not the righteousness which the law in its spiritual import as the revelation of God's holy will demands.

“Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel and say unto them, Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” Lev. 19:2.

The requirement of the holy law is not fulfilled when certain prescribed actions are performed, though they are the forms in which holiness ordinarily finds expression. Not the outward deed primarily, but the person is required to be holy. Accordingly, when a summary of the commandments is given,

there is no classification of right actions as the human eye beholds them, but the root of them all is pointed out in the heart as God's eye sees it.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Matt. 22:37-39.

“Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” Rom. 13:10.

But when love finds utterance in the worship of God with prayer, praise and thanksgiving, those who without love join in the external expression are not therefore fulfilling the law. They unite with the righteous in the form of worship. but they are not righteous.

“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Matt. 15:8,9.

Again our Savior warns us:

“Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Matt. 7:22, 23.

As long as men's hearts are far from God they remain in the bonds of iniquity, whatever their external deeds may be. These may have a good appearance; for in the world of appearance there is liberty, notwithstanding that all have sinned and the whole world lieth in wickedness. But it is deplorable that so many even of those who profess to be Christians and to stand in awe of God's Word allow themselves to be deceived in spite of our Lord's instructions and warnings, and thus to regard the civil righteousness of which the carnal mind is capable as the fulfillment of the holy law, of which the carnal mind in its enmity to God is utterly incapable. Thus it comes that works of charity are thought to be the essence of Christianity, and Deistic associations with their unseemly boasts of charity are esteemed equal value with the Church. To assist the needy and thus feed the hungry and clothe the naked is indeed a proper manifestation of love to our neighbor in his dis-

tress and helplessness but when this is done without the love which is the essential requirement of the law, it is a sin against the Word of God to call it the righteousness which that Word requires. It is conformity to the actions which usually result from the holy will which the law of the Holy One requires, but is a mere act when the heart is far from God, though the action conforms to the ordinary manifestation of righteousness. Christians have no excuse for disregarding the solemn words of our Lord. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5:20.

2. Inability of Man to Attain Spiritual Righteousness

The inability of man to attain the spiritual righteousness which the law requires becomes more clear and more evident to the disciples of Christ when they consider, that even they have the liberty which the Gospel gives to those who they have peace only in the daily forgiveness of sins through faith in the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. Their righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, because their will being liberated from the bondage of corruption and their hearts being purified by faith, they now are resolved to serve the living God. They are now devoted not only to the forms of righteousness as they are presented in the actions of men, but to righteousness itself. It is not only a civil, but a Spiritual righteousness which they pursue in the worship and work of their Redeemer and Lord, whom the carnal mind does not know nor love, and whom it has no liberty to serve, because it sits in the blindness and bondage of sin. But they know from the Scriptures which they love as the light that shines into the darkness of earth, and from their daily experience in their conflicts with the world and the devil and the flesh, that they have not attained the perfect righteousness which the holy law of their holy Lord demands of His creature originally created and endowed for such righteousness. Even they cannot have any assurance of entering into the kingdom of God on the ground of a righteousness supposed to be secured by their fulfillment of all divine requirements. On the contrary, the more they become impressed with the holiness of the law of God as expressive of His absolutely holy will, and of their own shortcoming and transgression of its requirements by reason of the opposition of their own sinful nature to the demands of the law and now also to the motions of the Spirit in complete co-

incidence with these demands, the more it becomes apparent to them, that in the way of the law there is no possible justification of sinful humanity before our Creator and Judge. But sinners need not on this account despair. God in His infinite mercy has provided a way that is plain and adequate.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His Only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

The way of the law is not the way of salvation for sinners. It serves to show us our sin and helplessness and condemnation, not a way of escape from the indignation and wrath that is revealed against all unrighteousness of men.

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all that believe: for there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Rom. 3:19-24.

We cannot enter into the kingdom of God by our civil righteousness, or by any other righteousness that is the product of our natural powers or free will, or can in any sense be called our merit.

3. Free Will Cannot Work The Righteousness of God by Faith

The free will has no power to work the righteousness of God by faith, which alone avails before Him, “but this is wrought in the heart when men receive the Spirit of God through the Word.” Man in his fallen condition can not fulfill the righteousness which the law requires, because his heart at enmity with God, whom it requires us to love and fear and trust above all things. All efforts in this direction are fruitless because he cannot change his nature, and therefore the utmost he can do is to produce the mere outward form of godliness and civil righteousness. But God in His infinite mercy would on that account abandon the world and leave it to the end mis-

ery which it had wrought by its abandonment of God. He pitied it and sent His Son to save it.

“When we were yet without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Rom. 5:7-9.

This love embraced all the world for all had sinned, were all alike in their sinfulness, and no distinction could be made where there was no difference. The Savior died for all. “He is the propitiation for our sin not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.” 1 John 2:2. To bring this universal salvation to the lost world he enfolded it in the Gospel and ordained that it should be proclaimed to all people. His command to His disciples was, “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15.

“Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Luke 24:46.47.

The Lord has placed no limit on His love for our lost race and to His purpose and plan to save all from everlasting destruction. Salvation is free to all through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Man needs only to accept it in order to possess it, and enjoy it, and many therefore flatter themselves that all the disabilities which hamper us under the law are now done away under the Gospel as the way of salvation by grace alone. But man can as little change his nature now as he could under the command “be ye holy,” and God can as little by an act of His omnipotence force sinners to spiritual acts and divine ways as before. Men are inexcusable when they overlook an essential element in the plan of salvation. For when the command is given to preach the Gospel to all the world, it is expressly stated, and that as plainly as words can state it:

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:16.

And now what can the free will of man do? It can do that which lies in its nature, not as it originally was, but as it is now in its fallen state.

“The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Rom. 8:7.

And as in its unholiness it cannot be subject to the holy law, though in virtue of conscience the righteousness of the law is approved, much less can it accept the righteousness of God by faith as offered in the Gospel, for this offends man’s pride and excites the carnal reason to opposition.

“We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block and unto the Greeks foolishness.” 1 Cor. 1:23.

The Gospel presents God, with whom the natural mind is at enmity, and spiritual things, which lie in the domain of holiness from which he is fallen.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Cor. 3:14.

Man has no liberty in this respect; for by his natural powers he can neither know nor feel nor will the things which belong to his peace.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Eph. 2:8.

To the natural reason it would seem that the whole plan of salvation is a failure, because access to it is blocked and barred on every side. How can any soul be saved if in man’s natural state of sin it can neither keep the law nor believe the Gospel? But what nonplusses man’s reason is easily accomplished by the wisdom and mercy of God, whose ways are indeed often past finding out, but who does exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. For our faith the words of our Confession are sufficient:

“This is wrought in the heart where men receive the Spirit of God through the Word.”

Where the Spirit of God is there is liberty: the truth makes souls free. The heart is purified by the faith which the Holy Spirit works and works by His grace converting the soul without forcing anyone to believe, whose free will persists in resisting its regenerating power. For the humble Christian, it is

enough to know that “faith comes by hearing,” and that “If ye continue in Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31,32.

III. Pelagianism Condemned

(Our article condemns) “the Pelagians and others, teach that by the powers of nature alone, without the Spirit of God, we are able to love God above all things; also to perform the commandments of God as touching the substance of actions.”

1. The Pelagian Spirit

The Pelagians were a large party who gave the Church much trouble in the fifth century and later, and against especially the great gifts of St. Augustine were called for a defense of the truth revealed in Holy Scripture. Entertaining views of man and his relation to the Creator that made man practically his own master and the arbiter of his own fate and holding notions of sin that failed to recognize it in itself or rebellion against God whose wages is death, they made much of the power of man’s will and had little use for the grace of God. Indeed, according to their theory of human ability they denied the need for a Savior who was delivered for our offenses and again for our justification; for if man were only properly educated and the proper motives were presented to exercise him in favor of the right as man’s natural power is capable of seeing it, he could not be justly doomed to damnation and would need no salvation from sin and death. At the same time they did not renounce Christianity or the Bible, but endeavored to subvert them by teaching a moral system of Naturalism. They were condemned by the Church, but their theory of human power, toned down to what is usually called Semi-pelagianism, which was offered as a compromise between the doctrine of salvation by grace alone and human merit alone, continued to exert a powerful influence in the world down to our day. The Church of Rome was pervaded by the leaven of Pelagianism, and this was one of the principal elements of the corruption which made the Reformation necessary. And popery, which rejected the great Gospel truth of salvation by grace through faith alone in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, is condemned among the others which our article has in view. There is no sect

now known under the name of Pelagians. But the Pelagian spirit is still abroad and works mightily among errorists, who are all included when our Confession mentions “the Pelagians and others, who teach that by the powers of nature alone, without the Spirit of God, we are able to love God above all things.”

2. The Obligation To Condemn Error

And great is the obligation laid upon the Church of the Reformation, which God has so greatly blessed in bestowing upon it the knowledge of the truth unto salvation, to hear and heed the condemnation of error as well as the confession of truth expressed in our article. For here at least it must be apparent to all sincere Christians, many of whom refuse to see it in other instances, how faith and love combine in the confession of divine truth and condemnation of human error, for the salvation of souls from the sin and the death that is upon them and from which only the grace of God can deliver them. How many souls have gone down into everlasting night because of the Pelagian principles that were promulgated in the World and in the churches, we of course cannot know; but this we do know, that “the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe,” Gal. 3:22; that “the wages of sin is death,” Rom. 6:23; that Christ is

“the stone which is set at nought of you builders, which has become the head of the corner: neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved;” Acts 4:11.12;

that in short, the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ must be preached to all nations, and “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:16. “Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,” Rom. 5:12, and there is absolutely no way of escape but by fleeing in faith to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Pelagians have devised another way, and their appeals to man’s pride are very successful. They are the popular party, and alas, how many churches hearken to, their siren song! The science of our times with its evolutionary sophistry disseminates it; our polite literature takes up the song and the cry, and is full of it; our public institutions of learning, which

are not allowed — God pity us and our children — to teach Christian truth unto salvation, but have scope to teach the religion and morality of the natural man, propagate it. We do not know what thousands of poor souls have thus be held in the bondage of sin and death; but we do know that device of the Pelagians will not stand when the Lord comes judge the world in righteousness according to the Gospel, that those who will not join in their condemnation are faithful neither to God nor man.

Article XIX. Of The Cause Of Sin.

Concerning the cause of sin they teach that, although God creates and preserves nature, yet the cause of sin is the will of the wicked: to-wit, of the devil and ungodly men; which will, God not aiding, turns itself from God, as Christ says, “When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own.” John 8:44.

A DIFFICULT PROBLEM, which has given rise to much profound speculation and over which philosophers have puzzled for ages, is suggested in this brief article of our Confession. But while these difficulties cannot be justly ignored in an exposition, our readers are reminded that what we have before us is a confession of our faith, not an effort to solve a philosophical or even a theological problem. The Reformers were pursuing a thoroughly practical purpose when they delivered their Augsburg Confession, and that purpose must be kept in view when we endeavor to extend and intensify our knowledge of its import. It is our faith that is confessed, and that faith rests wholly on the Word of God and gives us peace without needing any corroboration of reason. God is good, and has made all things good; the world lieth in wickedness, but He did not make it so. The sin that is upon us, the wages of which is death, did not come by His will, but by the will of the creatures that became wicked: and His good will now is that man should be delivered from the wages of sin and restored to peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ by faith in His name. Perplexing thoughts are thus suggested, but the believer holds to his faith that our Maker is good, and that in His infinite goodness He has prepared a way of escape from the dreadful consequences of the wickedness which not He, but His ungrateful creature has brought into the world. What therefore must engage our attention in this article is the negative statement, that God is not the cause of sin, and the positive statement, that the cause is the will of the wicked.

I. God Is Not The Cause of Sin.

God did make all things and preserves and governs all things, but He made all things good. “Although God creates and preserves nature, yet the cause of sin is the will of the wicked,” not of the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth.

1. God creates all nature.

God creates all nature. Whatever exists is His handiwork.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Gen. 1:1.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” John 1:1-3

“All things” are meant by the word “nature” in our article. We must observe this to prevent misunderstanding, as the term is not always used in the same sense. God created our human nature, as He created nature in general, but He did not create with the sin which now corrupts it. The corruption has a different cause from the nature which it corrupts. To avoid strivings about words their difference of meanings in different connections must not be overlooked. Thus it is also well to note the diverse signification of the word ‘nature,’ whereby the Manicheans cover their error and lead astray many simple men. For some times it means the essence, the very substance of man, as when it is said that God created human nature. But at other times it means the disposition and the vicious quality of a thing, which inheres in the nature or essence, as when it is said than nature of the serpent is to bite, and the nature and disposition of man is to sin, and is sin. Here the word nature does not mean the substance of man, but something that inheres to it’s nature or substance. When our article says that God made nature it means that He made the whole universe. “He made me and all creatures,” our Catechism says. But He did not make the sin that is in me and other creatures. Sin is not my substance. Nor has He made my substance with a quality of wickedness in it, so that our nature was or is essentially bad. On the con-

trary, all nature was good as it proceeded from the hand of the Creator, and the bad that is in it came afterward and from another source, as it does not belong to the created nature of apples or murrain to the created nature of cattle. That all men are sinners, and that therefore sin is an attribute of our nature now, being universal in the human creature, is not owing to the original constitution of our nature. How our nature became sinful the Scriptures plainly tell us.

“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Rom. 5:12.

But that was later. The Word of God expressly says that all things as God made them were good. This is repeatedly declared in the biblical narrative of the creation, and at the close of the six days’ work the account says: “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” Gen. 1:31.

2. He who made all things preserves them all.

He who made all things preserves them all. And man’s poor reason, perceiving that sin has come into the world and has corrupted our race, perplexes itself with the question, how God can preserve things that are bad without willing the existence of wickedness. Many thus come to the conclusion that either God is not the absolute Creator and Preserver of the universe, or that sin is not the deadly poison which the Scriptures represent it to be. No Christian should stumble at the truth or shrink from its confession on this account, seeing that it is only one of the wiles of the devil to turn souls away from their Savior. Things do continue to exist only by that power which called them into existence. Neither devils nor men could remain in the universe if God did not preserve them. For “by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.” Col. 1:16.17. He supports all things which He has created, “upholding all things by the word of His power.” Heb. 1:3. If the knowledge of this truth should lead men in their self-sufficiency and pride to enter into a controversy with God on the question, whether it is right to

preserve creatures that He made upright but that have gone wrong, the reply given by St. Paul in a similar case should not be considered harsh:

“O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of one lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?” Rom. 9:20,21.

The supercilious self-conceit, the ignorance and irreverence of man that finds fault with the wise and righteous ways of God, deserve no other answer than such a sharp rebuke. But not all who are occasionally troubled by the difficulties which arise in their minds when they reflect on the fact that devils and wicked men are preserved, as well as the rest of creation, are of that proud and presumptuous class. And for the sake of these Something more must be said.

One thing is that not the wickedness, but the creature whom it has corrupted, is the object of the preservation. As He created angels and men, not that they might sin, though this was a possibility which lay in the noble gifts with which His goodness and wisdom endowed them, but for a high and glorious purpose, so He preserves these creatures after they have fallen, in pursuance of the same purpose still. It is not the sin that He desires to perpetuate, but the persons in whom the sin has wrought such perversion. He warned against the sin and still warns against it; He condemns the sin; He declares His curse upon it. Sin is an abomination in His sight. It cannot be the continuance of this that He has in view when He preserves the sinner, though He might by His omnipotent power destroy the sin which corrupts by the destruction of the creature which is corrupted. Must He do this in order to remain the Holy One who created all in holiness? That would be one way of dealing with the calamity that has befallen the intelligent creature and that has extended its wretchedness over all creation, and that is probably the way which the wrath of man would suggest. The consummation of the world would thus have taken place in its destruction before its history had fairly begun. It is not God's way. He had thoughts of peace towards man and resolved to preserve our race, notwithstanding the sin which polluted and disabled it, upholding by the word of His power the nature He had created, whilst continuing to condemn the sin which so marred it. He is the Holy One that He always was, and continues to uphold His creatures for the

same holy purpose for which He created them. He is no more the cause of sin in the preservation than in the creation of His fallen creatures.

And not connivance at sin, but goodness and mercy as well as holiness and righteousness prompt Him not to destroy His creature that has fallen into sin. Not everything is forever lost. Ruined souls may be restored. This could not be done by an act of omnipotence upon a creature endowed with will in liberty, thus capable of making the holiness which was the crown of his nobleness his own choice and permanent personal character, but also of turning away from the fountain of all holiness and of perishing; for such an act of omnipotence would be equivalent to the destruction of the souls that sinned and the creation of others to take their place. They could not be the same creatures if their will were created by a superior power and they were made mere irresponsible machines without the power of will. Man was not so created, and God chose to preserve the creature that He had made. For He had thoughts of mercy and restoration with regard to the fallen. Not to perpetuate its sin, but to perpetuate the race with a view to its salvation did He preserve it and continue to preserve it. In His eternal counsels He resolved to send us a Savior, and announced this purpose shortly after the fall in Paradise, and with ever increasing clearness until the fulness of time had come, when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Gal. 4:4.5. That not all men would accept the great salvation God knew quite well. The whole race could not thus be restored without departing from His creative plan and dealing with man otherwise than as He created Him and thus virtually destroying his identity. But some would hear when the Holy Spirit calls them by the Gospel and flee for refuge to the hope set before them in Christ. As for the others, it was mercy to give a chance to escape the wrath to come and to postpone the execution of that wrath upon sin and all the ungodliness of man until God's thoughts of peace to usward could be accomplished. His hatred of sin, which men in their contracted vision suppose to be impeached by His preservation of the creature notwithstanding his sin, will ultimately shine forth in the just punishment of the wicked as His love of His fallen creatures in providing for their salvation and preserving them for its enjoyment. The devil and his angels were at once banished from the glory of heaven and doomed to eternal death. That they are preserved, instead of being annihilated, is because their doom is eternal in the righteous govern-

ment of God as in their nature they were designed to be immortal. That man is preserved in mercy with a view to his recovery from his dreadful fall, does not in the least militate against the manifestation of God's hatred of sin upon those who reject His mercy and go down to everlasting death when the time of grace is past.

3. Sin Is Never The Will of the Holy One.

Sin is never and can never be the will of the Holy One, and can therefore never be implied in any of His purposes or works. It is only the false theorizing of man's benighted reason; which assumes premises that have no foundation and draws conclusions that often would not follow even if the premises were more than fancies, that causes difficulties and perplexities. The facts are plain, that God made and preserves the world, and that the world lieth in wickedness, and to our limited intellectual powers their contemplation may present a puzzling problem when we endeavor to reconcile them; but all efforts to solve the problem by denying the facts or by assuming premises which are inconsistent with all that we know or may know from the Bible concerning them, is neither right nor reasonable. To assume that because evil is in the world God, if He is good, cannot be the world's Maker and Preserver, and to follow up this assumption with such a theory as that of the Manicheans, that there is another eternal principle that is wicked, a bad god who is at enmity with the Good and who created this wicked world: or such a theory as that of the Platonists, who imagine that all souls lived in purity ages before they came into our world and became soiled and spoiled by coming here — these and all similar speculations only show the incompetency of human reason to deal with such a problem, For aside from the fact that they have no ground for their assumptions, the conclusions fail entirely to meet the difficulties in the case, and the problem which they were devised to solve, how evil could exist in a world whose Maker and Preserver is good, confronts us just as it did before. The Manichean speculation tries to vindicate God by denying that He is the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, and thus that He is God at all; the preexistent speculation pushes back the difficulty, but does absolutely nothing to remove it, because, however far back it is forced, there it still faces us. Nor are the attempts of other speculatively inclined people, Christians and infidels, any more conducive to the solution of the problem or compli-

mentary to human ability. The theory of Calvinists and others of their predestinarian way of thinking, that God needed evil in the world to make known His justice in its condemnation and just punishment, and that He thus makes vessels of wrath for His glory; in other words, that He does evil that good may come, does not vindicate His righteousness before the forum of human conscience, which always condemns sin without regard to the purpose alleged to excuse it; and the theory of Deists and Materialists, who presume that God, after creating the world, withdrew from His work and has nothing further to do with its development and its course, so that He has no hand and no responsibility in its ways and works, is superficial and fatuous in the extreme, neither exculpating the Maker nor accounting for the sin and misery that are upon us. Manifestly, reason merely flounders about in the mire and darkness that afflict us, and can as little find an explanation of the sin that is in the world as it can furnish a remedy for the evil. Christians are content with what the Creator and Preserver Himself tells us about the matter in the Scriptures which He has given us. From these we know that He is the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, who upholds all things by the Word of His power, and that He is good, and made all things good and doeth all things well. The evil in the world He did not create, is not inherent in the things which He did create, and attached itself and corrupted these things not only without but also against His holy will.

“For Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Thee. The foolish shall not stand in Thy sight; Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.” Ps. 5:4.5.

God is the Holy One who can do no evil, cannot look upon it with complacency, forbids it, warns against it, condemns and punishes it. “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” 1 John 1:5. He is not the cause of sin, but when it has come as a hostile power to ruin His holy work, His wisdom and mercy and power are directed to saving His unhappy creature from its ravages.

II. Sin’s Cause Is The Will of the Wicked.

“The cause of sin is the will of the wicked; to wit, of the devil and ungodly men; which will, God not aiding, turns itself from God, as Christ says, ‘When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of His own.’ John 8:44.”

When sin once exists in the creature, it is not hard to understand how his actions are sinful. That is just what we expect. The devil’s natural wickedness will manifest itself in the wickedness of his deeds. So when men have been born in sin, their understanding being darkened and their affections corrupted and turned away from God, it is but natural that their wills should be moved to wickedness. But how this could become so in creatures that God made good is a mystery, on the solution of which our faith does not depend. The cause of sin is not God, but the will of the wicked, whatever difficulties may present themselves to our reason in view of the truth which the Bible reveals and our faith receives and confesses.

1. Will Enables An Intelligent Creature To Fall Into Sin.

The possibility of turning away from God and falling into sin must of course have lain in the intelligent creature endowed with will. This lies in the nature of will and is rendered unquestionable by the fact that angels and men did fall. When carping critics put the question, Why did God create such beings of a higher order with such noble powers knowing the dangers that were implied? Christians are not confounded. Even reasonable men see that such a question simply means, Why did He make creatures of such a high order at all? Why did He not make us all brutes with no power to transgress His will? Even reason recognizes the fatuity of such criticism when the case is stated without the clause that impeaches the Creator’s goodness. He could create minerals and vegetables and animals without any danger of their sinning, and to all inquiries why He did not confine Himself to these, but proceeded to make angels and men also who could think and will, and even use these powers against the will of their Maker, it is a sufficient answer that in His wisdom and goodness it was His pleasure to do this. Many of His rational creatures in the exercise of their high power find fault with God’s work and imagine that they could have done better. In pursuance of God’s creative plan they are permitted to become fools. But no doubt they themselves are ready to acknowledge that God is not responsible for their folly, which in their darkness and perversion they call wisdom.

God made all things good; and the creatures that possessed the highest powers with which creatures were endowed and could even pervert them and use them against the Creator's will, were very good. Their sin did not come from God, who forbade it and warned against it, but originated in themselves.

