1858 Western District

[This essay has been previously translated by Tappert and M. Harrison. Below is an independent translation with highlighting and comments added. Page numbers are linked to their respective original pages for ease of comparison.]

==========

<page 7>

The main subjects of the deliberations and resolutions of this year's Synod are now presented to the public in the following.

The Synod spent most of its time discussing a paper submitted by a member in response to a question posed to him in writing by the District President: "Why are the symbolic books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church to be signed by those who wish to become ministers of the same, not conditionally, but unconditionally?" After this work had been gone through in all its individual parts and unanimously adopted together with a few small additions, the Synod decided to bring it to the public through the Synodical Report, in the *Lutheraner* and as a pamphlet with a hardcover, which is why it now follows here as a unanimous expression of the Synod's opinion.

Essay

on the question:

Why are the symbolic books of our church to be signed by those who wish to become servants of it, not conditionally, but unconditionally?

Before the speaker proceeds to answer this question, it will be necessary, in order to prevent possible misunderstandings in the assessment of the same, <Page 8> to first agree on the meaning and significance of an unconditional and conditional subscription of the church's confessions.

Since the symbols are confessions of faith or of the doctrine of the church and are not intended to be anything else, nothing else can be understood by an unconditional subscription than the solemn declaration given to the Church on oath by a person entering the ministry of the Church that he has recognized the doctrinal content of the symbolic books of our Church, but that he has recognized it without any exception as not being in conflict with Holy Scripture in any point (neither in a main nor in a secondary point), but as being in complete agreement with it; that he therefore believes in it from the heart as divine truth itself, and thus wants to preach this doctrine unadulterated. Whatever position, therefore, any doctrine may occupy in the doctrinal system of the symbols, and in whatever form it may appear therein, whether as a subject treated *ex professo*, or as an incidental remark: to each of these the unconditional signature given refers; none of them is thereby stipulated by the signer. Far from excluding here, for example, those doctrines which are used in the Symbols only for the proofs contained therein, these are to be regarded as doctrines which are regarded by our Church as absolutely irrefutable doctrinal foundations and are held by her as such; their joyful acknowledgment is therefore presupposed above all others by those who sign the Symbols. Holding, however, that the symbols are confessions of faith or doctrine, the Church must, on the contrary, necessarily exclude everything that does not concern doctrine

from the circle to which the signing of the symbols refers. As little, for example, as he who subscribes to the symbols of the Church as his symbols without any condition, thereby declares them to be a rule and guideline of German or Latin orthography or of a perfect style, just as little does his signature refer to any other things which belong to the field of human scholarship. For example in Article VI of the Augsburg Confession, a passage from an ancient interpretation of the First Epistle to the Corinthians; in Article XX (of the Latin text), a passage from the treatise "On the Calling of the Gentiles," as a saying of Ambrose; in Article XVIII of the same Confession, a passage from the ancient treatise "Hypognostikon," is cited as a passage of Augustine — it goes without saying that even those who unconditionally subscribe to the Augsburg Confession by no means undertake to regard Ambrose and Augustine as the authors of those writings, because they are cited in the said Confession under their own names; even if it were not known that even the drafter of this fundamental confession of ours knew quite well that the cited writings are only cited under that name, without their authorship being decisively attributed to them. But just as the servant of the Church is not bound by that which falls within the sphere of criticism, <page 9> so neither is anything that belongs to the sphere of history in terms of the content of the symbol.

And even more. The interpretation given in the symbol of individual Scripture passages is in a similar relationship. The holy apostle Paul himself states as the only absolutely necessary requirement of an unobjectionable [*unverwerflichen*] "prophecy" or interpretation of Scripture: "Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion [or analogy] of faith." Rom. 12:6. From this Johann Gerhard draws the rule of interpretation: "Even if we do not reach the actual and particular [*eigentlichen und besondern*] meaning of all the passages, it is sufficient not to bring anything against the analogy of faith in the interpretation of the same." *)

---

*) "Si vel maxime proprium et genuinum omnium locorum sensum non assequamur, tamen sufficit, nihil contra fidei *αναλογίαν* in illis interpretandis proferre." (Loc. th. de interpr. SS. . § 71. [*On Interpreting Sacred Scripture*, p. 74: "Even if we do not always arrive at the most proper and natural sense of every single passage, it is enough not to say anything contrary to the analogy of the faith when interpreting them.".])