2. The Sinning Creature Turned Away from The Creator.

The sinning creature turned away from the Creator, "God not aiding." He gave no impulse to the ungrateful and disloyal thought of using the will in independence of God and His good will, or in any way abetted or gave encouragement to it. He did not aid in the formation of the will to commit an act of disobedience to the Maker of all things and the Ruler of all in righteousness. How could He instigate thoughts of rebellion against Himself, or in any way contribute to their execution? That would mean that He joined the enemy in concocting treason against Him and contriving plans to overthrow His government, and thus ceasing to be God. It is His holy will that is violated when sin is committed, and it is His holy nature that sin attacks and strives to render powerless. No thought could be more absurd than that He in some way aids its nefarious work and shares in its responsibility. The reason of man's foolish thoughts in this regard is no doubt the blindness of the human heart in its present benighted condition, which concludes that because God still preserves our race notwithstanding its sin, He must in some way connive at sin and thus by implication approve it. The argument is that, if God did in no wise and in no degree sanction it, He would not make its continuance possible by still preserving the sinner, but would render this impossible by his annihilation. If we could assume that these wiseacres are wiser than God, we might see some force in the argument; but as not even reason can make such an assumption and to Christians it only appears ridiculous, the argument stands only as a manifestation of unreasonable and impotent ill-will towards our Lord and our God. If enemies of the truth insist that God must in some way be implicated in the sin, because He did not take their way of dealing with it by at once destroying the sinners, they may make the most of it. God still remains the Holy One who doeth all things well, saving what can be saved from the wreck that sin has wrought, and letting no sinner escape His righteous judgment, though He endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.

“The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.” 2 Pet. 3:7.10

The complete revelation of God’s righteous wrath against all sin will come in due time, when the Lord returns to judge the quick and the dead, and when,

“...the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless, and account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation.” 2 Pet. 3:12.15.

3. How Did Wicked Persons Enter Into The World?

When our Confession says that the cause of sin is “the will of the wicked,” it does not presume to solve the mystery of the introduction of evil into a world which God made good and which became wicked against His will. When there are once wicked creatures with wills in the world, we have no difficulty to understand that these wills of the wicked would perpetuate wickedness. But when we inquire further how, under the conditions presented, it came about that there were wicked persons in the world whose wills were the cause of sin, we find it no easy task to furnish an adequate answer. Even the fall from grace of a regenerate Christian is from a psychological point of view, not so easy to explain, notwithstanding that in this case the continued presence of sinful proclivities in our old nature furnishes a clue to the solution of the problem. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and therefore the warning is needful, that in the struggle he that thinketh that he standeth should take heed lest he fall. But in the good angels and in our first parents, by whom sin was brought into the world, there was by their created nature no such lusting to evil. It was probably this difficulty that led some writers to misconstrue the words of our article, that the cause of sin is the will of the wicked, “which will, God not aiding, turns itself from God.” They presumed that “God not aiding” means, that God first turned away from them, leaving them without the holiness in which He had

created them, so that they were left without His aid in a state of moral indifference, and could thus exercise their will for good or for evil, as thoughts or feelings induced by circumstances might suggest. Such willing of a creature without harmony with the Creator's will and without His guidance for the attainment of His purpose would necessarily lead to substitute that creature's will for the Creator's as the rule and norm of action, and thus to turn away from God and His will to self and the gratification of the desires which move the selfish will. This misinterpretation of the words "God not aiding," is supposed to be confirmed by the German text of our article, which says that the will of the wicked at once, when God withdrew His hand, turned away from God to evil. This would rationally account for the existence of sin in the world, but it would not be an explanation of this article of our faith. On the contrary, it would be an argument in favor of the fundamental error which it was the purpose of the article to renounce and condemn. For it would imply that God so ordained that His intelligent creatures must rely on their own will and thus necessitated the selfishness which conflicts with the sovereignty of God and is the root of all sin in the world. There is nothing in the words to justify such an idea, and there is everything in the circumstances to condemn it. God had no hand in bringing about the defection from Him and the setting up of a kingdom of the creature in opposition to the absolute sovereignty of the Creator. He did withdraw His hand when the creature went wrong by exercising his power of free will against His good will as it had been made known to the creature. He preserved the poor creature with no view to the preservation of his sin, but with thoughts of peace and salvation toward our fallen race. He did not aid in the consummation of rebellious thoughts and feelings, and He did not by an exercise of His omnipotence prevent the execution of the cogitations and impulses of a willful creature, though inclining against Him, because He would not depart from His creative design that angels and men should be free creatures, as He does not repeal or transgress His eternal ordinance now, but carries out His plan of wisdom and love and righteousness. still, whatever the devil in his rebellion and fallen man at his instigation may do. He did not aid in bringing sin into the world, and He did not aid by the intervention of His almighty power to crush the human will to prevent it, but left the creature free, as He had made it, to his own choice. That is what our article says and that its words mean.

4. How Could Man Created In The Image of God in Righteousness and True Holiness Choose to Disobey?

How it could be that man created in the image of God in righteousness and true holiness could choose to disobey the divine will, we do not know and our Confession does not pretend to say. It has no philosophical or theological theory to propound. It was not drawn up for such a purpose. It is simply a confession of the Christian faith in the matter, and that faith rests on no human speculations and theories concerning the facts presented, but exclusively upon the Holy Scriptures. What they say Christians humbly believe, and if we cannot comprehend how it all can be, we still know and believe that God is good, that He made all His creatures good, that sin came not from Him but from His self-perverted creature, and that He is the Savior from sin and fully understands the whole plan of His government.

Article XX. Of Good Works.

Ours are falsely accused of forbidding good works. For their writings extant upon the Ten Commandments, and others of the like argument bear witness that they have to good purpose taught concerning every kind of life, and its duties: what kinds of life, and what works in every calling, please God. Of which things preachers in former times taught little or nothing; only they urged certain childish and needless works; as keeping of fixed holy-days, set fasts, fraternities, pilgrimages, worshipping of saints, the use of rosaries, monkery, and such like things. Whereof our adversaries having had warning, they now unlearn them, and do not preach concerning these unprofitable works, as they were wont. Besides, they begin now to make mention of faith, concerning which there was formerly a deep silence. They teach that we are not justified by works alone, but they join faith and works together, and say we are justified by faith and works. Which doctrine is, indeed, more tolerable than the former one, and can afford more consolation than their old doctrine.

Whereas, therefore, the doctrine of faith, which should be the chief one in the church, has been so long unknown, as all men must needs grant that there was the deepest silence about the righteousness of faith in their sermons, while the doctrine of works only was taught in the churches; for this cause our divines have thus admonished the churches:

First, that our works cannot reconcile God, or deserve remission of sins, grace, and justification, but that these we obtain by faith only, when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake; who alone is appointed the Mediator and Propitiatory by whom the Father is reconciled. He. therefore. that trusts by works to merit grace, despises the merit and grace of Christ, and seeks, without Christ, by human powers to come unto the Father: whereas Christ said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." John 14:6.

This doctrine of faith is handled by Paul everywhere: "By grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works," etc., Ephes. 2:8. 9.

And lest anyone should craftily say that a new interpretation of Paul has been devised by us, this entire matter is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers. For Augustine, in many volumes, defends grace and the righteousness of faith, over against the merits of works. And Ambrose, in his *De Vocatione Gentium*, and elsewhere, teaches to like effect. For in his *De Vocatione Gentium* he says as follows: "Redemption by the Blood of Christ would become of little value, neither would the preeminence of man's works be superseded by the mercy of God, if justification, which is wrought through grace, were due to the merits going before, so as to be, not the free gift of a donor, but the reward due to the laborer."

[Note: pages 860-861 are missing from the source volume. -Ed]

...absolutely false. There never was any evidence of any sort adduced to substantiate it. Seemingly a lie without any sugarcoating of truth and some semblance of probability to render it respectable, could take little hold on the public, and needs no refutation before sensible people. But not all people are gifted with good sense, not even with common sense. And the authority of those who occupy high places, and the prejudices of those under their influence, must not be overlooked. Priests tell the most absurd stories about Luther, and the masses under their guidance think it loyalty to the Church to believe every word of the stupid lie. But whilst myriads of ignorant Romanists regard it as sufficient evidence that the vilest slanders against Lutherans and the Lutheran Church must be true, because their spiritual guides promulgate them, the higher officials would hardly venture before the general public with lying statements to which they could not, by craft and sophistry, give some semblance of truth. Whilst the world is prejudiced against Lutherans because it is prejudiced against Christianity, that prejudice lies also against Rome, as far as it is still Christian, and fair-minded people of the world can therefore not be swayed by a bare-faced lie emanating from Rome against the men of the Reformation. Romanists would lose all standing among intelligent people if they circulated lies against their opponents without offering at least some shadow of proof when their allegations are challenged. Hence, though the blind devotees of the pope need no proof, they find it necessary, for the sake of others, to offer something which may look like evidence and may with uncritical minds serve their purpose. Thus they refer to the sins prevalent among Protestants and the inference which may be drawn from our doctrine of justification by faith alone, as proof that good works are forbidden among us. Of course the argument is groundless because if even all the premises be granted, the conclusion could not be that we forbid good works. But such sophistry as that of illogical inferences does not prevent making a show of argument in a bad cause, and it misleads many who do not detect the fallacy. Meantime the assumed premises, though they do not prove what is claimed, through a perversion of facts and confusion of ideas, create a prejudice against the Gospel which we confess.

It is maintained, in the first place, that the effect of the Reformation was a deterioration of morals among its adherents. Attempts are made to prove this by the statements of trustworthy historians of Protestant countries and

by the candid confessions of Protestant writers themselves, who deplored it and sought to counteract it. Some of the facts adduced are not denied. There were not a few Romanists who were supposed to live in a state of good works as long as they lived under the Roman yoke, but who, when they professed to accept the Gospel, did not like the good works which that implies and apparently became worse than before. They abandoned "certain childish and needless works" to which they had been urged and trained by their priests, such "as keeping of fixed holydays, set feasts, fraternities, pilgrimages, worshipping of saints, the use of rosaries, monkery, and such like things, and did not become zealous of such good works as the Scriptures require and therefore please God. No one need wonder that under such circumstances Romanists would regard them as morally worse than before. And there were some who, hearing of the liberty which the truth in Jesus confers and of the emancipation from papal tyranny which the Reformation secures, became fanatical in their zeal for liberty, which they did not understand, and, imagining that they were freed from all authority, human and divine, and had no law but their own will, became lewd fellows of the baser sort and disgraced all Christianity. But that this ungodliness was due to the Gospel which Luther preached and which these people neither accepted nor understood, even our bitterest enemies should be ashamed to assert. Nor would reasonable people who have any sense of righteousness think of attributing the shortcomings of true believers or the wickedness of false Christians, who are found in all denominations, to the Gospel truth which the Reformation proclaimed and the Church of the Reformation confessed. Not the Gospel, but the rejection or the perversion of the Gospel was the cause of the deplorable condition of morals in Protestant countries, as well as in others. If Romanists think of convicting evangelical Christians of the superiority of Romanism over Protestantism by arguments such as these, let them compare the condition in this regard of Romish with Protestant countries, and hide their heads in shame. Even when they place the highest possible estimate upon their "childish and needless works," they cannot fail to see, being rational creatures, that they are left far in the rear in regard to righteousness and true holiness as manifested in works of love. Meantime we must remind the reader that the malicious charge made by our enemies is that we Lutherans forbid good works, and that their charge would not be proved even if it were so, that our people are morally worse than the Romanists. This is not proved, but the contrary is manifest so that the facts, de-

plorable as some of them are, lie against Romanism more than against Protestantism.

But this whole mode of argumentation is false. If a professed Lutheran is not what he ought to be, as he manifests this in his life, the only legitimate inference is that he does not do his duty. The conclusion that Lutheranism does not teach man his duty is without all rational warrant, as it certainly is without authority of revelation. He does not do his duty, and he does not do it whether he has been taught it or not, or whether when he has been taught it he has recognized it or not, or whether his flesh has relucted against it and he has in weakness failed to perform it. To assign the teaching of the Gospel, as the Lutheran Church proclaims it, as the reason of his failure is as unreasonable as it is wanton, to say nothing of the teaching of Holy Scripture in the case.

In the second place, it is argued that the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law, as the Reformation presents it according to the Gospel, cannot otherwise than lead to a neglect of good works. The argument must be admitted to have a semblance of truth to those who, not having any profound consciousness of sin and not fleeing in repentance to the hope set before them in Christ, cannot see how any soul could pursue holiness with any earnestness when the motive of escaping death and meriting reward is taken away. An unregenerate and self-righteous person can only pronounce the doctrine of salvation without the deeds of the law the impracticable dream of a visionary. The Gospel has always been to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. So it has always been, and so it will always be to fallen man in the darkness of his sin.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Cor. 2:14.

It is therefore not surprising that Romanists and Pelagians and Socinians and all their following in every sect, accepting the judgment of the natural man, can see in our doctrine of justification by faith only an influence hostile to good works. They cannot understand the power of faith which they do not possess, and the only motive to good works of which they have any knowledge is barred by the Gospel doctrine of salvation by faith alone. To unbelievers it no doubt seems ungracious that matters of personal experience are thus introduced into the discussion of controverted doctrine; but

the necessity of this is apparent to all who have any insight into the situation. The reformers preached what the Scriptures teach of the way of salvation by faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The whole host of those who followed the teachings of corrupt nature, headed by the Romish pope, thought they knew a better way and urged the way of the law against the way of the Gospel. It would be a good way if the sin that brings death were not upon us, which means that if we needed no salvation the righteousness of the law, there being no sin to be saved from, would be sufficient. So it certainly would be, as there surely would be no need of a physician and a remedy if no man were sick. But that reveals the root of the trouble that made the Reformation necessary. How could our Lutheran fathers, without injury to the cause of truth and human salvation, avoid saying things that seemed ungracious? The salvation of souls was at stake, and mincing words did not become those whom God had blessed with a knowledge of the truth revealed in the Gospel. "This doctrine," they say, and we of the Lutheran Church continue to say, "must be wholly referred to the conflict of a terrified conscience, and cannot be understood but where the conscience has felt that conflict. VVherefore all such as have no experience thereof, and all that are worldly minded, who dream that Christian righteousness is naught else but a civil and philosophical righteousness, are poor judges of this matter." Luther, after his earnest and vigorous manner, used words that were still more severe, especially against opponents who were not only ignorant of the Gospel, but whose self-righteous ignorance rendered them contemptible by its pride and haughtiness. The alleged violence of the great Reformer can be understood only by those who appreciate the eternal interests at stake. What can be done to rescue the millions whom a great calamity has befallen? One that is mighty to save comes to rescue them with a power of which humanity knows nothing. And human wisdom comes with all its pride and pomp and declares that the perishing multitudes must help themselves; it would be degrading to accept extraneous help. That is the condition of fallen humanity. Is there any help for it? The Gospel answers, Yes, Christ has come to save us from our sins. Infidels pronounce the idea absurd, and Romanists and others of like opinions, starting out from the same regard for the honor of humanity notwithstanding its ruin by falling away from God, declare that Christ may be accepted as an assistant to help ourselves, and therefore the absurdity can lie only in the faith which accepts Him for justification without the deeds of the law and therefore

without our effort and work. Rome and the Naturalism which it represents in religious matters differ only in the extent to which foreign power may be necessary to fulfill the requirements made upon man by the holy law of God, not at all in the inherent ability of the human creature, though a little help may be needed to support it in its weakness. This may be desirable and is furnished by our Lord. The Gospel thus becomes a different thing from that which the Scriptures teach, and the opposition to the Reformation with its proclamation of the Gospel as the way of life through faith in the work and sufferings and death of our Savior becomes apparent. If our Lord Jesus has fulfilled all righteousness for us what need is there for any human righteousness or any effort to attain it?

From the standpoint of human nature in its sin the argument is not a plain fallacy. If I am able to help myself, it is not altogether false to say that it is degrading to lean upon the arm of another to support me. If I can fulfill all righteousness myself, why should I need a Savior to fulfill that righteousness in my stead? And if I have failed in any particular, why should I not trust in the mercy of God to pardon the infirmity without compromising my position as a free agent under the dominion of a merciful God? Everything seems favorable to the claim that man needs no Savior. And when Christ is preached as the Redeemer of all the world, in whom alone there is salvation, and that faith is the only way of appropriating it, all the self-conceit and pride of sin revolts against the thought. But still the Gospel of God's grace in Christ must be preached or the souls so dearly purchased by His blood will be lost. He alone can save us, and faith alone can appropriate the benefit of His great salvation. That is what the Gospel teaches and the Reformation confesses. And now when man in his pride lifts up his voice in protest, we can understand him. He imagines that all the salvation that can possibly be needed is his continuance in good works. To such minds our Lutheran doctrine that man's works contribute nothing to salvation, that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified, that the sinner is justified by faith alone, without the deeds of the law, must seem equivalent to forbidding good works, because to such minds all purposes and uses of good works and all motives for their performance are thus removed. But the argument which is thus saved from appearing the sheerest sophistry, owes its respectable appearance only to its renunciation of the Gospel and can have that appearance only where the essential conditions of understanding and appreciating that Gospel are wanting. In short, to a true believer of the

Gospel the argument against our confession of its central truth is foolishness, just as to an unbeliever that Gospel is foolishness, because it runs counter to all the pretensions of the natural man's pride of reason.

The charge made against us, that we forbid good works, is absolutely false, though we perceive how the arguments to sustain it serve to mislead the people who have no appreciation of the truth revealed in Holy Scripture for our salvation. This presented to our Confessors a not unwelcome opportunity to state again the doctrine of justification by faith in its practical import.

II. Justification by Faith Alone Cannot Be Abandoned.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone cannot, in deference to erring opponents who are offended at it without the least Scriptural cause, be abandoned; on the contrary, charity requires of us to make it clear, if possible, to those among our enemies who yet believe in Christ, and to show them how it brings peace and comfort to the penitent sinner, and how, instead of forbidding or in any way hindering good works, it is the divine way of securing them.

1. The One and Only Way of Salvation.

Whatever men may think or say about it, and whatever tendencies may be supposed to lie in the doctrine that may seem menacing to morality, it is the one and only way of salvation revealed in the Gospel. Christians can rest perfectly easy under any accusations which the wisdom of man may make against the wisdom of God; for however imperfect may be their knowledge of things revealed, they at least know and can realize that the wisdom of God is greater than that of His creature, even though they may esteem the endowments of man exorbitantly high. God doeth all things well. But it is not only this antecedent judgment that renders believers secure against the attacks of the world and the devil. They are sinners, and they would not have become believers if they did not know it. Because they know it, they fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel. And now what is that hope? They found in the Gospel the proclamation of good tidings of

great joy which shall be to all people. The good tidings are that a Savior has come. The Word, who is the Eternal Son of God, was made flesh and dwelt among us. What this was for is plainly told us.

“When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father!” Gal. 4:4-6.

He came to save us; we could not save ourselves; there was no health or strength in us; in infinite mercy He came to make an infinite sacrifice for our sins and save us from the everlasting death which is their due. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” Gal. 3:13. Here is infinite love manifesting itself in an infinite sacrifice for us miserable sinners. And now we have peace in believing in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. How could a person be such a believer and still imagine that our good works are in some way or in some measure necessary to eke out the work of Him who fulfilled all righteousness in our Stead! What was there in our Lord’s obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, that needed any additions from our filthy rags of righteousness to make it perfect? And what could we add to the infinite sacrifice of God’s own Son on the cross to make it more complete or more effective as a perfect atonement for the sins of the world? Is it any wonder that the Reformers used strong language against people who professed to be Christians and still contended for the necessity of good works, to complete the work of Christ, as if His glorious work had been at least a partial failure and needed the help of our miserable efforts and good works to save it from defeat and make it efficacious for our rescue?

True, there is another feature of the subject which it is not fair or right to overlook. It would be unjust as well as uncharitable to maintain, that Romanists and all others who oppose our doctrine on the plea that it eliminates good works, on that account cannot be Christians. The delusion of satisfaction by works is dangerous and many are lost by entertaining it, because it prevents them from embracing the salvation offered in Christ, which alone can help them. He that believeth not in Him shall perish in his sins, whoever he may be or whatever may be his profession. But among those who seek justification by the alleged merit of their good works there are many who still profess to believe in Christ as their Savior, and no doubt some of

them do believe, and in the depth of their souls, notwithstanding all their errors, at last trust in Him for salvation. They have hearkened to false teachers and have been deceived, thinking that they adhere faithfully to the Gospel of Christ, while their Pelagian teachers keep them under the terrors of the law. Nor is it difficult to understand how this is possible. The law is of God; it is righteous and good; it was given to be our rule of right living; it is obligatory upon all men: how then can we please God if we disregard its requirements of good works, as our doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law so manifestly seems to do? Sincere souls may be misled, and that...

[Note: pages 870-871 are missing from the source volume. -Ed]

That is the way of the Gospel offering to us the righteousness of the Lamb of God, to be received simply by faith, and imputed to us, "if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." Rom. 4:24.25. Under the law and its works we can secure no righteousness of our own; for the more we study it with its holy demands, the more we see our inability to fulfill its requirements.

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and, come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus?" Rom. 3:20-24.

It is astounding that many who have the Bible and even profess to be Christians should be so ignorant or so oblivious of the very quintessence of Gospel truth as to think still of a righteousness of good works under the law for their salvation, when the failure of all human effort in that direction is so manifest, and the mercy of God is magnified so gloriously in providing a perfect way of salvation in Christ to rescue our sinful souls from the death which is the consequence. Instead of grasping with eagerness and joyful praise the proffered gift of free justification and salvation by faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, some still display the filthy rags of their own righteousness and boast that some note must be taken of this, if not as rendering the sacrifice on the cross needless, still as in some way necessary to render complete and efficacious the righteousness

acquired by our Savior in our stead and offered to us freely in the Gospel, that we might embrace it by faith and thus stand justified before God without our deeds of the law. It is necessary not only patiently to continue our testimony and instruction on a subject so vital, but also to repeat the warning: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace." Gal. 5:4.

But some profess a profound interest in the holy living which God requires of His creatures, and allege this as their ground for declining to accept the great truth of justification by faith alone which was the heart of the Reformation. While some by their deeds showed then and some show now, that that is not their chief concern, some no doubt were and some are now sincere in putting forth that plea. If we are justified by faith alone, without the good works which the law requires, what is there left to secure the performance of good works among men? They seem to think that this question is a sufficient answer to all that Lutherans have said or can say in support of their doctrine, and that when they fairly consider it they will be rendered speechless. Probably that would be the case if they stood on such unsafe ground as their adversaries. But they stand upon the solid rock of revealed truth, and therefore hear and consider the question with perfect composure and heartfelt pity for the opponents that have been deluded, and who might be with us in our enjoyment of the comfort of the Gospel, if they had not been befooled by false prophets. For these we have a calm and ready answer.

In the first place, it is not for us to set ourselves up as advisers of God, how He shall preserve the supremacy of His holy law and secure holy living among those whom He has put under it. He does not need our wisdom to help Him in the accomplishment of His purpose. It is for us to hear and to let Him speak. And when He tells us that sinners are justified by faith in Christ without the deeds of the law, that matter is decided, whatever puzzling questions may be started in our minds. For a sincere Christian the Word of the Lord is enough to settle all questions. We start in a wrong Spirit and pursue a wrong road when we presume to argue against God's plain Word.