Supposing, then, that an interpreter did not grasp the particular meaning of some passage of the Bible, but interpreted it in such a way that his interpretation had its ground in other clear passages of Scripture, he was certainly mistaken in the opinion that a certain doctrine was contained in a certain passage, but he was not mistaken in the doctrine. Even those who unconditionally subscribe to the symbolic books therefore only declare that all the interpretations contained in them are "analogous to the faith".

Furthermore, since the proof of a doctrine may be imperfect, even though not only the doctrine to be proved or the proposition itself rests on an irrefutable divine foundation, but also the doctrines used to support the proof, or the major and minor propositions, are correct: so also an unconditional subscription by no means implies the recognition that no

line of reasoning given in the symbolic books for the pure doctrine is capable of perfection, or in other words, that the form, the method and the process of reasoning are also perfect and therefore every faithful minister of the Church is bound to use the method followed in the symbols and no other method. Our Fathers do not judge otherwise of an unconditional subscription to the symbols. The old orthodox and astute Strasbourg theologian Johann Conrad Dannhauer (d. 1666) writes: "It may be that such (symbols) do not make it obligatory to record all circumstances, ways of speaking, proofs, citations: but the doctrinal content or the substance of the teaching must be recorded as it is set down in writing, and not only insofar as it may seem to the private part to agree with Scripture; in which way one could also sign the Koran." **)

**) "Esto, haec ejusmodi non obligent ad 'omnes in iis circumstantias, phrases, probationes, allegationes tenendas, ipsa tamen doctrinae substantia tenenda est, prout scripta, nec eatenus tantum, quatenus sacris literis privato judicio consonare videbitur, qua quidem ratione etiam Alcorano subscribi potest," (Lib. conscientiae apertus. ed, 2. tom. I. p. 258.)

Finally, those parts of the symbolic books, as ecclesiastical doctrinal confessions, to which even a subscription unconditionally affixed <page 10> to them does not refer, do not include the principles and doctrines laid down therein concerning church constitution, church order and church ceremonies, but these things themselves, which are subject to Christian freedom, as many of them are mentioned in the symbols. For this reason, as is well known, neither Luther's *Order of Baptism* nor *Order of Marriage* booklet was included in the *Book of Concord* as an integral part of it. Therefore, the minutes of the colloquium held in Quedlinburg in 1582 concerning the Formula of Concord state: "These two books (the Marriage and Baptism Books) have not been removed, as if one wanted to change something in Dr. Luther's Catechism or as if something dangerous were sought thereby, but for the reason that the ceremonies prescribed in Dr. Luther's booklet on marriage and baptism are not absolutely the same in all churches that subscribe to the Christian Book of Concord, but in some these, and in others other free ceremonies, are in use. So that this may not cause offense and the churches in which such ceremonies as those in Dr. Luther's booklet of marriage and baptism, do not complain that they should be joined to such ceremonies by such booklets, or, if they do not accept them and wish to condemn or abolish them, accuse them of having acted contrary to the Book of Concord and the subscription they have made, of leaving the two booklets mentioned outside and setting the Catechism alone; and then that the comparison in the Book of Concord was directed to the dogmata or doctrine and not to such and such ceremonies (which are free to each church). In leaving out the marriage and baptism booklets, it has been seen in particular with regard to the churches of the Oberland, and especially in *Palatinate* (Pfalz), etc., which do not have such ceremonies, nor can they be introduced in them without a thorough disruption of the same churches, as they would certainly not have signed the Book of Concord to this day if these two booklets had been left with the Catechism in the Book of Concord." *)

---

*) See the Latin-German edition of the Concordienbuch by Reineccius p.584 ff.