In the second place, it is a pitiful display of ignorance and presumption to assert, and to do it with such stupidity of self-conceit as to oppose their assertion to the clear words of Holy Scripture, that God cannot uphold His law and secure His object of righteous conduct and good works among

men, if He declares that men are justified without their righteous conduct and without their good works. They do not see far and do not look around them, and in that condition they may not be able to understand how God is accomplishing the plans of His infinite wisdom and mercy by the mission of a Savior to fulfill all righteousness in our stead and by imputing this righteousness to them that believe. But God has given us the light of the Gospel, and they are without excuse if they will not learn and by the grace of God receive that light and obtain understanding hearts.

In the third place, their pretended reasoning is false even from the standpoint of nature. It amounts only to this, that denying the necessity of good works to secure salvation is equivalent to denying that they serve any purpose whatever. It ought to occur to them, as rational beings, that what is not useful for one purpose may be of great use or even essential for another. If bread is not necessary to save the soul, it certainly has a very important purpose in sustaining life; and if good works are not necessary to save souls, they certainly have an important office in the operations of grace in this world of sin and in the work of Christians among the ruins which sin has wrought. Besides, the law commanding holiness and all manner of good works serves as a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, when it leads us to see our shortcoming and sin, our inability and hopelessness, to the end that we may see our sin and prepare us to flee for refuge to the hope set before us in Christ. The arguments brought against the Lutheran doctrine are all outgrowths of the vanity of our human nature in opposition to the comfort of the Gospel.

2. Salvation by Faith is the Fulfillment of the Law.

One more point remains to be urged, both for the refutation of those who insist on the necessity of good works for the sinner's justification, and for the assurance and guidance of those who rejoice in the salvation by grace through the complete redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ by faith alone, without the deeds of the law. It is this, that the salvation by faith and the righteousness which our Lord acquired through His obedience unto death for us, even the death of the cross, is the way of the fulfillment of the law. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." Rom. 3:31. For Christ, the incarnate Son of God, fulfilled it all as our substitute, and He by faith gives us His Holy Spirit and thus

makes us free to do the will of God which the law commands, and thus to abound in good works which are pleasing in His sight.

In the first place, all the righteousness of the law is satisfied in the vicarious work of Christ. The thought is worse than fatuous, it is wicked, that God should repeal His holy law because of man's sin and sinful disability, and now accommodate His will to our wickedness. Not by abolishing His law did He make it possible for man to escape its curse, but by providing for its fulfillment through the mission of His beloved Son. What we could not do He did for us. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." Gal. 4:4. God was manifest in the flesh, not only to be our great Teacher, but to fulfill all righteousness in our stead and to bear all the penalty of our failure to fulfill it. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. To this end the Eternal Son became man that He might take our flesh, and that through faith His work might be accounted ours, so that we, who have no righteousness of our own, might have another's righteousness imputed to us who believe. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." Isa. 53:5. And He was mighty to save, being God over all, blessed forever, at the same time that He was a true man, and thus able to do all and suffer all that the law of God required of us. And now the Gospel announcing these glad tidings of a Savior, is preached to us, that we might by faith alone have the full benefit of this great salvation wrought out for us by our blessed Savior. That is the precious doctrine of justification by faith without our deeds of the law which the Church of the Reformation confesses. If those who profess so lively an interest in the maintenance of God's holy law as the rule of human life would look more into the revelation which God has given for our learning in Holy Scripture, and think a little, they would see how groundless is their objection that the Lutheran doctrine disparages the law and hinders good works; for they would learn that every jot and tittle of the law is upheld in the doctrines of the Gospel, that salvation is by faith, not by our human works, because Christ's fulfillment in which our faith, according to God's gracious plan, trusts for salvation, is perfect in doing and suffering all that is demanded, whilst our own fulfillment is at best so very imperfect that it cannot secure us against the law's condemnation of all that transgresses or comes short of its complete and perfect fulfillment. Do they suppose that our Lord's work

is inferior to theirs? Ought it not to be plain to all Christian hearts that it is a base and unworthy proceeding to minimize our Savior's work of infinite love in order to magnify their efforts, real or pretended, to obey the law and achieve some glory of holiness, whilst God, who judgeth righteous judgment, sees in their best and most sincere efforts nothing but failure to attain the perfectness required? If they would only cease to reluct against the Holy Spirit and accept the grace of the Gospel, how different all would seem! Then the life and death of our Lord to fulfill all the requirements of the law in the poor incapacitated sinner's stead would appear in its comfort and its glory.

In the second place, the question would then hardly recur, how it is then about the holiness and the good works which our Holy Maker requires and in His nature must ever require of us. For a soul that truly believes is one that through the law becomes conscious of its sin, experiences the terrors of conscience pronouncing condemnation upon it, and knows of no relief under the law of God which pronounces damnation on it. When the light of the Gospel shines on such a soul which can find no solace in earth or heaven, it means infinitely more than the pride and presumption of self-righteousness can understand. The poor, forlorn, condemned person then hears good tidings of salvation by a way that never entered his thoughts even in his dreams. He is redeemed by the blood of Jesus. All has been made good by One who is mighty to save. He has fulfilled all righteousness, and He was chosen of God to do this for us. All that is needed now is by faith to embrace this offer of a free salvation which is effected for all our lost race. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. The tidings are just what meet the poor sinner's wants. When by the grace of God he believes the Gospel, he is comforted. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 5:1. Then we have come to live in joy and gratitude under Him in His kingdom and to serve Him in righteousness and true holiness, unto which we were created and are now regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Good works follow of an inward necessity, not at all because they are necessary to salvation: this is perfectly secure through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, but because our hearts, purified by faith, now love holiness. "Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Tit. 2:14.

Article XXI. Of The Worship Of Saints.

Concerning the worship of saints, they teach, that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works according to our calling; as, the Emperor may follow David's example in making war, to drive away the Turks from the country: for either of them is a king. But the Scripture does not teach us to invoke saints, or to ask help of saints, because it sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiatory, High Priest, and Intercessor. This Christ is to be invoked, and He has promised that He will hear our prayers, and this worship He especially approves, to wit, that He be called upon in all afflictions. "If any man sin. we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous." 1 John 2:1.

This is about the sum of doctrine among us, in which may be seen that there is nothing which deviates from the Scriptures, or from the Church Catholic, or even from the Roman Church, so far as that church is known from the writings of the Fathers. This being the case, they judge harshly, who insist that our ministers shall be regarded as heretics. But the dissension is concerning certain abuses, which, without any certain authority, have crept into the churches, in which things even if there were some difference, yet would it be a becoming lenity on the part of the bishops, that on account of the confession which we have now presented, they should bear with us, since not even the canons are so severe as to demand the same rites everywhere, nor were the rites of all churches at any time the same. Although among us in large part the ancient rites are diligently observed. For it is a false calumny, that all the ceremonies, all the things instituted of old, are abolished in our churches. But the public complaint was, that certain abuses were connected with the rites in common use. These, because they could not with good conscience be approved, have to some extent been corrected.

AT THE FIRST GLANCE it would not seem as if much importance were to be attached to this closing article of the doctrinal part of our great Confession. Apparently its appropriate place would be in the second division. But on more mature reflection its importance as an article of our faith becomes apparent. And the Romanists, the whole tendency of whose system is away from Christ as the only Savior of the world, and from faith as the only means of appropriating the salvation which He has acquired for our lost

race, felt this and therefore resented this article with more than their usual stubbornness. "This article," says our Apology in reply to their pretended Confutation of our Confession, "they absolutely condemn, because we do not require the invocation of saints; nor on any topic do they rhetoricate with more prolixity." They saw that their occupation, both as regards the authority by which their human institutions were upheld and the commercial profits which were thence derived, was endangered, and likely soon to be gone, if the tide of the Reformation continued to flow. Little as it would seem to matter whether people called on St. Joseph or St. Barbara or not, they felt that the whole Antichristian institution of popery was at stake, as our Lutheran confessors saw that the Mediatorship of Christ and His great glory as the Savior of the world was in question. On neither side therefore was it an insignificant matter, and is not now, seeing that popery is still the same and the Gospel is subject to no change.

Human reason and sentiment can easily, by shrewd manipulation, be led into channels favorable to the Romish scheme. Not all men have faith, all have more or less imagination and feeling. When there is no experimental knowledge of the great salvation which Christ has brought to our world and therefore no joyful feeling of a penitent soul that has escaped the damnation of hell through faith in the Redeemer, it is not difficult to infuse the thought that all the emotions of the heart are divine and that all the reasoning thus inspired is right. It is the deceivableness of unrighteousness which only those who believe can discern. If not many philosophers, who mainly do the thinking for the world, certainly many romantic poets and sentimental followers of romantic dreams, have been guided by the sophistry and sentimentality of the papistic pleas and pageants, and have found reason in heathenish and spiritistic intercourse with the dead. In logic it amounts to nothing, but in superstitious sentimentalism it amounts to much. But it is all against the good will of our God revealed to us in Christ, of which reason and feeling and imagination know nothing and without faith can realize nothing. The Romanists with their human appeals to our fallen nature are always at an advantage against the revelation of God given in Holy Scripture. Reason and science, sentiment and poetry are arrayed against faith, as these are manipulated and mustered by the flesh. But the Lutheran Church in the days of the Reformation cared for none of these things. It cared for the salvation of souls lost by sin, for whom there was no rescue but through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus by faith in Him. And that is the po-

sition of the Lutheran Church now. Our Reformers did not ask philosophy or science or the products of the imagination to help them in their tremendous conflict with Rome and its gigantic power. They simply believed the Word of God and as His servants sought to save men in His way. They knew no other way and desired no other way. If God has revealed a way to save me, that is enough: With that every believer is satisfied. If any man is not satisfied, that is a pity.

I. Proper Honors To The Saints

Meantime our Confessors, with their usual patience and purpose to enlighten those who are willing to hear and to receive the light of the Gospel, answer the condemnation of the Papists by declaring the truth of Scripture respecting the matter. The Apology says: "Our Confession approves honors to the saints. For here a threefold honor is to be approved. The first is thanksgiving. For we ought to give thanks to God because He has shown examples of mercy; because He has given teachers or other gifts to the Church. And these gifts, as they are the greatest, should be amplified, and the saints themselves should be praised who have faithfully used these gifts, just as Christ praises faithful business men. Matt. 25:21, 23. The second service is the strengthening of our faith: when we see the denial forgiven Peter, we also are encouraged to believe the more that grace truly superabounds over sin. Rom. 5:20. The third honor is the imitation first of faith, then of the other virtues, which every one should imitate according to his calling. These true honors the adversaries do not require: they dispute only concerning invocation. What is right and proper, and what we Lutherans are ever ready to accord, they do not ask. What they want is what the pope demands, but what the Scriptures forbid. They demand that we should make poor, sinful creatures like ourselves the objects of our adoration and give them the glory which belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ alone, and whatever betide us we cannot do the sacrilegious thing.

We are ready to give departed souls all the honor that is their due, but not to worship them as if they were gods. They may be recognized as saints now in glory. Not that we can accept the Roman judgment as to whom we must regard as a saint. Papists have notions of saintship that have no root in the Gospel and are therefore foreign to the Lutheran conception. Their ideas

are part of their work-righteous system. A saint with them is primarily a man whose personal holiness distinguishes him from the common mass of Christian people and whose powers are therefore marked by miraculous performances. Accordingly, when they speak of a communion of saints they do not mean what our Apostles' Creed means. According to the Scriptures a saint is a penitent sinner who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of his soul and thus trusting in another's merit, has peace with God and rejoices in the hope of glory — one who is "in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." I Cor. 1:14. Of such believing sinners the Church is composed. It is the communion of such saints, the congregation of believers whose hearts are purified by faith. Rome indeed is not willing to declare that only those whom the pope has canonized, which means that he has declared them to be saints upon whom Romanists may call for help, belong to the communion of saints. That does not lie within the purview of the Romish scheme, which could not be promoted by teaching it. Not the believers in Christ, but the believers in the power and authority of the pope, are the chief concern of the papacy. It is a hard saying, but the whole history of Romanism and of the Reformation requires it to be said. When our Confession, always concerned for the interests of truth and righteousness, consents that saints should be honored, it does not and cannot mean all the real and imaginary saints whom popes have canonized and thus declared worthy of invocation and adoration. Why, some of these saints cannot be historically proved ever to have existed, and some of them can be proved not to have been better than they ought to have been, and all certainly came short of the glory of God under the law and had nothing to boast of under the Gospel. When our Confession concedes that we may honor the sainted dead, as all Christians are disposed to do where honor is merited, it takes pains to guard against making the impression that it honors worthy men because the pope has canonized them or that this honor means the adoration or invocation of acknowledged saints, all of whom are poor sinners saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

In the first place, it is cordially admitted that those who serve the Lord faithfully should receive the honor due them. This is merely a recognition of their services and the sacrifices offered in rendering them. When we rightly appreciate a man who subordinates his own individual interests to

the welfare of the community, the sense of right in our hearts induces us to honor him. That is the impulse of nature as well as the motion of the Spirit. It is natural, both in the order of unrenewed nature under the power of conscience and of regenerated nature under the power of the Holy Spirit. "Honor to whom honor is due." is a universal rule acknowledged by all, however much parties may differ in judgment respecting the worthiness of the person to whom honor is claimed to be due. Christians never hesitate to bestow such honor. They recognize the fact when distinction is achieved in labor and suffering. Not that strenuous labor or extraordinary suffering in pursuing the path of righteousness constitutes a merit surpassing and rendering superfluous the merit of our Savior. Such a thought would undermine the whole foundation on which our admiration of any one's unusual work and sacrifice is built. It is the labor of love, without any merit or worthiness of ours, that is admired and honored. And so it should be: so faith and reason unite in decreeing.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." Heb. 2:24-26.

No doubt all Christians of every name join together in admiration of such self-denial and such loving self-sacrifice. This must be done to do our Master's holy will, who was obedient unto the divine law even unto the death of the cross. It is an example of the devotion that we are to honor and that we can rightfully imitate, and that our Confession approves.

This approval does not mean what Romanists infer. It does not mean that we recognize in faithful Christian believers a righteousness of their own that constitutes a merit before God and entitles them to heaven, nor that we accordingly proceed to appeal to them for help in our struggles on earth and flatter ourselves that their supposed merits may inure to our benefit. Ours is the faith which trusts in the merits of Christ alone, and needs no superstitious and self-righteous Romish system to help it; and when Romanists argue against us on premises derived from that unscriptural system, they cannot rationally expect us to have much respect for their reasoning. We recognize the good works of the sainted dead, and the blessings which have come to us through their labors and their sacrifices. We esteem them highly and would not have them forgotten. We call to mind the benefits which we en-

joy as the result of their work and join in erecting monuments to their memory, lest we forget. But it is altogether of the flesh when this is employed to glorify men instead of glorifying God who uses man as His instrument to do His holy will and dispense the blessings of His grace upon man in his sin and his helplessness. All that is right and good in the Romish theory of saint worship is fully recognized in the Lutheran Confession; and this that is right and good forms the sugar-coating which deceives many a right-minded Christian and induces him to think that the Romish theory is not so great an abomination after all. As usual, the devil makes it plausible that God never meant man to submit to His authority alone, and to give Him alone the glory. Our Confessors were men of faith who knew the ways of God and therefore knew the ways of sin and Satan. They made the necessary distinction between the Lord's will and work and the instruments whom He employed to perform it. The work done for the salvation of man was His work in the redemption, and is His work in the application of it by the Holy Spirit. Absolutely it is His work in all time and must be recognized as such after the consummation in all eternity. The glory all belongs to God. But that does not in the least conflict with the divine employment of human agencies in executing His merciful designs. He might have employed angels instead of sinful men to promulgate His Gospel, or He might have spoken immediately to the hearts of men without employing any created medium of communication. In His infinite wisdom, He chose to employ means of His grace and men to administer them. The wisdom of the choice is apparent to those who believe. The Word of God and the holy Sacraments contain and convey the whole effect of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. That is the treasury in which the whole gracious result of the life and death and resurrection of our Savior is deposited and from which it is designed to flow for the salvation of all them that believe. This entire blessing of salvation and means of distribution to men is committed to the Church, which is the congregation of them that believe. For the more effectual performance of the great and glorious work, God has ordained that Special ministers shall be called for the public administration of the precious means committed to all. And now, when in pursuance of this gracious plan some men manifest special aptitude to do the work or special power in suffering the persecutions of the world and the devil, shall we not honor them for their faithfulness and praise them for their resistance even unto death, as in the case of

the martyrs? What our Confession means is very plain. We should give honor to whom honor is due.

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn; and, The laborer is worthy of his reward.” 1 Tim. 5:17.18.

All that reason requires and human sentiment rightfully suggests is assumed as proper in Holy Scripture and is accepted and emphasized in our Confession as the will of God. But our ways part when we refer to the grounds of such honors, and therefore to their original source in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. When a man has been instrumental in saving a soul from death, to whom is the glory due? Whatever Romanists may answer, our Lutheran faith and Confession insist that it is God that saves, and that the instrument employed exerted no power and can claim no merit in the great achievement. The honor is due to God alone, who effected the redemption, who instituted the means of its communication, and who appointed the ministers to apply these means. The glory all belongs to Him. Therefore our Christian emotion and consideration all tend to the one point, that our gratitude is due first of all to the blessed Savior, who alone has redeemed us and provided for the application of that redemption to our sinful race by the institution of the Church with its means of grace and holy ministry. Therefore the contemplation of saintly lives and the memory of the sainted dead inspires us first of all with gratitude to God for the benefits conferred through them and their consecrated work. But they are instruments whom God has made willing laborers together with Him for our good, and thus honor is also reflected upon them. We esteem them highly for what God has enabled them to do in His service for our good and His glory, but feel that it would be dishonoring them as well as the Lord who employed them in His service if we endeavored to exalt them to a place in our worship.

In the second place, it is right and proper that we should hold the dead who have died in the Lord in loving remembrance that we may be encouraged by their example to follow their faith and imitate their good works. Biographies of faithful servants of Christ are always pleasant and profitable reading for those who desire to walk with God and follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and the contemplation of the grace given them in their pains and perils and of the victories which it enabled them to win moves us to thank

God and take courage. The Lord who gave strength to the weak in other days is with us still and will help us. The work assigned us seems beyond our ability to accomplish: the trials are sometimes apparently too great for our endurance. the enemy who opposes our progress towards the goal seems too powerful to be met and resisted with any reasonable hope of success. But we have the Word of God to assure us of mightier help than the foe can muster, and the grace of God to sustain us in our pilgrimage and our warfare by the way. God is good and makes all things work together for good to them that love Him. His Word should be enough to make us sure that His grace will be sufficient for us, whatever may be the difficulties and hardships through which we must pass ere we reach the promised land. But the best of Christians are weak by reason of the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and often have fearful struggles, when the tide is against them, to maintain their faith. Then the remembrance of the departed, of their woes and final victories, exerts a confirming power in our souls to the promises given us in the Word and admonishes us not to cast away our confidence. The eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews contains a notable catalogue of saints who continued steadfast unto the end, gave glory to the Lord that sustained them, and who entered triumphantly into the rest that remains for the people of God after all the turmoils and troubles of this earthly life. And it was all written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. The long list shows the marvelous power of faith to support in works of love and endurance of hardship, and it is all given us that we might be encouraged in our life of faith notwithstanding the forces that oppose it and the trials and tribulations to which it subjects us. After presenting the catalogue of worthies who illustrated the power of faith, the writer of the epistle adds:

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Heb. 12:1, 2. Scripture as well as reason points out the good grounds which Christians have for remembering the departed, and faith is glad to learn the history of men saved by grace and the achievements of which that grace made them the blessed servants. Our Confession cheerfully accords to the sainted dead all the honor that saints could desire.

II. No Invocation To Saints

But it will not consent to the Romish perversion and accord them an honor which the Word of God does not allow and which is not their due. “The memory of saints may be set before us that we follow their faith and good works according to our calling.” That the Lutheran Church does. It holds dear the memory of the dead.

“But the Scripture does not teach us to invoke saints, or to ask help of saints, because it sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiatory, High Priest, and Intercessor. This Christ is to be invoked, and He has promised to hear our prayers; and this worship He especially approves, to wit, that He be called upon in all afflictions. ‘If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous’. 1 John 2:1.”

For a complete understanding of our Confession it must be kept in mind that the great struggle of the Reformation was to maintain the glory of Christ as the Mediator between God and man and as the Redeemer of the world, as against the Antichristian usurpation of the pope and the consequent papal decrees founded on such usurped authority. Rome never was fully conscious of the depths of human depravity and never recognized, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and therefore never fully appreciated the heights of divine grace and the magnitude of the work of redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore it could extol human merit where it should magnify divine mercy, and could give honors to Mary that belong only and entirely to our Lord, and teach and practice the invocation of saints instead of calling on the name of the Lord. That is the error that was especially heinous in the eyes of the Reformers, and that is the point to which our article directs principal attention. Christ is to be invoked, not sinful creatures who cannot help us in our sin and distress.

Romanists maintain their theory of other mediators than Christ by appeals to human nature which, in man’s fallen condition are sure to make an impression in proportion as the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ for the remission of sin through faith is set aside. Souls that are taught to rely upon their own good works for acceptance with God, and that can therefore never be sure of their salvation. cannot approach their God with the confidence of an evangelical Christian who knows and believes the love which God hath to us and that the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin. They are kept

under the law with its terrors and are afraid to enter into the presence of the Lord God who demands perfect righteousness and pronounces condemnation upon every soul that sinneth. Romanism never could educate a people who rejoice in the forgiveness of sin and the hope of an eternal home in heaven through the righteousness of Christ which the faith wrought by the Holy Spirit embraces as spotless and eternally sure through God's promise. It has not the material to educate such a people, since it rejects it all by rejecting the pure Gospel which Luther and his coworkers preached and which the Church of the Reformation confessed at Augsburg and still confesses, but which in its blindness the obstinately erring Church of Rome still rejects and condemns. The poor people under the Romish yoke are to be pitied, that they are deprived of the Gospel light, which would lead them to liberty and joy in Christ. But why will they not hear the Gospel when they have opportunity to hear it, but choose to remain in the bondage wherein sin has bound them? Rome and the Reformation never can be brought into harmony unless Rome can be converted to the Gospel and thus led to abandon its whole papal pride and pretension.

Romish teaching and consequent practice coincides with the flesh in all essential respects, both as to the reason and the emotions. Therefore it seems the rationally and the sentimentally established truth in regard to the matter. It is dangerous to approach the Majesty of God, against whom we have sinned, because His righteousness condemns us and His lightnings will surely strike us if we presume to come near. There is undeniable truth in that, and no one should wonder that it affects the people in a Church that has not the Gospel truth to teach, which would overthrow the whole foundation of error on which the Romish system is built. That system will allow no poor soul to come to a knowledge of the truth of salvation by grace as the Gospel teaches it and the Lutheran Church confesses it. Errorists therefore think only of what natural reason and sentiment say. which is always what the flesh says, and cannot otherwise than conclude that Rome is right in interposing between sinners and God some powers that may intercede for the unreconciled parties. Mary first, then other saints, and even angels are naturally resorted to for this purpose. Is not that right? Certainly it is, if our case is otherwise hopeless; and certainly our case is hopeless according to Scripture if we have no other recourse but this. The whole conflict between the Gospel of Christ and the righteousness of the law, which was the storm center of the Reformation, is brought into view. The Romanists' saw no way of

approach to God but by the help of creatures who were supposed to have done their duty and even more than their duty under the law, or of holy creatures who never failed in their obedience to the will of God in all its holiness. Miserable men that we are should they not help us? And thus the superstitious Church taught that we must flee for refuge to the saints for help in our shortcoming, else we must perish. And superstitious souls, ignorant of the divinely revealed way of salvation through faith in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, accept the instruction: some sincerely, feeling that they are not worthy to appear in the divine presence, and some because they were taught to obey the mandates of the Church, although they felt no need of an atonement or any spiritual help whatever. Romanism is in complete accord with Naturalism: if we assume that there is any sin on our part and that God hates sin and pronounces His curse upon it, we would better not venture into His presence with our petitions for exemption from the curse. How can we presume, knowing the holiness of God our Maker, knowing the holiness to which He appointed us, and knowing the curse which He has pronounced upon sin. how could we present ourselves before Him, knowing our sinfulness? It is natural that we should think of the mediation of some more acceptable creatures whose merits might avail for our plea for exemption from the curse. All believers in the Gospel can see how the entire scheme contravenes the truth revealed for our salvation in Christ.

There is no other Mediator as there is no other Savior, but Christ our Lord. The Church would be unfaithful to Him if she permitted herself to be deceived into the recognition of any other. We do indeed need a Mediator between God and man. The sinner not only feels that he has no right to approach his God with all his burden of sin upon him, against which He who is Judge of all the earth has revealed His wrath, but the feeling is founded on reality and reflects the truth. God is angry with the wicked, and rushing into His presence, as if sin were no barrier to access, is daring presumption. There can be no rational hope of forgiveness without an atonement and no access to the offended Majesty of Heaven without a mediation. But Rome only manifests its inadequate conception of the Gospel when it imagines that works can make atonement or sinful men can serve as mediators.

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” 1 Tim. 2:5.

He offered Himself as a propitiation for our sins and opened the way for our access to God. People talk much in these last days of the Fatherhood of God and the glory of human brotherhood as His dear children. Romanists and the whole self-righteous fraternity land the loveliness of the zeal displayed in so delightful a cause: but it is all talk and zeal without knowledge and can only lead to final disappointment and disaster. which the Church of the Reformation would avert and is willing to suffer all sorts of contumely, that at least those who are willing to hear the Word of God may be saved from delusion. There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus — only one, He alone. “I am the way and the truth and the life,” He solemnly tells us: “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” John 14:6. Through Him there is a blessed brotherhood under the Fatherhood of God. “As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12. Without Him we can do nothing: in Him we have grace and every blessing. “The Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life. but the wrath of God abideth on him.” John 3:35, 36. Alas. that men are so slow, even when they profess to be Christians. who are people that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and reverence the Word of Holy Scripture given by God for their learning, to recognize the necessity of a Savior who alone could atone for the sins of the world and through whom alone there could be any effectual mediation between our righteous God and His unrighteous creature. Our sin is not now necessarily a bar between us and the love of God who desires our salvation. But it is only and wholly because we have a mighty Savior who has fulfilled all righteousness in our stead and thus effected an otherwise impossible mediation between God and men. Now we can come to God through Him with the perfect confidence of faith that, coming in His name, we shall in no wise be cast out. But there is no other name by which we can come and be heard and accepted.

“If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.” 1 John 2:1, 2.

In Him Christians are taught to trust, and in such trust have joy and peace through the Holy Ghost, who speaks to them in the Scriptures.

“Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Rom. 5:12.

Verily, in the light of Holy Scripture and of the experience of Christians in all ages as well as of their own, it was not a light matter which our evangelical Lutherans encountered in the Romish invocation of saints; and when they rejected and condemned the whole Romish invention of creatures, whether of angels or Mary or other alleged saints, who were delusively supposed to supply the place of our glorious Advocate with the Father, our blessed Savior, it is plain how much they saw at stake and why they were so persistent.

Nor could they close their eyes to the fact that this Romish denial of Christ as the only Mediator between God and men opened the way for the whole heathen delusion of other gods than the One Almighty Maker of heaven and earth. It does not seem courteous and kind, but rather a violation of charity, to charge the Romish system with idolatry. But that is what it is, and if we Lutherans must suffer in this world for saying the truth in order to warn against the lies of Satan, God’s will be done! We confess that the charity which would not disarrange the hair or rend the coat of drowning men, if that were necessary in the effort to rescue them, is not ours. If we succeed we are glad, notwithstanding the condemnation of our supposed roughness. As we see it, roughness is a virtue when gentleness not only fails to correct, but even encourages vicious propensities. A doctrine that contravenes the truth revealed in the Scriptures may not be designed to overthrow the authority of revealed truth, but we must condemn it and warn against it, though the condemnation and warning may be painful to those who promulgate it and seem unjust because they have consciously no such intention. Christian love looks first of all to the interests of the soul, and therefore cannot excuse people who ruin souls because of their intentions, really or pretendedly represented as good. The worship of angels and saints is idolatry. The sin is thus the double one of rejecting the true and only Mediator between God and men, and dishonoring Him by substituting others who can supply no help, and the second one of calling upon the creature to confer the blessings which only God can give. The entire Romish system of invoking angels, praying to Mary, trusting in the merits of saints and seeking help in the alleged miraculous powers of relics is a manifest superstition that has its ground in heathenism, not in Christianity, and its influence always has

been and in its nature must be adverse to the way of salvation by faith in the Savior of sinners and the true Spiritual worship to which that faith leads. “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” Matt. 4:10.

II. Articles In Which Are Re-counted The Abuses Corrected.

Inasmuch as the churches among us dissent in no article of faith from the Church Catholic, and only omit a few of certain abuses, which are novel, and contrary to the purport of the canons have been received by the fault of the times, we beg that Your Imperial Majesty would clemently hear both what has been changed, and what are the reasons that the people have not been forced against their consciences to observe those abuses. Nor should Your Imperial Majesty have faith in those who, that they may inflame the hatred of men against us, scatter amazing slanders among the people. In this way, the minds of good men having been angered at the beginning, they have given occasion to this dissension, and by the same art they now endeavor to increase the discord. For beyond doubt Your Imperial Majesty will find that the form both of doctrines and of ceremonies among us is far more tolerable than that which these wicked and malicious men describe. The truth, moreover, cannot be gathered from common rumors and the reproaches of enemies. But it is easy to judge this, that nothing is more profitable to preserve the dignity of ceremonies and to nurture reverence and piety among the people than that the ceremonies should be rightly performed in the churches.

Article XXII. Of Both Kinds In The Lord's Supper.

Both kinds of the Sacrament in the Lord's Supper are given to the laity, because this custom has the commandment of the Lord, "Drink all ye of this," Matt. 26:27; where Christ manifestly commands concerning the cup, that all should drink. And that no man might cavil that this should refer to the priests alone, St. Paul to the Corinthians recites an instance that the whole church used both kinds in common, 1 Cor. 2:28. And this custom remained a long time in the church; neither is it certain, when, or by what authority, it was changed, though the cardinal Cusanus mentions the time when it was approved. Cyprian in certain places testifies that the blood was given to the people; the same thing does Jerome testify, saying: "The priests minister the Eucharist, and distribute the blood of Christ among the people."

Nay, Pope Gelasius commands that the Sacrament be not divided: Dist. 2, De Consecr. Cap. Comperimus. Only a custom, not very ancient, has it otherwise. But it is manifest that a custom, brought in contrary to the commandments of God, is not to be approved, as the canons testify: Dist. 8, Cap. Veritate, and the following. Now this custom has been received, not only against the Scripture, but also against the ancient canons, and the examples of the church. Therefore, if any would rather have used both kinds in the Sacrament, they ought not to have been compelled to do otherwise with the offense of their conscience. And because the division of the Sacrament does not agree with the institution of Christ, it is the custom among us to omit that procession which has hitherto been in use.

THE 21 ARTICLES forming the first part of the Augsburg Confession treat principally of the faith of the Church and are usually called the Doctrinal Articles, wherein the pure Gospel as the Reformers proclaimed it in opposition to the corruptions and perversions of Rome is set forth. By this pure Gospel the Church of the Reformation meant to stand at every hazard and every cost to fortune and life. But they were meek-minded men who made their great Confession at Augsburg, and were ready to treat with Rome or any other adversaries as long as there was any hope of agreement under the supremacy of that Gospel on which their joyful hope of salvation rested. They were conscious of being in complete unity of faith with the holy Christian Church of all ages, including even the time of papal supremacy, in which one error after another was introduced by those in authority and one abuse after another followed in logical consequence. All thinking men who know the conditions have reason to wonder at the patience of the heroes of the Reformation. But they were men who, being saved by grace, knew nothing but Christ and Him crucified in matters of man's salvation. That, next to the glory of God whi) secured that salvation, was always uppermost in their 'thoughts. Might not Romanists, who inaugurated the abuses which our evangelical believers abolished, be yet induced to think of these things which belong to our peace? There were evidently some under the tyranny of the pope, who would listen to the voice of the true Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of all men and the only Savior of all. Might there not be some even among those who followed the pope, to say nothing of the possibilities with regard even to the apostate popes, who would recognize the departure from the Lord's Word in the papal institutions? There was no use in trying to conciliate stubborn errorists, who cared nothing for truth, but everything for success, in their unscriptural edicts and carnal determination to enforce them. Our brethren met with disappointment and suf-

ferred in consequence. But they were inured to suffering, and their labor of love was worth the sacrifice. There is much of recognition due to the effort to help, though it fails, and the praiseworthiness is all the greater when reason proclaims the failure sure, but Christian charity declares success possible. Certainly our fathers were not to blame when against hope they still hoped that in regard to abuses they might lead some to see the light of the Gospel which would enable them to see the errors from which these abuses flowed. At any rate, they reserved the right to do all that was possible to effect such a consummation and therefore to speak of the abuses separately, partly to defend themselves against ignorant and malicious aspersions, partly to offer the hand of charity further to consider these abuses and the principles which led them to abolish the offensive departures from the Gospel.

First of these abuses is that pertaining to the administration of the Holy Supper, which is the subject of the twenty-second article. "Both kinds of the Sacrament in the Lord's Supper are given to the laity." The Romanists gave only one kind, and continue that abuse to this day.

A word of explanation may be necessary to enable our Lutheran people to understand what this means. From the Bible and the practice of the Church of the Reformation they know nothing of an administration of the Lord's Supper otherwise than by the use of bread and wine, and they have learned from the Catechism that this Sacrament "is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself." Many are therefore puzzled when they read of both kinds in the Sacrament and of the abuse of administering it only in one kind. The kinds refer to the earthly elements of bread and wine, which were used in the institution and commanded to be used until the last day; "for as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do show the Lord's death until He come." 1 Cor. 2:26. But Rome has found out many inventions, and one of them is to administer only the bread to the laity. That is what is meant by celebrating the Holy Supper only in one kind, while our Lord requires the use of both bread and wine, that is "both kinds."

The case is one which illustrates in a glaring way the Antichristian character of the papacy, which many are slow to perceive. It is one in which even those who are not gifted with sharp vision may see the vital questions involved in the great contest of the Reformation. Apparently it was a sec-

ondary matter that was here involved, especially as the Romanists, though not without putting their Antichristian mark upon it, accepted the truth of the Gospel, that Christ really communicates His body and blood in the Sacrament. But all questions which pertain to God's plans and institutions for the salvation of sinful souls, and their effective execution and use, must of necessity refer back to the ground of all authority and the Holy Scriptures which alone give us light in regard to our Creator's and Redeemer's will. The papacy had usurped such authority and therefore had no further need of the Scriptures to decide such questions. The pope was lord of all. Luther and his companions in the faith of the Gospel and in the tribulations which followed in its confession and protest, insisted that Christ, who alone is the Savior of the world, is alone the Head of the Church, whose Word alone, as this is made known by inspiration of God in the Holy Scriptures, is authoritative and decisive. The more thoroughly we examine the papal hierarchy and the Church of the Augsburg Confession, the more clear it becomes that it is the controversy between Christ and Antichrist for the dominion on earth. True, by the introduction of sin into the world the devil has already become its prince, and thus it would seem that there is no room for any other Antichrist. But let Christian people consider. The devil has succeeded in bringing sin and death and all their associated misery into the world. But Christ came to save us and to this end to destroy the works of the devil. He established a kingdom of truth and salvation upon the earth, which is the congregation of believers, the holy Christian Church. Whoever by the grace of the Holy Spirit is brought to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is delivered from the bonds of Satan and serves the Redeemer. Of course the enmity of the devil is now directed against the Church, which is rescuing souls from his dominion and undermining his power. It is now mainly a conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light; the one inaugurated by sin and falsehood, led by Satan; the other established by righteousness and truth, led by Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Is there now no room for the continuance of the devil's struggle for the continuance of his deadly work in the world that lieth in wickedness under his control? A large portion of the world will not heed the good tidings of salvation from his tyranny and misery proclaimed in the Gospel, and thus remains under his dominion. Will he do nothing to preserve his possessions, on which the Church is making constant inroads? And is it at all reasonable to suppose that he will do nothing to uphold his power against the Church? Of course

he would not be the bitter enemy of God and all righteousness which the Scriptures represent him to be, if he did not marshal all his hellish forces in opposition to the kingdom of Christ. But he would not be the crafty and wily foe against whom these Scriptures warn us, if he did not sometimes appear as an angel of light, so that, if it were possible, he would deceive the very elect. We are commanded to beware of false prophets, who come to us in sheep's clothing. They may themselves be deceived and not know that they are serving the devil by their false teaching. It is quite in character of our malicious foe that he should invade the Church and even in the very citadel of truth and righteousness set up an Antichristian kingdom that would profess to be the kingdom of Christ. He is a liar from the beginning, and will continue to be a liar unto the end. He remains the bitter enemy of the Church and all its precious truth, but he is a devoted friend of all that, though under the guise of truth and righteousness, deceives the people and hinders the kingdom of God. Christians must not wonder that, while the watchmen slept, an Antichrist should be smuggled into the temple of God, "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." 2 Thess. 1:9, 10. Our readers will understand better the contention of our Church against Rome in its Antichristian contention against the Gospel, when they consider the illustration given in the Romish mutilation of the Sacrament of the Altar.

The papacy decreed that only one kind, the bread, should be administered to the laity. Evidently the purpose was to exalt the clergy as a special order or class in the Church for the enhancement of its power over the laity. It was part of the development of the Romish hierarchy which reached its Antichristian crown in the declaration of the pope's infallibility. The Christians oppressed under the papal yoke had thus no court of appeal left them from the tyranny of their oppressors.

How bold the papacy became in its proud pretensions the subject of our article evinces with remarkable clearness. Our Lord "took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the new testament. which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matt. 26:27, 28. As if in prophetic warning against the foreseen ventures of Antichrist and his usurpations, Christ expressly says, "Drink ye all of it." whilst in regard to the bread He simply said to His disciples. "Take, eat." More was not necessary, but in regard to the cup special emphasis is laid

upon the fact that it was designed for all by expressly mentioning that all are meant. In St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, after repeating the words of our Lord's institution of the Sacrament, he refers repeatedly to the practice of apostolic times of administering the Holy Supper in both kinds. The Christians who were guided by the Word of God knew of no other way to administer the Sacrament. Bread and wine were appointed for the communication of our Lord's body and blood. and no one who desired the blessing could think of any other way to receive the Sacrament. By eating this bread and drinking this cup they showed the Lord's death till He come.

“Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.” 1 Cor. 11:26-29.

Always the eating and drinking are joined together as our Lord ordained the two elements to be used, the one for eating, the other for drinking. Indeed, Christians can know of no divinely instituted Holy Supper where only the bread is administered, and we can censure no one who not only refuses to participate in a mutilated Sacrament administered only in one kind, but who denies that it is a Sacrament at all.

What the Scriptures teach and the early Christians believed and practiced, that the Sacrament requires both bread and wine to communicate the body and blood of Christ, and that the communion of the Lord's body and blood requires the eating and drinking of both bread and wine, was the constant faith and practice of the Church until the rise of the papal Antichrist and his usurpation of power to change it. When this was definitely accomplished has not been clearly ascertained. Its introduction was gradual, as was the case with other errors and abuses. Our article mentions Pope Gelasius, who was Bishop of Rome A.D. 492 to 496, as opposing it as an error of the Manichean sect. Even as late as Pope Paschalis, who died in 1113, opposition was expressed to the withholding of the cup from the laity. We have here a plain instance of pope against pope. notwithstanding the modern Romish proclamation of papal infallibility. Cardinal Cusanus, who died in 1464, says that the use of only one kind was decreed at a Lateran Council in 1215. Probably it was not definitely settled until the Council of Constance in 1415, which condemned Huss and his followers. But it matters little when the error finally obtained such foothold in the papal Church as to

become the universal practice upon which it insists as authoritatively decreed. As such papal abuse our Lutheran fathers found it, refused to accept it, and protested against its enforcement.

We cannot but wonder that men who professed to be Christians, and teachers and rulers of the Christian people, could be so audacious as to decree a practice so directly against the express instructions of our Lord. It was the plainest declaration of Antichrist against Christ, whose place the Romish pope usurped. In many instances the sophisms of Rome can confuse the people and make black seem white. They cannot follow the intricacies of sophistry and detect the insult to the understanding which a Strict analysis of their pretended grounds would expose, and so thousands are deceived. But here we have a plain declaration in opposition to the plain words of our Lord. It is venturesome and bold, and would be inexplicably inconsistent with common prudence if it were not assumed that the Papists count upon the ignorance and indifference of their people and their consequent willing subjection to their rulers, the ground of whose authority they have no disposition to question, and all questioning of which, even if they had any passing desire to look into it, would only cause them trouble.

Not that the Romish leaders never felt the need of offering some defense of their manifest contradiction of Christ's words. Even the illiterate among them, if they ever came to hear these words, might have the feeling that not everything is right in this setting aside of the explicit command of Christ, and the more intelligent might have interest enough in the subject to ask a reason. They cannot be dispensed from it, and so they proceed to give the best they have.

And the best is very bad. The real motive, which is to illustrate the superiority of the priesthood, could not be used in evidence. It would not do to argue that priests are better than other people, as is evinced by the fact that our Lord declared them of higher quality and rank by giving them two elements in the Sacrament whilst He gave the common people only one; for the Scriptures, to which the Christian people appeal, show the very reverse; as our Lord says of the cup which is withheld from them, "Drink ye all of it." Nor could they, when they had once, by a usurpation of divine authority, succeeded in establishing a communion in only one kind for the laity, appeal to the existing fact to show the superiority of the priesthood; for the right of introducing such a practice is denied, and what is adduced as proof of their claim is the very matter in dispute- The argument, that in adminis-

tering the cup some of the consecrated wine is liable to be spilt, and that therefore ordinary prudence requires us not to administer it lest offense should be given by the occurrence of such an accident, is too childish to merit serious consideration in view of the divine command to administer it. There remains only the philosophical attempt which Rationalism has devised to justify the sacrilege, but is a device of Antichrist to set aside the authority of Christ, and that condemns it. Of what use they say, can it be to administer both bread and wine, to communicate the body and blood of our Lord, when common sense teaches us that the body contains the blood and needs no additional element for its conveyance? We must confess that such an argument will convince the reason of people who have no faith. But the Church of the Reformation is the Church of the pure Gospel as it is given us in the Holy Scripture. She believes in Christ as the Head of His Church and knows no authority but that of her Lord, who has given us His Word for our guidance and our assurance. When the pope openly contradicts the words of her Lord and Savior, and will not hear when these words are set before him as solemn appeals to every Christian conscience, what can she say else but that thou art the very Antichrist, who, sitting in the temple of God, treads under foot the very Word of Christ? We have no need to enter upon metaphysical subtleties and ingenious speculations. In matters which are plainly and unmistakably declared in the Gospel and which are there written for our learning. With Christians it is not a profound question of human science and learning, in which our common people are not experts, but of Christian faith, about which they know more, or at least have means of knowing more, than the pope and his cardinals. They believe the Word, and its decision is absolute and final, whatever human reason and feeling and will may say. Hence the simple believer in the truth of the Gospel is mightier in his appeal to the Word of the Lord than all the wisdom and learning of earth in their appeals to human sense and sentiment, or whatever else the flesh may suggest. The whole subject reduces itself to the question whether Christ shall rule and reign in the Church which He has purchased with His blood, or whether His people shall ask Him to abdicate His crown in favor of a usurping Antichrist. And when the Christian people thus see the question in its true light, those who truly believe, whether they are learned or unlearned, can have no difficulty in deciding, not whether they can solve a problem of reason or not, but whether they will follow Christ or not in a case where Antichrist contests His authority. Hence our Smalcald Articles

say with regard to the subject before us: “We do not need that high art which teaches us that under one form there is as much as under both, as the sophists and the Council of Constance teach. For although it may perhaps be true that there is as much under one as under both, yet the one form is not the entire ordinance and institution established and commanded by Christ. And we especially condemn, and in God’s name execrate, those who not only omit both forms, but also tyrannically prohibit, condemn, and blaspheme them as heresy, and so exalt themselves against and above Christ our Lord and God.” Part III. Art. 6. The institution of the Sacrament only in one kind is not the Lord’s institution, “and this custom has been received not only against the Scripture, but also against the ancient canons and the example of the Church.” Our Lutheran Church is in harmony with the Gospel and with the Christian Church of all ages before Romish usurpations began and popish corruptions were introduced under its alleged authority.

Another abuse, growing out of this mutilation and corruption of the Sacrament, is mentioned in our article. The alleged reason given for withholding the cup from the laity, and which, if it should have any force at all, would be equally effective against giving it to the priests because it is superfluous, was closely associated with the error of transubstantiation. The opinion became current in the Church and was finally made an article of faith by the papal authorities, that the bread and wine in the Holy Supper no longer existed as such after the consecration of these elements, but that they were changed in their substance and became the body and blood of Christ, so that the bread and wine were not the means of communicating the body and blood of our Lord, as the Bible teaches and the Church of the Reformation confesses, but were entirely displaced by the heavenly element which our Lord designed them to communicate. According to that theory, which Romanists accepted as their faith. the body and blood of our Lord are made present by the priestly consecration, not through the ordinance of the Lord that the’ bread and wine shall be the medium of their communication for the forgiveness of sins. to be appropriated by faith, but through the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, which means that the bread and wine no longer exist and are not means of communication of the body and blood of our Lord, and that the Sacrament directly dispenses the body and blood, there being no longer any bread and wine when these have been blessed for the communion. Of the sad effects of this rationalistic speculation in matters of faith, respecting which light and as-

surance can be derived only from the Scriptures, our Confession gives other examples. Here it mentions only one other in connection with the withholding of the cup from the common people. The bread was said to be changed by the priest into the body of Christ. and as this was assumed to contain the blood. no special consideration of the cup was deemed necessary. although this too was used in the sacrifice of the mass, of which we shall have occasion to speak in a subsequent article. If the bread was really changed into the body of Christ, reason would naturally conclude that this body should be honored, and that the adoration of the host would be the consequence. And so it was ordained by the Roman Bishop, who is called Pope Honorius III. and who reigned in Rome from A.D. 1216 to 1227, as needful that all Christians should bow their knees to the bread which had been transubstantiated into the body of Christ: and in pursuance of this logical conclusion the Bishop of Rome. who is called Urban IV. in 1264 instituted the festival of Corpus Christi for the wider worship of the body of Christ presented in the host. The host is the consecrated bread, the consecrated bread is the body of Christ. the corpus Christi as it is called in the Latin language. and the festival was instituted in honor of the supposed Christ into which the priestly manipulation had changed the bread. That our fathers refused to have anything to do with such superstitious proceedings and processions is manifest when it is remembered that they adhered in all respects to the Gospel of Christ.