Concerning this subject, Polycarpus Leyser also writes: "Just as the Elector Palatine Ludwig, among others, let himself be heard with clear words before he wanted to accept the baptismal booklet, which contains the exorcism, he wanted to renounce this common work (the introduction of the Formula of Concord together with the other symbols) together with his churches. Not that he wanted to condemn other churches on account of such ceremonies (to which His Electoral Grace expressly agreed), but rather that his churches had recently been torn out of Calvinism and that the simple-minded could not be sent into exorcism for this reason. So that this would not give rise to a new dispute, nor would so many churches be deterred from the common work of concord, it has been deemed advisable that each church should be left its freedom in this matter, all the more so because, without the provision in the Christian Book of Concord fol. <page 11> 248 and 318 [Formula of Concord X, 31] states that because of the disparity of the ceremonies, since in Christian freedom one church has less and the other more, neither should condemn the other, if only they are otherwise united in doctrine and all the same articles, as well as in the right use of the sacraments." *)

---

*) Ibid. p. 587.

From this it is self-evident what it means to subscribe to the symbols only conditionally. It means to subscribe to them with the condition that not every doctrine contained in the symbols must be accepted as being in perfect agreement with Holy Scripture, but that one may also make a distinction in the doctrines contained therein.

These include the following formulas: firstly, one subscribes to the symbolic books if and insofar as they do not conflict with Holy Scripture or if and insofar as they agree with it. As is well known, this formula was declared to be the most appropriate by the so-called Pietists and was later also adopted by the Rationalists, albeit in different senses. The former, however, did not want to exclude the fundamental articles of our faith; the latter, on the other hand, believed that they were not bound by this formula to accept these articles, since they only recognized Scripture as the rule and guideline of their doctrine insofar as the content of Scripture was not contrary to their reason.

Secondly, only conditional acceptance of the symbols lies in the formula: one subscribes to the symbols insofar as one recognizes that the basic teachings of the Bible are taught correctly or at least essentially correctly. In this way the local so-called General Synod and the individual synods belonging to it profess the Augsburg Confession. **)

**) The Constitution of the General Synod states, for example, Art. 3, Sect. 3: "All regularly constituted Lutheran Synods, holding the *fundamental doctrines* of the Bible as taught by our Church, not now in connection with the General Synod, may, at any time, become associated with it." Furthermore, in the Hartwick Synod, among other things, the person to be licensed is obliged to answer the following question submitted to him: "Do you believe, that the *fundamental doctrines* of the Bible, are taught in a manner *substantially* correct, in the doctrinal Articles of the Augsburg Confession?" (S. Hist. of the Amer. Luth. Ch. by Hazelius p. 187. 297.)

A third kind of conditional recognition of the symbols is when one expresses it in this way: one subscribes to them if one only interprets or understands them according to Scripture or correctly. Even the Reformed have declared their willingness to sign the Unaltered Augsburg Confession under this condition. Thus Dr. Wernsdorf writes: "The Zwinglians, before this and only recently Heidegger in his *Introd. in Viam Concord. Protestant*: they wanted to sign the Augsburg Confession if only they were allowed to interpret it according to Scripture." ***)

***) S. G. Wernsdorf's Bericht von dem Indifferentismo der Religionen. 1734. S. 860

When the Calvinist Jerome Zanchi was asked in writing to declare that he wanted to teach "according to the precept (*secundum formulam*) of the Augsburg Confession", he changed this form and put <page 12> in its place: "According to the true and orthodox understanding of the doctrine contained in the Augsburg Confession." *)

*) "Secundum veram et orthodoxe intellectam doctrinam in A. C. contentam" Carpzovii Isagoge in libb, eccl" Luth, Symbolicos p. 112.)

He [Zanchi] also signed the Augsburg Confession in 1563 with the following words: "This form of doctrine, for as godly as I recognize it, I also accept it." [much like Loehe "accepted" the Smalcald Articles.] Soon afterwards, he interpreted this signature himself in a letter to the Strasbourg Council: "For as godly as I recognize it, i.e. in what way I recognize and respect it as godly, I accept it, i.e. in the same way and in the same agreement I accept it; I recognize it as godly if it is understood as I will interpret it." **)

**) "Hanc doctrinae formam, ut piam agnosco, ita etiam recipio.'* — "Ut piam agnosco, h. e. quemadmodum ego illam agnesco et judico esse piam, ita recipio, h. e. ad eundem modum et consensum recipio ; agnosco, eam esse piam, si ita intelligatur, quemadmodum ego explicabo." op. cit. p. 112. 113.