Article XXIII. Of The Marriage Of Priests.

There was a common complaint of the examples of such priests as were not continent. For which cause also Pope Pius is reported to have said, “that there were certain causes for which marriage was forbidden to priests, but there were many weightier causes why it should be permitted again;” for so Platina writes. Whereas, therefore, the priests among us seek to avoid these public offenses, they have married wives, and have taught that it is lawful for them to enter into marriage. First, because Paul says, “To avoid fornication, let every man have his wife;” again. “It is better to marry than to burn.” 1 Cor. 7:2, 9. Secondly, Christ says, “All men cannot receive this word,” Matt. 19:12; where He teaches that all men are not fit for a single life, because God created mankind male and female. Gen. 1:28. Nor is it in man’s power, without a special gift and work of God, to alter His creation. Therefore such as are not meet for a single life, ought to contract marriage. For no law of man, no vow, can take away the commandment of God, and His ordinance. For these reasons the priests teach that they may lawfully take wives.

And it is well known that in the ancient churches priests were married. For Paul says, “that a bishop must be chosen which is a husband.” 1 Tim. 3:2. And in Germany, not until about four hundred years ago, the priests were by violence compelled to live a single life; who then were so wholly bent against the matter, that the Archbishop of Mayence, being about to publish the Pope of Rome’s decree to that effect, was almost murdered in a tumult by the priests in their anger. And the matter was handled so rudely, that not only were marriages forbidden for the time to come, but also such as were then contracted, were broken asunder, contrary to all laws diVine and human, contrary to the canons themselves, that were before made not only by popes, but also by the most famous councils.

And seeing that, as the world decays, man’s nature by little and little waxes weaker, it is well to look to it, that no more vices overspread Germany. Furthermore, God ordained marriage to be a remedy for man’s infirmity. The canons themselves say that the old rigor is now and then in latter times to be relaxed because of the weakness of men. Which it were to be wished might be done in this matter also. And if marriage be forbidden any longer the churches may at length want pastors.

Seeing, then, that there is a plain commandment of God; seeing the use of the church is well known; seeing that impure single life brings forth very many offenses, adulteries, and other enormities worthy to be punished by the just magistrate, it is a marvel that greater cruelty should be shown in no other thing than against the marriage of priests. God has commanded to honor marriage: the laws in all well-ordered commonwealths, even among the heathen, have adorned marriages with very great honors. But now men are cruelly put to death. yea, and priests also, contrary to the meaning of the canons, for no other cause but marriage. Paul calls that “a doctrine of devils,” which forbids marriage, 1 Tim. 4:1; which may now very well be seen, since the forbidding of marriage is maintained by such punishments.

But as no law of man can take away the law of God, no more can any vow whatsoever. Therefore Cyprian advises those women to marry who do not keep their vowed chastity. His words are these, in the 1st Book, the 11th Epistle: “If they will not, or are not able to persevere, it is better they should marry, than that they should fall into the fire by their importunate desires. In any wise, let them give no offense to their brethren or sisters.”

Yea, even the canons show some leniency towards such as before their ripe years have taken vows of chastity: as hitherto for the most part has been the custom.

THE MARRIAGE OF PRIESTS is as little a problem which is of difficult solution to Christians as the withholding of the cup from the laity. Rome, in order to separate more fully the priesthood from the laity and constitute it a higher order than common Christian people, concluded that it is not well that priests should be married, and therefore the authorities forbade it. In pursuance of his usurpation of all 'power in heaven and on earth the Roman Antichrist not only, as in the matter of the former article, presumed to reverse the ordinance of Christ as declared in Holy Scripture, but proceeded even to the extreme of issuing mandates in violation of the manifest laws of nature. For this is clearly the import of the Romish effort to glorify the priesthood by forbidding the marriage of priests, and thus elevating them to a superior order of sanctity.

Marriage is not obligatory upon all men. Some have not the qualifications for it, some are providentially hindered from consummating it. some for good reasons decline it. Apparently it is thus a matter of liberty which the Church may regulate without conflicting with divine law. Rome's error does not consist in viewing it as a matter of liberty. It would not sin against the Word of God if it declared 'that the divine law does not require every man and woman of mature age to marry, and that all may therefore judge.

for themselves whether they shall marry or not, keeping in mind that they are accountable to God for their decisions and actions in liberty as well as under the law. Rome would do right if it declared that this is a matter of personal liberty. But that is just what it does not declare and what its declarations contradict. It arrogates to itself the arbitrament of human liberty. That is the front of its offending. God has left some things free to the individual; the Antichrist is not content with that, has plans with which that conflicts, and therefore thinks it unwise to observe the decrees of God and issues decrees conflicting with the divine order and depriving some of the liberty which the Lord has granted equally to all. That is, the tyrannical abomination of Rome in the prohibition of the marriage of priests. It is an arrogant decree which not only deprives a portion of the human race of a divinely granted liberty, but which rejects the exclusive authority of God to rule over His creatures, counteracts His creative purpose, and contradicts His revealed will for the regulation of His institution.

Let it be kept in mind that God, when the dreadful fall in Eden took place through the devil's wiles in the form of a serpent, purposed to preserve our race notwithstanding, having resolved that the seed of the woman should crush the serpent's head. We do not know all the thoughts of God, but we do know what is revealed in the Bible, that He meant to propagate and, preserve our race until in His time the judgment of the whole earth should come, meantime sending His own Son to redeem the lost world and bringing into His glory them that believe. Therefore He provided for the propagation of our race. He declared that it was not good that man should be alone, but made a help meet for him. "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." Gen. 1:28. This will of God was not changed when the dreadful fall occurred. Our first parents, notwithstanding their sin that brought death into the world, were fruitful and multiplied and replenished the earth. This was continued until now, and shall be continued until the final consummation of God's plan in the coming of the Son of man to judge the quick and the dead, and the appearing of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Sin brought with it libidinous desires, as this is illustrated in many an old arrangement for the gratification of carnal lust, and eminently in the modern principle and practice of free love and intercourse between the sexes. What God designed is quite forgotten under the dominion of sin, and the reign of

the flesh is the dominant power. That is natural, because that which is born of the flesh is natural. We must eat and drink to live, and therefore there are gluttons and drunkards who appeal to the constitution of their nature to justify their excesses. But in the matter of the propagation of our human race God has made more specific laws than in regard to our natural hunger and thirst which are directed to the supply of a natural need. He has instituted the marriage of one man and one woman as the only legitimate way of gratifying the sexual desire and accomplishing His purpose of multiplying the species and replenishing the earth. The desire is natural, and the ordinance of marriage for its gratification is divine, while the gratification in any other way or form is sin, which is expressly forbidden in the sixth commandment.

And now comes the pope and forbids the priests to marry. What can this mean? Do the Romish authorities mean that priests shall not be appointed who have the ordinary sexual desires? or that the law of God requiring the propagation of our race shall not apply to them? or that all sexual intercourse, which is the only way which God has ordained for multiplying our race and replenishing the earth, is a failure? Whatever it may mean, the purpose of making the priesthood seem a peculiar people of superior sanctity is manifest, and it means this first of all, notwithstanding the plain implication that it means the rejection of the divine purpose to accomplish His will by the institution of marriage. It is a clear expression of the will of Antichrist against the will of Christ.

Why should the ministers of the Church be forbidden to marry? Every reason alleged and every motive offered runs counter to the Gospel which we of the Church of the Reformation believe and confess. Have not all Christians the same calling to multiply and replenish the earth, and have not all the same obligation to regulate their desires by the revealed will of the Lord of all the earth? While governments may make special regulations under the general divine law, no power, whether of Church or State, can make null and void that which God has ordained. But the Antichristian pope cared for none of these things and was intent only on maintaining his authority and accomplishing his will. Accordingly at a Synod in Rome A.D. 1074 he had all married priests deposed, forbade their marriage in all future time, and enforced the decree notwithstanding the commotion that was raised against it. The Papists as usual submitted to their lord, the pope, and in course of time the turmoil ceased and the decree of the Antichrist was honored as the divine decree of Christ, whose throne the pope had usurped.

The priests submitted to their tyrannical rulers as slavishly as did the people. and every success attained by the pope in the enforcement of his authority rendered him holder in his usurpations until the Reformation became inevitable.

Forbidding the marriage of the priests seems comparatively a small matter, seeing that it affects only a small portion of the Church, and even these could in some degree escape the oppression by abandoning the ministry. But more was and is involved than the suffering of those ministers. The arrogant pretensions of a Church professing to be the Church of Christ, to have authority to override God's law and to substitute decrees of its own even to the extent of tyrannizing over such sincere Christians as are yet believers in Christ and desire to be submissive to His will; the abomination of popery crushing under its relentless heel the poor Christians who really constitute the Church and suffer under the Antichrist; the usurpation of divine power, in virtue of which usurpation the very Word of God is set aside, and thus all means of correction of the crying evils and protection against their cankerous working for the ruin of the Church are taken away from the people, ostensibly in the service of the Lord, whose exclusive authority to rule in the Church is boldly usurped, — this and all that this involves is not a small matter. The words of the Reformers could not be too strong in the condemnation of such an Antichristian decree promulgated in the name of Christ. In regard to this very matter of forbidding marriage the Scriptures use terms that are as severe as those of Luther, who in the sincerity of his faith and the honesty of his heart never minced words, but sought, and did not seek in vain, to express the very truth of God in the severity of its condemnation of all sin and in the fulness of its grace in Christ to all them that believe. The decree forbidding the marriage of priests, in the face of all the provisions which God has made for the continuance of our human race on earth and the regulations which should ensure the purity of its propagation, is devilish. If Romanists, in their exorbitant pride of knowledge and of power, thought that they knew better than God how to regulate a matter which sin had made difficult and which Christian meekness sees that only God could control, presume to meddle with God's ordinance, forbidding its observance in some cases and modifying it in others, who could blame our fathers for employing plain words, which to the offenders must seem harsh, in condemning the damnable heresy of presuming to be wiser than God and teaching men that the decree of our Lord must be set aside and the better

decree of the pope must be observed? The papal decree is devilish. That is the verdict of Scripture which Lutherans in humble faith accept. St. Paul says:

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.” 1 Tim. 4:1-3.

Rome professes superior sanctity and pretends that in forbidding marriage and commanding to abstain from certain meats and observing certain fasts it makes men holier than the law of God requires; but the apostle declares its proud presumption to be departing from the faith and giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.

And history has shown the sad effects of the imagined superior sanctity. Forbidding marriage has not destroyed the natural cravings of the priests, but has only led to their gratification in violation of God’s order to escape violation of the pope’s decree. Even popes were not transformed into men of superior sanctity by their presumptuous decrees against marriage, and history records deeds of shame at papal courts that would disgrace the stews. If this had been confined to the Antichrist in his palace and pomp at Rome, the world would be shocked at the abominations that could not all be concealed and that aroused a cry for the reformation of morals before the need of a reformation of the Church by a revival of the Gospel was widely felt, but the case would not have been so glaringly bad, although the lechery of popes and high officials, sometimes sinking to abominations worse than heathenish, might not unjustly be taken as an official interpretation of the prohibition of marriage. But it corrupted the whole priesthood, high and low, so that the confessional became an assignation house and a dread of all true Christians. The fornication and adultery to which the forbidding of marriage to priests naturally led, is still and always in the nature of the case must be the result of an effete declaration of war against the law of God in nature and Scripture. The Reformation made Romanists more cautious, but those who would not receive the truth of the Gospel remained as before. Rome continued to forbid the marriage of priests, and these continued to be human with all the sexual impulse and temptations and transgressions of divine law which this implies. In a land like ours, where reformatory thought

is dominant, notwithstanding that the pure Gospel is not fully appreciated, the natural effects of such an unnatural decree do not become so apparent as in the middle ages. or even in the countries where Rome still has control of the community and does not find it so necessary to hide all its infirmities from the public eye, but the sin of forbidding marriage still becomes manifest in its sinful consequences.

Article XXIV. Of The Mass.

Our churches are wrongfully accused of abolishing the mass. For the mass is retained among us, and is celebrated with the greatest reverence; yea, and almost all the ceremonies that are in use, saving that with the things sung in Latin we mingle certain things sung in German at various parts of the service, which are added for the people's instruction. For therefore alone we have need of ceremonies, that they may teach the unlearned. This is not only commanded by St. Paul, to use a tongue that the people understand, 1 Cor. 14:2 sqq., but man's law has also appointed it.

The people is accustomed to receive the Sacrament together, as many as are found fit thereunto; and this also increases the reverence and devotion at the public ceremonies. For none are admitted, except they be first proved. Besides, we put men in mind of the worth and the use of the Sacrament, how great comfort it brings to terrified consciences; that they may learn to believe God and to look for and ask all good things at His hands. This worship pleases God: such a use of the Sacrament nourishes piety towards God. Therefore it does not appear that the mass is more religiously celebrated among our adversaries than with us.

But it is evident, that for a long time this has been the public and most grievous complaint of all good men, that the mass is basely profaned, being used for gain. And it is not unknown, how far this abuse has spread in all the churches; of what manner of men masses are celebrated only for a reward, or for wages; and how many celebrate them against the prohibition of the canons. But Paul severely threatens those who treat the Lord's Supper unworthily, saying: "He that eateth this bread, or drinketh this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord," 1 Cor. 11:27. Therefore, when the priests among us were admonished of this sin, private masses were laid aside among us, seeing that for the most part there were no private masses but only for lucre's sake.

Neither were the bishops ignorant of these abuses, and if they had amended them in time. there had now been less of dissensions. Heretofore, by their dissembling. they suffered much corruption to creep into the church: now they begin, though it be late, to complain of the calamities of the church; seeing that this tumult was raised up by no other means than by those abuses, which were so evident that they could no longer be tolerated. There were many dissensions, concerning the mass, concerning the Sacrament. And perhaps the world is punished for so long a profaning of masses, which they who both could and ought to have amended it, have so many years tolerated in the churches. For in the Ten Commandments it is written, "He that takes the name of the Lord in vain, shall not be held guiltless." Exod. 20:7. But from the beginning of the world there neither was nor is any divine thing, which seems to have been so much employed for gain as the mass.

There was added an opinion, which increased private masses infinitely; to wit, that Christ by His passion had satisfied for original sin, and appointed the mass, wherein an offering should be made for daily sins, both mortal and venial. Hereupon the common opinion was received, that the mass is a work that takes away the sins of the quick and the dead, and that by the mere doing of the work. Here men began to dispute, whether one mass said for many were of as great force as particular masses said for particular men. This disputation has brought forth that infinite multitude of masses.

Our preachers have admonished. concerning these opinions, that they depart from the Holy Scriptures and diminish the glory of the passion of Christ. For the passion of Christ was an offering and satisfaction, not only for original sin, but also for all other sins; as it is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 10:10, "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all;" also, "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Heb. 10:14.

The Scripture also teaches that we are justified before God through faith in Christ, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. Now, if the mass takes away the sins of the quick and the dead by the mere doing of the work, then justification comes by the work of the masses, and not by faith: which the Scripture cannot endure.

But Christ commands us to do it in remembrance of Himself, Luke 22:19; therefore the mass has been instituted, in order that the faith in those who use the Sacrament, may be reminded what benefits it receives by Christ, and that it may raise and comfort the alarmed conscience. For this is to remember Christ, to wit, to remember His benefits, and to feel and perceive that they are indeed imparted unto us. Nor is it sufficient to call to mind the history; for that the Jews also, and the wicked can do. Therefore the mass must be used to this end, that there the Sacrament may be given to them that have need of comfort; as Ambrose says, "Because I always sin, therefore I ought always to receive the medicine."

And seeing that the mass is such a communication of the Sacrament, we observe one common mass every holyday, and on other days, if any will use the Sacrament, at which times it is offered to those who desire it. Neither is this custom newly brought into the church. For the ancients, before Gregory's time, make no mention of any private mass; of the common mass they speak much. Chrysostom says "that the priest stands daily at the altar and calls some unto the communion, and puts back others." And by the ancient canons it is evident that some one did celebrate the mass, of whom the other elders and deacons received the body of the Lord. For so the words of the Nicene Canon read: "Let the deacons in their order, after the elders, receive the holy communion of a bishop, or of an elder." And Paul, concerning the communion. commands, "that one tarry for another," 1 Cor. 11:33, that there may be a common participation.

Seeing, therefore, that the mass among us has the example of the church out of the Scripture and the Fathers, we trust that it cannot be disapproved: especially since our public ceremonies are kept for the most part like unto the usual ceremonies: only the number of masses is not alike, the which, by reason of very great and manifest abuses, it were certainly far better to be moderated. For in times past also, in the churches whereunto was greatest resort, it was not customary to have mass said every day; as the Tripartite History Book 9, Chap. 38. testifies, "Again," it says, "in Alexandria, every fourth and sixth day of the week the Scriptures are read, and the teachers interpret them: and all other things are done also, except only the celebration of the Eucharist."

IN THE EARLY HISTORY of the Church it became customary to call the celebration of the Lord's Supper the mass. This continued to be the usual name for the Sacrament down to the time of the Reformation, and in this sense the Lutherans of those days often used it. When our article begins by saying that "our churches are wrongfully accused of abolishing the mass," it is therefore manifest, as the succeeding words plainly show. that they were falsely accused of abolishing the Lord's Supper. "The mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence." But those who are not kindly disposed to the Lutheran Church, though some of these nowadays call themselves Lutherans, make this retention a ground of reproach. The Church of the Reformation is censured both for abolishing and retaining the mass: by Romanists for abolishing the abuses, by Anti-lutheran Protestants for retaining the essence.

The case is a signal instance of the wrongs that are done by the reckless employment of ambiguities of language to serve a purpose. It may be, but it is hardly credible, that the Romanists meant to charge us with the utter rejection of the Lord's Supper in doctrine and practice. They had a notion of its celebration, which they called the mass. The rejection of the superstitions involved in that notion they interpreted to mean a rejection of the mass itself, by which term the celebration of the Lord's Supper was generally understood. Men not conversant with the usage of that term before the Reformation supposed it to mean the whole Romish perversion of the Sacrament in doctrine and practice, and therefore in their opposition to Rome thought it proper and right to condemn our Confession for retaining the mass, which means the Lord's Supper, while all the Romish abuses in regard to the Sacrament were removed and abandoned. Manifestly the changes which popery made in the Sacrament were included by Romanists in the word mass, which the Reformers frequently continued to use in its original sense

as a name for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but which gradually came to include in its signification the Romish perversions, so that now it can hardly be used without carrying that meaning with it.

But there is no excuse for intelligent people when they persist in the uncharitable imputation of Romish tendencies to our Augsburg Confessors, when these resent the charge that they have abolished the mass and insist that they have retained it. The Confessions themselves furnish ample means for better information. This very article, as clearly as honest hearts could wish, shows that it is the holy Sacrament which our Lord instituted that is retained, and that it is the corruptions and abuses introduced by papal misrule which have been abolished.

Our Lutheran fathers left nothing ambiguous in their testimony, so far as it was at all in their power to use plain Speech. Luther and his co-laborers had no motive besides that of making the Gospel known to the people for the salvation of their sinful souls. They had no other aim, collateral or ultimate. If this were attained, all other interests, important as they might subordinately and temporarily seem, might be wrecked for aught they cared. For what could it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Art, science, literature, state craft — personal, domestic, political, even ecclesiastical prosperity — what are they all worth if eternal salvation from sin and everlasting death is lost? The earnestness of our Lutheran ancestors is little appreciated by a materialistic age that cares much for the present on earth, but little or nothing for the rescue of souls from eternal damnation or for the eternal blessedness of the rescued. The Gospel which they confessed made this their main concern. Therefore they spoke plainly, whatever the consequences might be, and had no compromise to offer in regard to the mass. The Word and Sacrament were precious in their eyes and hearts, the corruptions and abuses which papal usurpation had introduced, in conflict with the institution of our Lord, were an abomination in their sight. Hence Luther in the Confession, called the Smalcald Articles, declares, and the whole Lutheran Church declares with him:

“That the mass in the papacy must be the greatest and most horrible abomination, as it directly and powerfully conflicts with this chief article, and yet above all other popish idolatries it is the chief and most specious. For it is held that this sacrifice or work of the mass, even though it be rendered by a wicked and abandoned scoundrel, frees men from sins, not only in this life but also in purgatory, although only the Lamb of God frees us, as has been said above. Of this article nothing is to be surrendered or conceded, because the former article does not allow this.” Part I, Art. 2.

The former article treats of the merits of Christ and the righteousness of faith, which is the chief article before referred to as that with which the popish mass directly conflicts.

That this popish mass is not the mass which “our churches are wrongfully accused of abolishing,” and “which is retained among us and celebrated with the greatest reverence,” need not be mentioned again after such an explicit and irrevocable condemnation of it as chief among the “popish idolatries,” militating against the chief article of the Gospel. What our churches have not abolished, but reverently retained is the holy Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, which was called the mass before the Romish corruptions were introduced. Unfortunately these popish innovations, being specious and appealing to the natural passions of the people, in course of time came to be the prevailing thought in regard to the purpose of the holy Sacrament of the Altar, and the meaning of the word mass underwent a corresponding change. When Lutherans now speak of the mass they, like all others, mean what that word has come to signify in the Romish Church, although Christians used it before the Roman Church was dominant and always employed it as synonymous with the Lord’s Supper.

It was the Lord’s Supper to which the gross abuses of Rome were appended. The holy Sacrament was called the mass, and the corruption of the doctrine concerning that Sacrament prepared the way for the abuses which gradually became the chief import of the word mass, that originally meant the Lord’s Supper. As this Sacrament was instituted for the communication of our Lord’s body and blood under the earthly elements of bread and wine, that believers might thus be made sure of the forgiveness of their sins by the presentation of the very body and blood of our Lord through which it was secured and to which the promise was attached, the Romanists found a way to use this in the interest of their hierarchical scheme. First they changed the doctrine of the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the communication of bread and wine as the divinely chosen elements for the purpose into the doctrine of transubstantiation, which means that by the priestly consecration the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of our Lord, and that accordingly bread and wine are not a means for the conveyance of these, but have ceased to exist and are not administered. Only the body and blood of our Lord are the elements, and they are made to exist by the consecration, whether they are administered or not. Then came the logical inferences. The first is the withdrawal of the cup from the laity;

for what is the use of administering the cup, when the body and blood of our Lord are not communicated through the bread and wine, but directly and immediately, and when plainly the body communicated must needs contain the blood, so that the cup is entirely superfluous? Next comes the adoration of the bread which has been changed into the body of our Lord and the carrying about of the consecrated bread for the people's worship, and the culmination of the whole rationalistic and idolatrous conception in the Corpus Christi festival. Such mischief and misery comes when men depart from the Gospel of our Lord and follow their own blind reason and carnal hearts.

But this is not the worst to which such departure has led in regard to the Lord's Supper. In olden times this Sacrament was called the Eucharist. That word is still in use to designate it. And that gave the Romanists a hint which could be profitably used for their purposes and which was utilized and exploited in largest measure for the establishment of the theory of the sacrifice of the mass with all its abominations. In ancient times the Sacrament was regarded and spoken of as a feast of thanksgiving. The gifts of bread and wine were offered upon the altar and sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. And from this thank-offering occasion was taken to construe and develop the sacrifice of the mass, which consists not in the celebration of the Lord's Supper by administering the consecrated bread and wine, but in offering the alleged body of the Lord for the deliverance from sin. The mass has thus become one of the chief idolatries of Rome, because instead of administering the consecrated elements to the communicants of the Christian congregation, that through them the body and blood of our Lord may be communicated and believers may be assured of the forgiveness of their sins, the Romanists superstitiously use them as an offering to God to atone for the sins of the people; and as this offering by the priests is highly valuable to all who accept the delusion, as it delivers the sinner from the punishment which his transgression deserves and even serves to deliver the dead from the pains of an-imaginary purgatory, its benefits are eagerly sought and paid for, so that it is an important source of income to the. Papists which they would not willingly abandon.

How great this abomination is will become more apparent to the readers when they consider, that it virtually nullifies the divine institution of the Holy Supper, and that it sets aside the atonement of our Lord by His obedi-

ence unto death, even the death of the cross, thus practically overthrowing the very foundations of our Christian faith.

Our Lord instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Supper as a means of grace. In and with the bread and wine which He commanded His disciples to eat and drink He communicated His body and blood, that they might be assured that His body was given and His blood was shed for the remission of their sins. They should do this in memory of Him, and in communion with one another through their communion with Him jointly show forth the Lord's death until He come. Faith and love and confession were all united in the blessed Sacrament of His body and blood. But Rome perverted all. The sealing of our faith in the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, the fellowship of Christian love in the participation of the one bread, and the confession of the one Lord whose blood was shed for the salvation of us all, were practically ignored, in order to substitute for the blessed Sacrament which our Lord instituted with all its heavenly gifts, the sacrifice of the mass which the pope instituted with all its earthly vanities. Instead of the means of grace Rome has made it a means of carnal emolument, evidently supposing that gain is godliness. These seem hard words, but they are not written in malice. Let Christian people take their Bibles, by whose testimony alone we can know the heavenly truth unto salvation, and compare what Rome has decreed regarding the Sacrament with what our Lord has taught His people, and then judge whether popery has not rejected the truth of God in order to make room for its falsehoods. When the Romish priests offer on the altar or carry about for the adoration of deluded people what they call the body of Christ, they are offering up bread and inviting ignorant souls to worship it. According to our Lord's institution His true body and His true blood are communicated under the bread and wine to those who eat and drink when the holy Sacrament is celebrated according to His institution and command. But when it is not celebrated, as it certainly is not when there is no distribution, it is simply superstition to assume that the bread is the Lord's body. This body is communicated when the consecrated bread is communicated, because according to our Lord's institution what is taken and eaten when the distribution takes place is His true body and true blood. But the bread is not His body. The bread is merely the earthly element under which as a medium for its conveyance the body is presented to the communicant. There is not a word of Scripture to justify the assumption that the body of our Lord is present without the distribution of the bread

through which it pleases Him to communicate His body. The Romish mass, Without the distribution of the elements, is not the holy Sacrament which Christ instituted, and the offering of the bread as a sacrifice for sin under the pretense that it is sacrificing anew the body. of Christ to atone for sin, is duping the poor people who pay their money for naught and nurse a delusion that may ruin their souls.

And this endangering the soul is the worst feature of the unholy business. “Our preachers have admonished concerning these Opinions, that they depart from the Holy Scriptures and diminish the glory of the passion of Christ. For the passion of Christ was an offering and satisfaction, not only for original sin, but for all other sins; as it is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews 10:10, ‘We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all;’ also, ‘By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.’ Heb. 10:14.” In proportion as the Papists are successful in implanting their device of the sacrifice of the mass for the release from sin into the hearts of the people, these people will put their trust in this popish figment instead of trusting in the great sacrifice of our Lord upon the cross as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. “The Scripture also teaches that we are justified before God through faith in Christ, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. Now if the mass takes away the sins of the quick and the dead by the mere doing of the work, then justification comes by the work of the masses, and not by faith; which the Scriptures cannot endure.” And now if people are led into the delusion that the consecrated bread which the priest, for a consideration, offers on the altar in their behalf, makes a sufficient atonement for their sins, it could not be ordinarily expected that they would heartily repent of their sins and flee for refuge to the hope set before them in Christ. Some Romanists no doubt learn the truth of the Gospel, notwithstanding that the authorities obscure it and many of the clergy cannot teach it if they would, because they themselves do not know it; but where the Romish figment becomes fully effective in the soul, it will not believe in Christ and seek salvation in Him, in whom alone it is to be found. Where the Lord is dishonored and millions are in danger of being eternally lost because they are led to trust in devices that cannot save, our confessors at Augsburg could not be indifferent, and neither can the Church of the Augsburg Confession now, when the deadly error still prevails in Rome and the Gospel still condemns it and warns the people against it.

The abomination of the mass with its idolatries and superstitions and pecuniary profits the pope had no mind in the days of the Reformation and still has no mind to abandon. When it was proposed to convene a General Council, and Luther was requested to draw up a paper to be there presented as the ultimatum of the Lutherans and generally called the Smalcald Articles, he wrote: "The Council will especially labor and be occupied with' this article concerning the mass. For although it would be possible for them to concede to us all the other articles, yet they could not concede this. As Campegius said at Augsburg that he would be torn to pieces before he would relinquish the mass, so by the help of God I too would suffer my body, to be reduced to ashes before I would allow a celebrant of the mass, be he good or bad, to be made equal to Christ Jesus, my Lord and Savior, or to be exalted above Him Thus we are and remain eternally separated and opposed to one another. They think indeed with entire correctness, that when the mass falls the papacy lies in ruins. Before they. would permit this to occur they would put us all to death, if they could." Sm. Art. II. 2:10. Christ cannot yield to Antichrist and let His redeemed people perish.

Article XXV. Of Confession.

Confession is not abolished in the churches among us. For it is not usual to communicate the body of our Lord, except to those who have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are taught most carefully concerning faith in absolution, about which, before these times, there has been a deep silence. Men are taught that they should highly regard absolution, inasmuch as it is God's voice. and pronounced by God's command.

The power of the keys is honored, and mention is made how great consolation it brings to terrified consciences, and that God requires faith, that we should believe this absolution, as a voice sounding from heaven, and that this faith in Christ truly obtains and receives remission of sins.

Aforetime satisfactions were immoderately extolled: but of faith, and the merit of Christ, and justification by faith, no mention was made. Wherefore on this point our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries are compelled to concede in regard to us, that the doctrine of repentance is most diligently treated and laid open by us.

But of confession our churches teach that the enumeration of sins is not necessary, nor are consciences to be burdened with the care of enumerating all sins, inasmuch as it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm (19:13) testifies: "Who can understand his errors?" So also Jeremiah (17:9): "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" But if no sins were remitted, except those that were recounted, consciences could never find peace, because very many sins they neither see nor can remember.

The ancient writers also testify that the enumeration is not necessary. For in the Decrees Chrysostom is cited, who speaks thus: "I do not say to thee that thou shouldst discover thyself in public, or accuse thyself before others, but I would have thee obey the prophet when he says: 'Commit thy way unto the Lord.' (Ps. 37:5). Therefore with prayer confess thy sins before God. the true judge. Pronounce thine errors. not with the tongue. but with the memory of thy conscience," etc. And the Gloss (OF REPENTENCE. Dist. V. Chap. CONSIDERET), admits that confession is of human right only.

Nevertheless. on account of the very great benefit of absolution, as well as for other uses to the conscience, confession is retained among us.

SO FAR as the principles concerned in the matter of repentance and confession of sin required any statement and explanation, all that is necessary had been set forth in the first part of our Augsburg Confession. But our fathers were ever ready and even anxious to give a reason for the hope that is in them and therefore to accept every opportunity to get a hearing in regard to their evangelical doctrine and practice as founded upon the Holy Scriptures. If the Romanists had only accepted the fundamental principle that Christ is Lord in the Church and that the Scriptures are His Word, many a point in the controversy could easily have been decided by an appeal to the Bible. But the pope and his party would not agree to that. Such an agreement would have been fatal to their entire pretension and contention. But the Lutherans still hoped that something could be done towards spreading the light of the Gospel among their adversaries by a consideration of the abuses resulting from the false doctrines in vogue among them. It would help the cause of truth to show the falsity of the charges made against its confession, and would possibly help some of its adversaries to see the errors into which they had fallen and be a leaven whose effects could only be salutary in their souls. It was not a weakness, but rather the power of love that induced our fathers to offer a further consideration of Romish abuses after they had declared their evangelical faith with which they were inconsistent. The present article adds nothing to what was declared before as the faith of Lutherans, and it detracts nothing from it, but it does give opportunity for renewed consideration of practice in the light of principle.

In regard to confession the Church of the Augsburg Confession declared the truth of the Gospel, and now repudiates and refutes the false charge that they have abolished confession. They abolished the Romish abuse, which the pope as usual regarded as the main thing, and retained the Gospel use. This confession, as the articles in both the first and second parts of the presentation of our faith at Augsburg show, does not refer to the confession of sin directly to God, as all Christians of necessity do when they repent. In regard to that there was no dispute. The point of controversy was and is in regard to the confession of sin to the minister of the Church with a view to ministerial absolution. Here the fundamental difference between the papal usurpation and the Church of the Reformation comes into view. Must the penitent sinner who desires to enjoy the fellowship of Christian brethren in the communion of saints, with all the privileges and benefits which that involves, confess his sins to the minister of the Church in order to receive ab-

solution? And assuming that this is necessary, must the penitent confess and the minister know all the sins of such penitent in order to make the absolution valid for all his sins? Our fathers could find no ground in the Gospel for the papal demand that all sins must be confessed to the priest, by which an intolerable yoke is laid on the neck of Christian people, and could find nothing but arbitrary Antichristian decrees of popery as fictitious ground for the whole system of satisfactions and indulgences to which such a tyrannical law of confession gave rise. These horrible abuses were abolished by the Evangelical Church of the Reformation, and the Papists raised the cry that she abolished the practice of confession. Referring to the popish abuse, this was true; referring to the Gospel use, it was false.

The Gospel use is apparent to all who, without any prejudice inspired by the intolerable abuses of Rome, give heed to the Scriptures. Christ ordered that His disciples should join together and with one mind and one mouth confess Him as their Lord and Savior, and gave to them the Word and Sacraments for the preservation and extension of His kingdom on earth. He ordered that these believers, who constituted His kingdom, the one holy Christian Church, should appoint ministers for their congregations, that everything might be done decently and in order in the administration of the means of grace committed to the charge of His believing people. These ministers are the public agents of the congregation. When the Word is to be preached and the Sacraments are to be administered, they are to do it, not because they are a higher class of Christians but because their fellow Christians, in the name of the Head of the Church, have called them for the service.

When now a child is born and Baptism is desired, as every Christian father and mother desires it, who else shall administer the Sacrament but the minister called for the purpose? And when the Lord's Supper is to be administered, who shall see to it that the will of God is faithfully done in the administration and reception? That each communicant has the duty primarily of making the needful preparation to eat and drink the body and blood of the Lord, that he may receive the promised blessing and not eat and drink damnation to himself is obvious to all.

“Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” 1 Cor 11:18, 29.

But he who infers that the Church has nothing to do with the case, and that all the responsibility rests on the individual communicant alone, has much yet to learn of our Savior's gracious purpose and plan to save the souls purchased by His precious blood. The Cainitic thought that every man has enough to do with himself and should not presume to be his brother's keeper is specious enough to elicit the approval of carnal reason, but is certainly not Christian. The Bible recognizes the principle of individual right and duty and responsibility, and forbids us to be busybodies in other men's matters and meddlers in other people's affairs; but it pronounces righteous judgment on the selfishness of men who are concerned only about their own welfare, and who, when an appeal is made to them in behalf of those who are in distress, have the one standing reply, Let them help themselves as we have done and continue to do. The Church is a communion of saints which has been taught by the Holy Spirit to renounce such selfishness and to live and labor in love. And to this Church the means of grace are given with the instruction to appoint pastors who shall administer them and care for the souls committed to their charge. Let Christian believers decide whether a pastor who indiscriminately administers communion to all that come and who declares that if any do not examine themselves and eat and drink damnation to themselves. that is their concern and not his, is fit for such an office, and whether a congregation that sanctions such sentiments and proceedings is faithful to the Savior of the world and the King of saints.

"Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that a man be found faithful." 1 Cor. 4:1, 2.

"They watch for your souls, as they that must give account." Heb. 13:17.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made, you overseers, to feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood." Acts 20:28.

There are some who will not do this. There are some churches that have erred from the truth of the Gospel, though they still desire to be recognized as Christians, and there are some ministers who have other leading thoughts than those of fidelity to the Lord that bought them and called them to the ministry, although they desire still to be honored as Christian ministers. But

all this only shows the delusiveness of sin and the crafty devices of Satan, and confirms the need of faithful pastors to preach the Word in season and out of season and to watch over souls for their protection against the wiles of the devil. In no respect does it excuse indifferentists and errorists for setting aside the whole merciful arrangement of our Savior for the administration of the means of grace and the responsibility of the Church and the pastor in regard to such administration.

Our fathers did not abolish confession. As Christian believers they could not. They abolished the abuses which Romanism had introduced, but they could not abolish the Scriptural use on which those abuses had been fastened. "Concerning confession they teach that private absolution ought to be retained in the churches, though an enumeration of all transgressions be not necessary in confession." They retained what is in accordance with the Lord's purpose, they rejected what the human wisdom of popery, which is foolishness, had added.

Underlying that Romish addition, which shows itself by its impracticability to be even unreasonable as a human ordinance, was the false theory which ignorance of the Gospel had brought into vogue under the papacy, that the priest is a judge who must decide in regard to the merits of each confessor and who must therefore know the sins which each one has committed in order to render an exact decision and pronounce a perfectly fair judgment. "He that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned," which is our Lord's revealed criterion for all cases, was not recognized by the pope, and could not be recognized by the priests, to many of whom it was not even known. Theirs was a system of works and merits, and still is to this day. How then could they decide what satisfactions must be required in each individual case, unless all sins were confessed? The false theory made the impossible necessary. and thus added another to the already heavy burdens laid on the consciences of Christian people. Our Lutheran fathers, with a more profound knowledge of the human heart as well as of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ revealed in the Gospel, rejected the entire unscriptural dream about the need of confessing all transgressions which, as the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, no person can do.

But they could not on that account abolish confession or refrain from recognizing its utility for the promotion of the Gospel. It is of great importance for the communicant and the pastor in order to accomplish our Sav-

ior's purpose. Not that confession is a meritorious work, the performance of which in itself secures salvation and entitles to every blessing which the Church has to bestow. Lutherans are freed from all such self-righteous superstitions by the heavenly light which leads them to the Savior and assures them of their justification by faith. There is no work but that of our Lord Jesus Christ that can deliver from sin and make sinners happy children of God and heirs of heaven, and all that man can do in the matter of his salvation is to trust implicitly in His mercy and merits; and this he can do only by the power of the Holy Spirit, whose grace excludes all thought of any merit of our own. But while there is no merit in what the sinner does in confessing his sin, or in what the Church does for the benefit of his soul through the minister, both are needful for the right application and appropriation of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation. All communicants are required by our Lord to examine themselves, repent of their sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ before they can worthily partake of the Holy Supper. The pastor must see that this is done in order to have a clear conscience in the administration of the keys which the Lord has committed to the Church.

“It is not usual to communicate the body of our Lord except to those who have been examined and absolved.”

It could not be except where indifference in regard to the truth of the Gospel has produced its fruit of indifference in regard to the salvation of the souls which that truth is designed to make free. When the communicant declares his desire to receive the holy Sacrament, the pastor hears his confession of sin and assurance of repentance in order that he may absolve the sinner and bid him welcome to the communion. It is not a mere formality that is thus observed. A desirable opportunity is thus given the pastor to apply the Gospel to the individual for his everlasting welfare, as well as to guard the sanctity of the altar for the glory of the Lord of the Church and the protection of His gospel against offense and reproach. Many a weak Christian whose knowledge of sin and grace is yet superficial and whose self-examination, sincere though it may be, does not reach the depths of human sin nor the heights of divine grace, receives through the pastor's help the instruction needed in his personal case which the sermon does not furnish, and a growth is secured which months of attendance at public ministrations of the

Gospel would not supply. And some are careless and treat the eternal interests of their souls lightly, going gradually down on the inclined plain of worldliness without observing that they are daily departing further from the spirit of the Gospel and nearing the abyss of unbelief and ungodliness, in which the blessed relation to the Savior comes to a dreadful end. How many souls have been rescued from such a calamity by the judicious care of faithful pastors in examining applicants for communion before absolution, our Lord in heaven knows; we know only that the application of the Lord's Word of Law and Gospel is not in vain. And the absolution of an individual is a precious balm to wounded hearts. Reason argues that there is nothing in it, and that if there were any real blessing and comfort in it the whole benefit and consolation would be offered in the preaching of the Gospel without the need of any church provision for confession and absolution, or even for the administration. Reason does not know the truth, and therefore men professing to be wise in spiritual things invariably become fools. It is true, the Gospel is a proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and therefore the announcement of a divine absolution for all the world. He who believes this proclamation by the Lord of heaven and earth, based on the eternal redemption which He has effected, appropriates the blessing and has it through the faith which embraces it. This is not owing to any priestly power in him who pronounces the absolution to the penitent. God absolves by His Word, whether we read it in the Scriptures or hear it from the pulpit, whether it be declared publicly or privately, by a minister of the Church or by a brother who comes in no official capacity. Our Lord by His vicarious death on the cross has secured for us the remission of our sins, and the Gospel brings it to us for our reception by faith. That is all true. But the inference that all the divine provisions in the Church for bringing the blessings of the redemption to the redeemed, that these may appropriate them and enjoy them, are superfluous, and all controversies about them mere carnal quarrels about nothing, only shows that those who make it are meddling with matters which lie beyond their earthly reckonings. There is an absolution for all through the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was finished when . He died for our sins. To bring this to all sinners the Gospel was commanded to be preached to all nations and the Sacraments were instituted, that through these means of grace, which were committed for administration to the Church, all men might be brought to a knowledge of the good tidings and be made partakers by faith of the unspeakable gift. To argue now that the

whole arrangement for the effectual execution of God's plan is needless because the forgiveness of sins is secured without it to every soul that repents and believes, is plainly a quibble of unbelief to defeat the purpose of divine grace. Every Christian who rejoices in the truth knows that no sinner comes to Christ without the Gospel, that very few come to a knowledge of their sins and their Savior without the ministration of the Church, and that many who had been brought to Him fall away when they are deprived of these ministrations. And every true believer knows from his own experience how helpful it is for his continuance and his growth in grace to have a pastor who cares for his soul, and who can furnish him with the necessary light to see his sin and the necessary divine promises to sustain his faith by the absolution pronounced in the Lord's name. The Church of the Reformation, whose whole conflict with the Church of Rome was to preserve the truth for the salvation of souls, could not think of abandoning the confession of sin and its accompanying absolution because of the popish corruptions, but retained the use while she condemned and renounced the abuse, thus remaining in unity with the ancient Church in opposition to the innovations of Rome.

Article XXVI. Of The Distinction Of Meats.

It has been a general opinion, not of the people alone, but also of such as are teachers in the churches, that the distinction of meats, and such like human traditions, are works available to merit grace, and to make satisfaction for sins. And that the world thus thought, is apparent by this, that daily new ceremonies, new orders, new holydays, new fasts, were appointed: and the teachers in the churches exacted these works as a service necessary to merit grace: and they greatly terrified men's consciences, if aught were omitted. From this persuasion concerning traditions, many disadvantages have followed in the church.

For, first, the doctrine of grace is obscured by it, and also the righteousness of faith, which is the principal part of the Gospel, and which it behooves most of all to stand forth and to have the preeminence in the church, that the merit of Christ may be well known, and faith, which believes that sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, may be exalted far above works. For which cause also Paul lays much stress on this point: he sets aside the law and human traditions, that he may show that the righteousness of Christ is a far other thing than such works as these; namely, a faith which believes that sins are freely forgiven for Christ's sake. But this doctrine of Paul has been almost wholly smothered by traditions, which have bred an Opinion that, making difference in meats, and such like services, a man should merit grace and justification. In their doctrine of repentance there was no mention made of faith; only these works of satisfaction were spoken of: repentance seemed to consist wholly in these.

Secondly, these traditions obscured the commandments of God, because traditions were placed far above the commandments of God. Christianity was thought to consist wholly in observing certain holydays, rites, fasts, and attire. These Observances were in possession of a most honorable title, to wit, that they were the spiritual life, and the perfect life. In the meantime, God's commandments, touching every man's calling, were of no estimation: that a father brought up his children, that a mother nurtured them, that a prince governed the commonwealth, — these were reputed worldly affairs, and imperfect, and far inferior to those glittering observances. And this error greatly tormented pious consciences, which were grieved that they were held by an imperfect kind of life, in marriage. in magistracy, or in other civil functions. They admired the monks, and such like, and falsely imagined that the Observances of these men were more grateful to God.

Thirdly, traditions brought great danger to men's consciences, because it was impossible to keep all traditions, and yet men thought the observance of them to be necessary services. Gerson writes, "that many fell into despair, and some even took their own lives, because they perceived that they could not keep the traditions"; and, meanwhile they had never heard the comfort of the righteousness of faith, or of grace. We see the Summists and Divines gather together the traditions, and seek for mitigations to unburden men's consciences; and yet thereby they do not set the consciences free, but rather, at times, bring more snares upon them. And in the schools and in their sermons men have been so busy in gathering together the traditions, that they have not had leisure to touch the Scripture, and to seek out a more profitable doctrine, of faith, of the cross, of hope, of the dignity of civil affairs, of the comfort of conscience in severe afflictions. Wherefore Gerson, and some other divines, have made grievous complaints that they were hindered by these strifes about traditions, so that they could not be occupied in some better kind of doctrine. And Augustine forbids that men's consciences should be burdened with observances of this kind, and very prudently advises Januarius that he must know that they are to be observed as things indifferent; for these are his words.

Wherefore our ministers must not be thought to have touched this matter rashly, or from hatred of the bishops, as some falsely surmise. There was great need to admonish the churches of those errors which had arisen from such misunderstanding of the traditions. For the Gospel urges us to inculcate the doctrine of grace, and of the righteousness of faith, in the Church; which can never be understood, if men suppose that they can merit grace by observances of their own choice. Thus, therefore, they have taught that we cannot merit grace, or justification, by the observance of man's traditions; and therefore we must not think that such observances are a necessary service. Hereunto they add testimonies out of the Scriptures. Christ excuses His disciples, when they did not observe a received tradition (which yet seemed to be about a matter not unlawful but indifferent, and to have some affinity with the purifications of the law); and says, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matt. 15:3, 9. Christ therefore does not exact an unprofitable service. And a little further on He adds: "Not that which goeth into the mouth, defileth a man." Ver. 11. So also St. Paul: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink." Rom. 1-1:17. "Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days." Col. 2:16. Again: "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances: Touch not, taste not, handle not?" Ver. 20, 21. St. Peter says: "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." Acts 15:10, 11. Here St. Peter forbids to burden the consciences with many rites, whether they be of Moses, or of any others. And Paul calls the forbidding of meats "a doctrine of devils." 1 Tim. 4:1, because it is against the Gospel to appoint or to do such works to the end that by them we should merit grace, or as though Christianity could not exist without such service.

Here our adversaries object against us, that our ministers hinder the discipline and mortification of the flesh; as Jovinian did. But the contrary may be gathered from our men's writings. For they have always taught concerning the cross, that Christians ought to bear afflictions. This is the true, earnest, and unfeigned mortification, to be exercised with divers afflictions, and to be crucified with Christ.

Moreover, they teach that every Christian must so by bodily discipline, or bodily exercises and labors, exercise and keep himself under, that plenty and sloth do not stimulate him to sin; not that he may by such exercises merit grace, or satisfy for sins. And this bodily discipline should be used always, not only on a few and set days; according to the commandments of Christ: "Take heed, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting." Luke:21:34. Again. "This kind (of devils) goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." Matt. 17:31. And St. Paul says, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection," 1 Cor. 9:37; where he plainly shows that he did therefore chastise his body, not that by that discipline he might merit remission of sins, but that his body might be apt and fit for spiritual things and to do his duty according to his calling. Therefore we do not condemn fasts themselves, but the traditions which prescribe certain days. and certain meats, with danger to the conscience. as though such works as these were a necessary service.

Yet most of those traditions are obeyed among us which tend unto this end, that things may be done orderly in the church: as namely the order of lessons in the mass and of the chief holydays. But in the meantime men are admonished that such service does not justify before God, and that it is not to be supposed that it is a sin to leave undone such things, if they be omitted without giving offense. This liberty in human rites was not unknown to the Fathers. For in the East they kept Easter at another time than they did in Rome: and when they of Rome accused the East of schisms on account of this diversity they were admonished by others that such customs need not be alike everywhere. And Irenaeus says: "The disagreement about fasting does not break off the agreement of faith." Besides. Pope Gregory, in the 12th Distinction, intimates that such diversity does not violate the unity of the church: and in the TRIPARTITE HISTORY LIB. 9, many examples of dissimilar rites are gathered together, and these words are there rehearsed, "The intention of the apostles was not to give precepts concerning holydays, but to preach godliness and a holy life."

ALL ROMISH ABUSES are in the service of the Romish system of human authority and human righteousness, as against the exclusive authority of God and the sole righteousness of Christ appropriated by faith and the exclusive merit of our Savior in the matter of man's salvation. That this is the chief ground of objection to the abuse condemned in this article, as well as to the other abuses which the Reformation abolished, is expressly stated. "It has been a general opinion, not of the people alone, but of such as are teachers in the churches, that the distinction of meats, and such like human traditions, are works available to merit grace. And that the world thus thought is apparent by this, that daily new ceremonies, new orders, new holydays, new fasts were appointed; and the teachers in the churches exacted these works as a service necessary to merit grace, and they greatly terrified men's consciences if aught were omitted." The divine way of salvation was thus undermined.

The sin and damage to the Christian faith and to the souls of men lay not, as many suppose, in the mere observance of ceremonies and days which are not commanded of God. If Christians see good reason for arranging a certain order of public worship, for erecting a building in which properly to conduct it, for fixing definite days and hours to assemble for the purpose, they have the liberty to do so under the general law that everything shall be done decently and in order among them. If any should refuse to comply with the arrangement made by a congregation, on the plea that God does not command such an order, such a building, such a day and hour, he would be a disturber of the peace and sin against the fundamental law of love. Should the Church decide that certain prayers in the public worship should be said in a kneeling posture no enlightened believer would, on the plea that kneeling in prayer is not commanded in the Scriptures, make trouble in the congregation on that account. It is a matter of liberty, and nothing hinders compliance with an order freely adopted. Only when that liberty is denied and the authority is arrogated to override it and reduce Christ's free people to subjection under a foreign power, does the matter become of serious import. Then it is a question not of the expediency of doing certain things in a certain way, or of not doing them in another way, as circumstances may suggest, but of authority to command and of conscience to obey. That question is fundamental. The matter contained in an ordinance attempted to be laid upon our conscience may be of small import, but the freedom from all ordinances other than God's is not. Lest we should fail to appreciate this gracious gift we are earnestly admonished:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Gal. 5:1.

One is our Master, even Christ. We are not loyal to Him if we acknowledge any other. And this disloyalty is the same whether it be exercised in violating the law of the Lord in matters which He has commanded or in those which He has left to our liberty. We must not recognize other gods and lords beside Him, whatever may be the special case under consideration, or whatever may be its importance or significance. The great question is whether anyone can be permitted to rule over us besides our Lord and Savior. which is only another form of the great controversy between Rome and the Reformation, whether Christ shall rule by the Scriptures or the Antichrist shall

rule by his decretals. But too many, even in churches calling themselves Protestant fail to see the import of the principle involved in many a question that seems of little consequence. Often Lutherans are even ridiculed as stubborn fanatics for their firm adherence to Scriptural principles in cases when the world and those who judge according to the views of the world, though they profess to be Christians, can see nothing in the matter worth a moment's thought. The Lutherans at Augsburg would rather face increased troubles than join the procession and bow the knee to the host which was superstitiously regarded and worshiped as the body of Christ. They refused not only because they could not recognize the abuse in regard to the holy Sacrament, but because they could not submit to the papal usurpation which sought to impose on them a yoke of bondage. Even when an act that is perfectly within the scope of Christian liberty, and that Christian love would perform with cheerfulness as conducive to the glory of God, is demanded by some assumed authority, whether by Papists or Protestants, as necessary obedience to divine law, the Evangelical Christian declines to obey the mandate. The man was perfectly right who, when he was taxed with ten cents for a needful work of the Church and the sum was demanded of him as a debt that must be paid, protested that God had laid no such specific tax upon him, that he had assumed no such obligation, and that, he would not under any conditions pay a cent of it; but who in the love which he bore to the cause which the Church desired to promote and with which he was in complete harmony, paid ten dollars, with the express stipulation that not a farthing should be credited to the account charged against him as a debt, for the failure to pay which he was ready at any time to answer. It is an example that illustrates the spirit of Gospel liberty and at the same time explains the charge of stupid obstinacy raised against intelligent believers who prize the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free and would rather suffer persecution than surrender it. Paying a dime is a little thing, but recognizing an authority other than Christ is a fundamental error. Our fathers would not have taken off a shoe when commanded by the pope on pain of eternal damnation, even though the shoe pinched them to the limit of endurance. If some Protestants nowadays can see neither faith nor good sense in such so-called obstinacy, the greater is the pity for their type of Protestantism.

But the error of Rome and the necessity of resistance is greatly enhanced by the arrogant assumption of Rome, that its institutions and innovations are necessary to secure merit and save souls. That means not only that in or-

der to be faithful Christians we must obey the pope, but that “the distinction of meats and such like human traditions are works available to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins.” The Antichristian usurpations of popery not only presume to prescribe laws which Christians must obey in the order of their sanctification and progress in spiritual life, but declare that their Christian life itself is dependent on their obedience to the papal decrees. It would be abomination enough if the pope and his following added laws to those of the decalogue whose observance is declared necessary for a holy life, thus usurping God’s prerogative of making laws for the creatures and putting the pope on an equality with God and making him lord of all; but the Antichrist is not satisfied with this supremacy. There is the whole realm of the Gospel in its distinction from the Law, as the way of salvation by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that stands in his way. This too must be overcome. And the plan is not only to declare obedience to the commandments of God’s law meritorious, but to attach special merit to the obedience of popish additions. The error proceeds from bad to worse. That the law of God works the knowledge of sin and thus becomes a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ is entirely overlooked, and a scheme is devised by which its purpose to prepare the way in the consciousness of sinfulness and helpfulness for the reception of the hope set before us in the Gospel of Christ is set aside. Obedience to the holy law by the fulfillment of its prescribed duties, is assumed to be a merit, and the foundation is thus laid for the whole Romish system of work-righteousness, wherein the spiritual import of the law is ignored and its great work of awakening the conscience and leading to repentance is defeated. Then come the ordinances and traditions by obedience to which the merit is said to be increased and the forgiveness of sins is attained by the merited grace, so that nothing more is needed for salvation but faithful compliance with the rules and regulations of the papal usurpation of divine power and authority. The entire Gospel of Christ is thus made of none effect by the Romish decretals and traditions.

The Church of the Reformation could not in Luther’s time, and cannot now, endure such high-handed usurpations of Rome with its menace to all Christendom. For such a menace Romanism is in a twofold way. It undermines the divine authority of the Word of God, through which alone we can have any certainty of God’s purposes and effective means to accomplish them, and...

[Note: pages 938-939 are missing from the source volume. -Ed]

Article XXVII. Of Monastic Vows.

What is taught among us concerning monastic vows will be better understood, if one call to mind what was the state of the monasteries, and how many things were every day committed in the monasteries, contrary to the canons. In Augustine's time they were free fraternities; afterwards, when discipline was corrupted, vows were everywhere laid upon them, that the discipline might be restored again, as it were in a newly-devised prison.

Over and besides vows, many other observances by little and little were added. And these bonds were laid upon many, before they came to ripe years, contrary to the canons.

Many through error fell into this kind of life unawares, who, though they did not lack years, yet they wanted discretion to judge of their strength and ability. They who thus had got into these nets, were constrained to abide in them, even though, by the benefit of the canons, some might be set at liberty. And this occurred rather in the convents of nuns than of monks; although the weaker sex ought more to have been spared. This rigor displeased many good men heretofore, when they saw young maids and young men thrust into convents, there to get their living. They saw what an unhappy issue this counsel had, what offenses it bred, and what snares it laid upon the consciences. They were grieved that the authority of the canons was wholly neglected and contemned in a thing most dangerous. To all these evils there was added such a persuasion concerning vows, as it is well known in former times displeased those of the monks themselves who were somewhat wiser than the rest. They taught that vows were equal to baptism; they taught that by this kind of life they merited remission of sins and justification before God; yea, they added that the monk's life did not only merit righteousness before God, but more than that, because it observed not only the commandments, but also the counsels of the Gospel.

And thus they taught that the monastic vow was far better than baptism, that the monk's life was more meritorious than the life of magistrates. of pastors, and such like, who, in accordance with God's commands, followed their calling, without any such services of man's making. None of these things can be denied: they may be found in their own writings.

What occurred afterward in the monasteries? Formerly they were schools for the study of sacred letters, and other branches of knowledge profitable to the Church; and thence pastors and bishops were taken: but now the case is altered. It is needless to rehearse what is notorious. Formerly they came together into such places to learn; but now they feign that it is a kind of life instituted to merit grace and justification; yea, they say it is a state of perfection, and place it far above all other kinds of life that GOD has ordained. We have mentioned these things, not out of spite exaggerating anything, to the end that the doctrine of our churches, touching this matter, might be the better understood.

First, concerning such as contract marriage, they thus teach among us, that it is lawful for any to marry that are not adapted for celibacy: for vows cannot do away with God's ordinance and command. But the command of God is. "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife." 1 Cor. 7:2. And not only the command, but also the creation and ordinance of God compel such unto marriage, as without the special work of God are not exempted: according to that saying, "It is not good that the man should be alone." Gen. 2:18. They, therefore, that are obedient to this command and ordinance of God do not sin.

What can be said against these things? Let a man exalt the obligation of a vow as much as he will, yet can he never prove that the vow shall do away with the command of God. The canons teach, "that in every vow the right of the superior is excepted;" much less therefore can these vows, which are contrary to God's command, be of force.

If the obligation of vows from no cause whatever might be changed, then neither the Roman pontiffs could have dispensed therefrom. For it is not lawful for a man to annul an obligation which exists directly of divine right. But the Roman pontiffs have prudently judged, that in this obligation equity must be observed: therefore they often, as we read, have dispensed from vows. The history of the king of Arragon's being called back out of a monastery, is well known: and there are also examples in our own time.

Secondly, why do our adversaries so exalt the obligation, or the effect of the vow, when, in the meantime, they speak not a word of the very nature of a vow, that it ought to be in a thing possible, ought to be voluntary, and taken up of one's own accord, and with deliberation? But it is not unknown, how far perpetual chastity is in the power of man. And how many a one among them is there, that has vowed of his own accord, and well advised? Maidens and youths, before they know how to judge, are persuaded, yea, sometimes also compelled, to take vows. Wherefore it is not meet to dispute so rigorously of the obligation, seeing that all men confess that it is against the nature of a vow that it is not done of one's own accord, nor advisedly.

The canons for the most part annul vows which are made before fifteen years of age; because that, before one comes to that age, there does not seem to be so much judgment that determination may be made concerning a perpetual life. Another canon, making a greater concession to the weakness of men, adds some years more; for it forbids a vow to be made, before one is eighteen years of age. But which of these shall we follow? The greatest part have a valid excuse for leaving the monasteries because most of them vowed before they came to this age.

Last of all, even though the breaking of the vow were to be reprehended, yet it seems not to follow directly that the marriages of such persons are to be dissolved. For Augustine, in his 27th quest. 1st chapt., OF MARRIAGES, denies that they ought to be dissolved: and his authority is not to be esteemed lightly, although others afterward have thought otherwise.

And although the command of God touching wedlock seems to free most men from the vows; yet our teachers also bring another reason concerning vows, to show that they are void: because all worship of God, instituted of men without the command of God, and chosen to merit justification and grace, is wicked; as Christ says: "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matt. 15:9. And St. Paul everywhere teaches that righteousness is not to be sought by our own observances and services which are devised by men; but that it comes by faith to those who believe that they are received into favor by God for Christ's sake.

But it is evident that the monks have taught that services devised by men satisfy for sins, and merit grace and justification. What else is this, than to detract from the glory of Christ, and to obscure and deny the righteousness of faith? Wherefore it follows that these common vows were wicked services, and are therefore void. For a vow that is wicked, and which is made against the commandments of God, is of no force; neither, as the canon says, ought a vow to be a bond of iniquity.

Paul says, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Gal. 5:4. They, therefore, who wish to be justified by vows, are made void of Christ, and fall from grace. For they also who attribute justification to their own vows, attribute to their own works what properly belongs to the glory of Christ.

Nor can it be denied, that the monks have taught that they are justified by their vows and observances, and merit the remission of sins; nay, they have invented yet greater absurdities, and said they could lend their good works to others. If any man wished to expand these matters so as to excite odium, how many things might he rehearse, whereof the monks themselves are now ashamed! Moreover, they have persuaded men that these self-devised services are a state of Christian perfection. Is this not attributing justification to works? It is no light offense in the Church to propound unto the people a certain service devised by men, without the commandment of God, and to teach that such a service justifies men: for the righteousness of faith, which ought especially to be taught in the Church, is obscured, when this marvelous worship of angels, the pretense of poverty and humility, and of celibacy, are cast before men's eyes.

Moreover the commandments of God and the true worship of God are obscured, when men hear that monks alone are in the state of perfection: for Christian perfection is this, to fear God sincerely, and again, to conceive great faith, and to trust assuredly that for Christ's sake we have a reconciled God; to ask, and certainly look for, help from God in all affairs, according to our calling: and outwardly to do diligently good works, and to attend to our vocation. In these things the true perfection and the true worship of God consist: it does not consist in celibacy, in beggary, or in vile apparel. But the people conceive many pernicious opinions from these false commendations of monastic life. They hear celibacy praised above measure: therefore they live in marriage with a troubled conscience. They hear that beggars only are perfect; therefore with a troubled conscience they keep their possessions and buy and sell. They hear that it is merely a counsel of the Gospel, not to take revenge; therefore some are not afraid to avenge themselves in private life: for they hear that it is a counsel, not a commandment. Others think that all magistracy and civil offices are unworthy of Christian men.

We read examples of men, who, forsaking wedlock. and leaving the government of the commonwealth, have hid themselves in monasteries. This they called fleeing out of the world, and seeking a kind of life which is more acceptable to God: neither did they see that God is to be served in those commandments which He Himself has delivered, not in the commandments which are devised by men That is a good and perfect kind of life, which has the command of God for it. It is necessary to admonish men of these things.

And before these times Gerson reprehended this error of the monks concerning perfection: and testifies that in his time this was a new saying. that the monastic life is a state of perfection.

So many wicked opinions cling to the vows: as that they justify, that they constitute Christian perfection, that they keep the counsels and commandments, that they have works of supererogation. All these things being false and vain, they also make the vows invalid.

NOT MUCH needs to be said in explanation of this article, which is itself a lucid exposition of the whole abuse to which it refers. What was good in the original intent of monasteries and nunneries is freely acknowledged, and the utility of their pursuit of learning and their service in teaching and caring for the destitute and forsaken is fully admitted and duly commended. But the germs of evil lay in the system and soon became apparent. Even the regulations issued by the Church could not prevent their growth, and gradually the whole system became an Antichristian abomination.

“Formerly they were schools for the study of sacred letters and other branches of knowledge profitable to the Church, and thence pastors and teachers were drawn. But now the case is altered. It is needless to rehearse

what is notorious. Formerly they came together in such places to learn; but now they feign that it is a kind of life instituted to merit grace and justification; yea, they say that it is a state of perfection, and place it far above all other kinds of life which God has ordained.”

Whatever may have been the good intentions of its originators, the blight of popery with its wicked usurpation of divine power and substitution of creature merit for the grace of Christ was soon upon it, and its whole spirit and influence became adverse to the salvation wrought by our Lord and offered freely by the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament, to be received by faith alone, without any merit or worthiness on our part. Romanism has departed from the way of salvation through faith in Christ, beside whom “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,” and has devised another way, which is that of submission to the pope and the work-righteousness which he prescribes.

“We have mentioned these things, not out of spite exaggerating anything, to the end that the doctrine of our churches touching this matter might be the better understood.”

The papacy exacts monastic vows that conflict with the teachings of God’s Word, and in this pursues purposes and plans which undermine the Gospel with its teaching of the only possible way of escape from the curse that is upon human sin and of the attainment of eternal life. For Christ is the way and the truth and the life, and only he who believes in Him puts on Christ and enjoys the blessing of His great salvation, while trust in any other way is a fatal delusion.

Monastic vows are sinful as Rome exacts them. They are so on various accounts. They lay obligations on people which at least some of them cannot fulfill: they are imposed upon persons who are not yet able to judge whether they shall be able to fulfill them; they bind people for life to things that are free and in regard to which no one has a right to surrender his liberty, seeing that though he may do it voluntarily now, his convictions may change and hereafter his vow may become an intolerable burden and his life a miserable slavery under a foreign yoke. Marriage is forbidden, for with Romanists the vow of chastity means the obligation to refrain from the order of God to be fruitful and multiply, not only in the illegitimate way of fornication and adultery, but also in the legitimate way of marriage. Our churches rightly teach “that it is lawful for any to marry that are not adapted to celibacy: for vows cannot do away with God’s command. But the com-

mand of God is, 'To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife.' 1 Cor. 7:2. And not only the command, but also the creation and ordinance of God compel such unto marriage as without the special work of God are not exempt, according to that saying, 'It is not good that man should be alone.' Gen. 2:18." The Romish system of monastic vows is thus shown to be in conflict with nature as well as with supernatural revelation, and thus manifests the Antichristian pretensions. of popery to be the sovereign authority that can override the very Word of God and leave us no court of appeal from the tyranny of the pope.

But the most glaring manifestation of the Antichristian system of monastic vows lies in the purpose of their establishment as an institution of the papal church. They are not only imposed by a usurpation of authority to contravene the authority of God and substitute human ordinances for those of our Lord, but they materially involve a system of merits and of salvation that is in conflict with the merits of Christ and the salvation which He has secured for all men, and which alone will avail on the day of judgment. There is no way of deliverance from the death and damnation which sin has brought upon us but that of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and there is no way of participation in that redemption and the forgiveness of sins and eternal life thus secured for sinners, but that of faith in the Redeemer. And now come the Papists and declare that monkery is a higher order of righteousness and merit than that which avails for all men through the perfect righteousness of our Savior, which is acquired for all and which faith alone can appropriate.

"It is evident that the monks have taught that services devised by man satisfy for sins and merit grace and justification. What else is this than to detract from the glory of Christ and to obscure and deny the righteousness of faith? Wherefore it follows that these common vows were wicked services and are therefore void."

Paul says, "Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Gal. 5:4. They therefore who wish to be justified by vows are fallen from grace. "Nor can it be denied that the monks have taught that they are justified by their vows and Observances, and merit the remission of sins. Nay, they have invented yet greater absurdities, and said that they could lend their good works to others." "Moreover, they have persuaded men that these self-devised services are a state of Christian perfection. Is this not attributing justification to works? It

is no light offense in the Church to propound to the people a certain service devised by men, without the commandment of God, and to teach that such a service justifies men; for the righteousness of faith, which ought especially to be taught in the Church, is obscured when this marvelous worship of angels, the pretense of poverty and humility. and of celibacy, are cast before men's eyes.”

The Church of the Reformation, with its earnest protest against all Romish doctrines and practices that conflict with the pure Gospel of the remission of sins through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ by faith in His name, could not otherwise than condemn the sins of monasticism against the exclusive authority of God's Word and against the exclusive merits of Christ for the salvation of sinners. Her heart's desire was to save souls from sin and death, and therefore to labor and suffer and fight for the truth of the Gospel which alone can save. And so it is now. Whether men will hear or forbear, the Lutheran Church is set for the defense of the Gospel, and therefore opposes all errors and abuses that would hinder its blessed work.

Article XXVIII. Of Ecclesiastical Power.

There have been great controversies touching the power of the bishops; in which some have in an unseemly manner mingled together the ecclesiastical power, and the power of the sword. And out of this confusion there have sprung very great wars and tumults, while the pontiffs, trusting in the power of the keys, have not only instituted new kinds of service, and burdened men's consciences by reserving of cases, and by violent excommunications; but have also endeavored to transfer worldly kingdoms from one to another, and to despoil emperors of their power and authority. These faults godly and learned men in the Church have long since reprehended; and for that cause ours were compelled, for the comforting of men's consciences, to show the difference between the ecclesiastical power and the power of the sword. And they have taught that both of them, because of God's command, are dutifully to be revered and honored, as the chief blessings of God upon earth.

Now, their judgment is this: that the power of the keys, or the power of the bishops, according to the Gospel, is a power, or command from God, of preaching the Gospel, of remitting or retaining sins, and of administering the Sacraments. For Christ sends His apostles forth with this charge: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." John 20:21-23. "Go, and preach the Gospel to every creature," etc. Mark 16:15.

This power is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel, and administering the Sacraments, either to many, or to single individuals, in accordance with their call. For thereby not corporeal, but eternal things are granted; as an eternal righteousness, the Holy Ghost, life everlasting. These things cannot be obtained but by the ministry of the Word and Sacraments; as Paul says, "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Rom. 1:16. Seeing, then, that the ecclesiastical power bestows things eternal, and is exercised only by the ministry of the Word, it does not hinder the civil government any more than the art of singing hinders civil government. For the civil administration is occupied about other matters than is the Gospel. The magistracy does not defend the souls, but the bodies, and bodily things, against manifest injuries; and coerces men by the sword and corporal punishments, that it may uphold civil justice and peace.

Wherefore the ecclesiastical and the civil power are not to be confounded. The ecclesiastical power has its own command, to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. Let it not by force enter into the office of another; let it not transfer worldly kingdoms; let it not abrogate the magistrates' laws; let it not withdraw from them lawful obedience; let it not hinder judgments touching any civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to the magistrate touching the form of the state; as Christ says, "My kingdom is not of this world." John 18:36. Again, "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?" Luke 12:14. And Paul says, "Our conversation is in heaven." Phil. 3:20. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations," etc., 2 Cor. 10:4, 5.

In this way ours distinguish between the duties of each power, one from the other, and admonish all men to honor both powers, and to acknowledge both to be the gifts and blessings of God.

If the bishops have any power of the sword. they have it not as bishops by the command of the Gospel, but by human law given unto them by kings and-emperors, for the civil government of their goods. This, however, is another function than the ministry of the Gospel.

When, therefore, the question is concerning the jurisdiction of bishops, civil government must be distinguished from ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Again, according to the Gospel, or, as they term it, by divine right, bishops, as bishops, that is, those who have the administration of the Word and Sacraments committed to them, have no other jurisdiction at all, but only to remit sin, also to inquire into doctrine, and to reject doctrine inconsistent with the Gospel, and to exclude from the communion of the Church wicked men, whose wickedness is manifest, without human force, but by the Word. And herein of necessity the churches ought by divine right to render obedience unto them; according to the saying of Christ: "He that heareth you, heareth me," Luke 10:16. But when they teach or determine anything contrary to the Gospel, then the churches have a command of God which forbids obedience to them: "Beware of false prophets," Matt. 7:15. "Though an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed," Gal. 1,8. "We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth," 2 Cor. 13:8. Also, "This power the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction," 2 Cor. 13:10. So also the canons command: ii, quest. 7, chap. SACERDOTES, and chap. OVES. And Augustine. in his treatise against Petilian's epistle. says: "Neither must we give assent to catholic bishops, if they chance to err, or entertain any opinion contrary to the divine canonical Scriptures."

If they have any other power or jurisdiction, in hearing and judging certain cases, as, namely, of matrimony, and of tithes, etc., they hold it by human right. But when the Ordinaries fail, the princes are constrained, even against their wish, to dispense justice to their subjects for the maintaining of peace.

Moreover, there is a controversy whether bishops or pastors have the right to establish ceremonies in the Church, and to make laws concerning holydays, degrees, or orders of ministers, etc. They that ascribe the right to the bishops allege this testimony for it: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; but when the Spirit of truth is come, He shall guide you into all truth." John 16:12, 13. They allege also the example of the apostles, who commanded to abstain from blood, and that which was strangled. Acts 15:20. They allege the change of the sabbath into the Lord's day, contrary, as it seems, to the decalogue; and there is no example more in their mouths than the change of the sabbath. Great indeed, they declare, must be the power of the Church, since it has dispensed with a precept of the decalogue.

But of this question ours teach us: that the bishops have no power to ordain anything contrary to the Gospel, as was shown before. The same also do the canons teach, DISTINCT. 9. Moreover, it is against the Scripture to ordain or require the observance of any traditions, to the end that we may make satisfaction for sins, or merit grace and righteousness by such an observance. For the glory of Christ's merit is dishonored. when we seek by such observances to merit justification. But it is apparent, that through this persuasion traditions grew to an infinite number in the Church, while in the meantime the doctrine concerning faith, and the righteousness of faith, was quite suppressed; for from time to time new holydays were made, new fasts appointed, new ceremonies, new worships for saints, instituted; because the authors of such things supposed that by these works they should merit grace. Thus formerly the number of penitential canons increased, whereof we still see some traces in the Satisfactions.

Likewise the authors of traditions act contrary to the command of God, when they make sin to consist in certain foods, in days, and like things, and burden the Church with the servitude of the law, as if there ought to be among Christians, in order to merit justification, a service like the Levitical, the ordaining of which God has committed to the apostles and the bishops. For this some of them write, and the popes in some measure seem to have been misled by the example of the law of Moses. Hence are those burdens, that it is a mortal sin, even if no offense is given to others, to do manual labor on the festivals; that it is a mortal sin to omit the canonical hours; that certain foods defile the conscience: that fastings are works which appease God; that sin, in a reserved case, cannot be forgiven except by the authority of him that reserved it; whereas the canons themselves speak only of the reserving of the ecclesiastical penalty, and not of the reserving of the guilt.

Whence have the bishops the authority of imposing these traditions upon the churches, for the ensnaring of men's consciences, while Peter forbids (Acts 15:10) "to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples," and St. Paul says (2 Cor. 13:10) that the power given him was to edification, not to destruction? Why, therefore, do they increase sins by these traditions? '

But there are divers clear testimonies which prohibit the making of such traditions to merit grace, or as things necessary to salvation. Paul says to the Colossians, "Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days," Col. 2:16. Again, "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, Touch not, taste not, handle not; which all are to perish with the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things indeed have a show of wisdom." Col. 2:20-23. And in the epistle to Titus he plainly forbids traditions; for he says, "Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth." Tit. 1:14.

And Christ says of them that urge traditions, "Let them alone; they are blind leaders of the blind." Matt. 15:14. And He rejects such services: "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." Ver. 13.

If the bishops have authority to burden the churches with innumerable traditions, and to ensnare men's consciences, why does the Scripture so often forbid to make and to listen to traditions? Why does it call them the doctrines of devils? 1 Tim. 4:1. Has the Holy Ghost warned us of them to no purpose?

It follows then, that since ordinances, constituted as necessary, or with the opinion of meriting grace, are repugnant to the Gospel, it is not lawful for the bishops to institute or exact such services. For it is necessary that the doctrine of Christian liberty should be maintained in the churches, that the bondage of the law is not necessary unto justification; as it is written to the Galatians, "Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Gal. 5:1. It is necessary that the chief article of the Gospel should be maintained, that we obtain grace freely by faith in Christ, not because of certain Observances, or of services devised by men. What is then to be thought of the Lord's day, and of like church rites? To this ours answer, that bishops or pastors are allowed to make ordinances, so that things may be done orderly in the Church; not that by them we may merit grace, or satisfy for sins, or that men's consciences should be bound to esteem them as necessary services, and think that they sin when they violate them without offending others. So Paul ordains that women should cover their heads in the congregation, 1 Cor. 11:6; that the interpreters of Scripture should be heard in order, in the church, 1 Cor. 14:27, 30. Such ordinances it behooves the churches, for the sake of charity and peace, to keep, to this extent that one do not offend another, that all things may be done in order and without tumult in the church, 1 Cor. 14:40, comp. Phil. 2:14; but so that the consciences be not burdened, so as to deem them things necessary to salvation. and think they sin when they violate them, without offending others: as no one will say that a woman sins, if she goes in public with her head uncovered, provided no one is offended. Such is the observance of the Lord's day, of Easter, of Pentecost, and like holidays and rites. For they err greatly that think that by the authority of the Church the observance of the Lord's day has been instituted instead of the sabbath, as necessary. The Scripture has abrogated the sabbath, and teaches that all Mosaical ceremonies may be omitted, after the Gospel is revealed. And yet, because it was necessary to appoint a certain day, in order that the people might know when they ought to come together, it appears that the Church for that purpose. appointed the Lord's day: which for this cause also seems to have been preferred, that men might have an example of Christian liberty, and might know that the observance neither of the sabbath nor of another day is necessary. There are certain marvelous disputations touching the changing of the law, and the ceremonies of the new law, and the change of the sabbath; which all arose from a false persuasion, that there ought to be a service in the Church similar to the Levitical, and that Christ committed to the apostles and the bishops the devising of new ceremonies which should be necessary to salvation. These errors crept into the Church when the righteousness of faith was not plainly enough taught. Some dispute that the observance of the Lord's day is not indeed of divine right, but almost of divine right; and touching holydays, they prescribe how far it is permitted to work on them. What else are such disputations but snares for men's consciences? For though they seek to mitigate the traditions, yet the equity of them can never be perceived, so long as the Opinion of their necessity remains; which must needs remain, where the righteousness of faith and Christian liberty are not known.

The apostles commanded to abstain from blood. Acts 15:30. Who observes that nowadays? And yet they do not sin that do not now observe it; for neither the apostles themselves wished to burden men's consciences with such servitude: but they forbade it for a time, to avoid offense. For, in a decree, the aim of the Gospel is always to be considered.

Scarcely any canons are kept with exactness; and many grow out of use daily, yea, even among them that most eagerly defend traditions. Neither can there be sufficient care had of men's consciences, except this equity be observed, that we should know that such rites are to be observed without being deemed necessary, and that men's consciences are not hurt, though the traditions grow out of use.

The bishops might easily retain the lawful obedience due to them, if they would not urge, men to observe such traditions as cannot be kept with a good conscience. Now they command celibacy; and they admit none to the ministry, except they swear not to teach the pure doctrine of the Gospel. The churches do not ask of the bishops that they should procure concord with the loss of their own dignity, however it would be proper for good pastors so to do. They only ask that they would remit the unjust burdens, which are both new, and received contrary to the custom of the universal Christian Church. At first, some of these ordinances may have had probable reasons, but they are not adapted to later times. It is also evident, that some were received from false notions. Wherefore it were a matter for the pontifical clemency to mitigate them now; for such a change does not overthrow the unity of the Church. For many human traditions have been changed in the course of time, as the canons themselves show. But if it cannot be obtained that those observances may be relaxed which cannot be kept without sin, then must we follow the apostles' rule, which commands us to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29.

Peter forbids the bishops to be lords, and to rule over the churches. 1 Pet. 5:3. Now it is not our purpose to have the bishops deprived of their power: but this one thing only is requested, that they would suffer the Gospel to be purely taught, and that they would relax a few observances which cannot be held without sin. But if they will remit nothing, let them look to it, how they will give account to God for this, that by their obstinacy they afford cause of schism...

These are the principal articles which seem to be matters of controversy. For although we might speak of more abuses, yet that we may avoid undue length, we have embraced but a few, whereby it is easy to judge of the others. Great have been the complaints about indulgences, about pilgrimages, about the abuse of excommunication. The parishes have been vexed in manifold ways by the dealers in indulgences. Endless contentions have arisen between the pastors and the monks about parochial rights, about confession, about burials, about sermons on extraordinary occasions, and about other things without number. Things of this sort we have passed over, in order that those which are chief in this matter having been briefly set forth, they might the more easily be understood. Nor has anything been here said or adduced for the purpose of casting reproach on any one. Those things alone have been enumerated which it seemed necessary to say, that it might be understood that in doctrine and ceremonials among us there is nothing received contrary to Scripture, or to the universal Christian Church, since it is manifest that we have diligently taken heed that no new and godless doctrines should creep into our churches.

In accordance with the edict of His Imperial Majesty, we have desired to present the articles above written, in which our confession should be contained, and in which might be seen a summary of the doctrine of those who teach among us. If anything be lacking in this confession, we are prepared, God willing, to present ampler information, in accordance with the Scriptures.

Your Imperial Majesty's faithful and humble,

JOHN, DUKE OF SAXONY, ELECTOR.
GEORGE, MARGRAVE OF BRANDENBURG.
ERNEST, DUKE OF LUNEBURG.
PHILIP, LANDGRAVE OF HESSE.
JOHN FREDERICK, DUKE OF SAXONY.
FRANCIS, DUKE OF LUNEBURG.
WOLFGANG, PRINCE OF ANHALT.
SENATE AND MAGISTRATE OF NURENBERG.
SENATE OF REUTLINGEN.

IN THE CONCLUDING ARTICLE of our precious Augsburg Confession the Antichristian usurpation of divine power by the papacy is again brought to the notice of Christians, with a view to shed the light of the Gospel on its aberrations and to warn against its ungodly pretensions. The evils resulting from such usurpation are so many and so grave that nothing is more needful for their correction than a steady exposure of the root of sin out of which they grew and continue to grow. Nothing is gained by trying to ameliorate or excuse a growth that is essentially poisonous, and which must be eradicated and cast into the fire if men are to be preserved from its deadly influence. Popery must fall if Christ is to reign. The Church of the Reformation, with the everlasting Gospel in the faith of her heart and in the consequent confession of her mouth, can make no compromise with Antichristian popery.

Of course Rome does all that worldly wit and wisdom can do to render its pretensions plausible. The power which our Lord committed to the State is seized upon as a plain proof that divine power can be and is delegated to human agencies, who thus become authorities over others. Evangelical Christians have no disposition and no reason to deny that God has placed rulers over the people, whom these have the duty to obey.

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” Rom. 13:1, 2.

To these “powers that be” was given authority to enforce their laws even to the extent of depriving evil-doers of their lives. The ruler of a nation must be empowered to put down and punish those who resist the ordinance of God designed to promote the welfare of the community and protect it against the evil passions of wicked men, who would make a life of quietness and peace on earth impossible. “If thou do that which is evil be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain.” Rom. 13:4. Men live together in communities and not every one can be permitted to do as he pleases, because not every one pleases to do what the equal rights of all and the common welfare of all require. The selfishness that is in the sinful soul renders this questionable with all and impossible with many. Natural conscience is no safeguard against the natural lusts of the flesh, because its office is to warn before wicked deeds are perpetrated and to condemn when the deed is done, not to regenerate the soul and prevent its sinful action. In spite of all that civilization and culture can do, there will be criminals in every land. They must be restrained by civil law and must be punished when laws are transgressed. God has mercifully provided for this by ordaining civil government with authority to make laws for the protection of the people in their common rights, and for the punishment of those who in their selfishness disregard all rights of their fellow men and care for no interests but their own. And as all thinking people see the benefits that are thus conferred on the community by the divine institution of the civil government, Rome utilizes the situation and sentiment for its own ambitious purposes. Men must be governed, if life is at all to be made tolerable on earth. God has in His goodness instituted such government, that the life and property of men living together in communities might be protected and preserved, and honest people might pursue their vocations in quietness and without molestation.

It being thus conceded that there must be a government over the people, the papacy asserts its claim. Whether this was originally a confusion of ideas, in consequence of which Romish leaders were deluded into supposing that civil and ecclesiastical government, both being divine, are one and the same, or whether the fact of the recognition of a civil government with power to command, and enforce its commands, and to punish their trans-

gression, was craftily used as a means to confuse the people, is not here of material import. The fact is manifest, that the papacy claimed the power which was given to the civil government. It accordingly proceeded to usurp divine authority in the Church and make Christians its subjects, whose soul's salvation was declared to be dependent on their obedience to its mandates; and as the eternal welfare of man is of infinitely greater importance than the temporal, the authority thus assumed must of course be higher than that committed to civil rulers and render these subject also to the papal dominion. Thus the pope's vicegerency of God on earth was established, and the Christian people were reduced to slavery under the usurped supremacy of the pope, instead of being a free people under Christ, who asserts His sovereignty by the Gospel. Church and State are confounded. and the pope becomes supreme ruler over all. Popery thus sets aside the authority of the Scriptures in spiritual and of the "powers that be" in temporal matters, and makes the pope lord of all. Who can still wonder that in plain view of all this arrogance our Confession declares him to be the very Antichrist?

If some still are confused by the fact that civil government is divinely instituted and has divine authority to make and execute laws for the welfare of the community, let them consider that this institution has nothing directly to do with the great salvation through faith in Christ, which the Gospel, committed to the Church, proclaims and over which the Church watches and is called to exert its discipline. The world lieth in wickedness, and men with all their sinful passions cannot live in communities without legal restraints and constraints. To meet the emergencies God in His mercy instituted civil government, and gave rulers power to enforce righteousness among men and to prohibit and punish wrong-doing. Of course it is civil righteousness that is contemplated, and trampling on others' rights as nature is capable of seeing them, that is punished. It is man as he is by nature that is had in view in the establishment of civil government, and right as the natural conscience feels its obligatoriness and natural reason recognizes its claims, that must guide in its administration. One need not to be a Christian in order to be a citizen of the State or to be a ruler called to make or administer its laws. Its whole purpose is secular, not spiritual. Christians will always be the best rulers and the best citizens, but the conditions of citizenship and of ruling are not Christian faith. Civil government is necessary everywhere and especially among unbelievers, and it exists among heathens as well as among Christians. The heathen citizen has the same rights and

the heathen ruler has the same authority in the State as the Christian, because the purpose of the civil government is only to maintain civil righteousness, and has nothing to do with the attainment of the righteousness of God by faith, which avails on the judgment day and with which the Church has to deal. The two kinds of government are entirely distinct. The civil government is entirely of the world, and has no means and no powers with regard to the soul's eternal blessedness. It can save nobody from the eternal wages of sin and was not ordained for any such purpose. The Church is a kingdom which is not of this world, and has no authority but that of the Gospel, whose purpose is to save from the eternal death and damnation of sin. The State has no power to deal with sin, except so far as it comes to view the crime; the Church has no power to punish crime except by excluding the impenitent criminal from the communion of saints. When Rome mixes and mingles these two institutions it overthrows the whole order of God for the government of the world in Church and State, and sets up an Antichristian government of proud pretensions that is as hostile to the State as it is to the Church; for it leads to the horrid intolerance and persecution by the State of supposed heresies, with which the State has nothing to do. and leads the Church to meddle in the affairs of the State, with which the Church has nothing to do. And because Rome assumes that she has all the authority of the State as well as of the Church, and that both must be subject to her power, she presumptuously and superciliously interferes in temporal affairs with the powers committed to the Church and in the affairs of the Church with the powers committed to the State. Thus Roman arrogance has made the pope ruler of the world, dictating ordinances for the Church, as if his authority made these human ordinances divine and made the eternal salvation of men dependent on their observance. and threatening to depose rulers in the State if they would not accept his supremacy and submit to his dictation. The blessings of the Reformation in throwing off these shackles of Rome in Church and State are so great that, although people are reaping its benefits more or less throughout the world, comparatively few have a full appreciation in this respect of the great work of the Lutheran Reformation.

The Romish Church, since the truth of the Gospel has again been preached throughout the world in its purity and completeness, has lost much of its prestige and power; but it is the same erring Church still, has abandoned none of its Antichristian claims, and where it is possible it still prose-

cutes them and persecutes opponents even unto death. While Protestants sleep and dream pleasant dreams of the conversion of the Papists to more evangelical ideas and liberal thoughts, the pope and the Jesuit fathers are wide awake and watching their opportunity to assert their claims and to exterminate Protestantism as the pestiferous Lutheran heresy that has clipped the wings of its soaring ambition. And many who are not confessed Papists trust the loud boasts of what Rome has done for liberty in its many efforts to emancipate the people, while on investigation it always proves that its boasted emancipation was from the allegiance to the Gospel and consignment to slavery under the pope. The question in the last analysis always is whether Christ or the pope shall reign. What a pity that so many are confused by the arrogance of Rome and outwitted and misled by its shameless sophistries!

One of these sophistries is particularly mentioned in our article, and the importance of the matter involved challenges special attention to it. The Romanists argue that the Church has authority to make ordinances and bind them upon the consciences of the Christian people, and, that this claim is universally recognized by the general observance of the Lord's Day instead of the Sabbath. The assumption is false, and the fallacy is obvious. The Church has the right, in Christian liberty, to make all necessary provision for the preservation of order and the promotion of peace in the congregation. Of course the people are not bound in conscience to observe what is thus freely arranged, but when they are, truly Christians they freely observe them as needful for the welfare of the Church to which they belong and in whose prosperity and peace they are heartily concerned. "Such is the observance of the Lord's Day, of Easter, of Pentecost, and like holydays and rites. For they err greatly who think that by the authority of the Church the observance of the Lord's Day has been instituted instead of the Sabbath as necessary. The Scripture has abrogated the Sabbath, and teaches that all Mosaical ceremonies may be omitted after the Gospel has been revealed. And yet, because it was necessary to appoint a certain day, in order that the people might know when they ought to come together, it appears that the Church for that purpose appointed the Lord's Day, which for this cause also seems to have been preferred, that men might have an example of Christian liberty and might know that the observance neither of the Sabbath nor of another day is necessary." The Romanists, not knowing the power of the Gospel and the liberty wherewith the heavenly truth makes believers free, still thought

themselves under the Jewish law of outward rites, notwithstanding the plain words of St. Paul: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or, in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days; which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ.” Col. 2:16.17. They thought the law of the Sabbath still binding, but that they had power to change it, and this they adduce as an example of the power of the Church even over the divine law. It seems that they are not content with exposing their ignorance of Scripture, according to which the sabbatic law is abrogated, but that they are not ashamed, on their false assumption, to beg the whole question and call this a stringent argument to establish their pretended power. Lutherans see, as all Christians ought to see, that the Jewish law of the Sabbath is not binding on the consciences of believers, but that the observance of the Lord’s Day is an example of Christian liberty under the Gospel, inspired by love to promote the cause of salvation by grace alone through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, without the deeds of the law. All ecclesiastical power is lodged in our Savior and King, who is Lord over all and to whom be glory forever.

In the conclusion our faithful confessors renew the assurance that they are not actuated by any malice toward the men whom they are necessitated to oppose or any ambition to introduce novelties for their own glory, but have an eye single to the preservation of the Gospel of Christ. With that they declare themselves in perfect harmony. They did not wish to present a complete catalogue of the sins and evils to which Romanism had brought the Church in its departure from Christ and His Gospel. They desired to set forth the true faith as the Scriptures teach it and as they by the grace of our Lord had been enabled to believe and confess it. They knew themselves to be thus in accord with the Church of Christ in all the ages and to stand in the unity of the faith of Christians in all time. Rome had departed from this faith, and its errors must be condemned. These errors of doctrines has led to many abuses in practice, . only some of which were set forth for illustration. Rome would not receive the precious truth of the Gospel and persecuted those who confessed it. Those who knew the truth in Jesus and found their souls’ abiding comfort in it, would not abandon it. No power of pope or devil could induce them to do that. The result was the establishment of the

Church of the Reformation with its glorious Augsburg Confession as the Church of the pure Gospel, commonly called the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The same grace of God which led our fathers to know and believe and confess the Gospel of Christ. and gave them peace in believing and joy in the Holy Ghost, and which made them strong in the maintenance of the truth unto salvation against every foe of Christ and His Church, is with us still. We Evangelical Lutherans, who still carry the glorious banner of the Augsburg Confession that has floated now for well-nigh four hundred years, and who never have had reason to be ashamed of it, or to doubt the ultimate victory of the Gospel truth which it represents, need only be faithful to see the power of God's goodness upon His people. God in His infinite love and mercy grant that they may loyally stand by the truth in Jesus as witnessed in the Augsburg Confession, and to Him be all the praise and glory forever.

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Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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