The Calvinist Petrus Martyr wrote to the Landgrave of Hesse in 1565: "I gladly accept the Augsburg Confession if it is understood correctly and comfortably." ***)

***) "Augustanam Confessionem libenter amplector, si recte et commode intelligatur." op. cit. p. 113.

Calvin also signed the Unaltered Augsburg Confession in 1539 in order to be able to teach publicly in Strasbourg; however, he declared in a letter to Schalling in Regensburg in 1557: "I also do not reject the Augsburg Confession, which I willingly and gladly signed a long time ago, just as the author himself interpreted it." †)

†) S. Calvini Epp. ed. 2. Lausannae, 1576. p. 390.: "Nec vero Augustanam Confessionem repudio, cui pridem volens ac libens subscripsi, sicuti eam auctor ipse interpretatus est."

In a similar spirit [**as Reformed and Calvin!**], a few years ago an entire conference of Lutheran preachers gathered in Fuerth in Bavaria, headed by Pastor Löhe in Neuendettelsau in Bavaria, encouraged our Synod to understand and interpret the Symbols according to Scripture in order to come to an agreement on the controversial doctrines of Church and Ministry. In the relevant letter of this conference it says: "We do not doubt — if we only take the Word of God as our sole rule in all things — and understand our good confessions according to the guidance of Scripture and the opposition fought against each time, the Spirit of truth will also guide His church in all truths in this question." ††) [**Though Matthew Harrison comments regularly in his translations, he offers NO COMMENT ON THIS CRITICAL POINT AGAINST LOEHE! (See his pages 124-125.) So much for his "confessionalism".**]

---

††) See *Der Lutheraner*, vol. 10. p. 90.

With such additions, that one wishes to subscribe to the symbols if one may understand them correctly, it cannot of course be said that one may understand them as they read and are really meant, for only a madman can want to demand a different understanding; these additions rather indicate that one cannot accept them as they read, and that one therefore requires to be able to connect with the words of the symbol a meaning which does not lie in them, but which one considers to be the right Biblical one. **<Page 13>**

It is quite the same with the condition of wanting to accept the symbols in their "historical view [or context]". When, for example, the Iowa Synod writes: "Because the symbols are for the most part the results of ecclesiastical struggle and have the decision and settlement of the struggle as their purpose and goal, we can only recognize the historical view as the correct one, corresponding to the nature of the Confessions. For a confessional document and an article of it can only be correctly understood and interpreted on the basis of each individual dispute. That predominantly dogmatic, unhistorical view which overlooks and fails to recognize the historical view, through which the confessional statements often first come into the light and receive their correct limitation, we must declare to be incorrect and wrong." *) [**NO COMMENT BY MATTHEW HARRISON**]

---

*) A. a. O. [*Lehre und Wehre* vol. 4 (Feb. 1858), p. 62]

A fourth way of subscribing the symbols only conditionally is to declare that one can only profess what is confessional in them. Pastor Löhe, for example, only subscribes the symbols with this condition. He writes: "I distinguish in the Book of Concord what is confessionally said and what is not confessionally said, — and I distinguish even more. It does not occur to me to stick to the letter and be guilty of symbololatry. I accept what is confessedly (confessionally) said in the confessional writings." **) [**NO COMMENT BY MATTHEW HARRISON**]

**) See *Our Ecclesiastical Situation*. By Löhe. Nordlingen, 1850. p, 60. 62.

It goes without saying that this excludes a significant part of the doctrinal content of the symbols from what can be professed as one's faith; just as Pastor Löhe, in the same writing where he states the above, openly declares several parts of doctrine found in the symbols to be not pure and therefore capable of purification. ***)

***) The same thing that Pastor Löhe says, as noted above, is expressed by the Iowa Synod thus: "The actual confession, the *norma docendi* binding the conscience, can only be the thetical and antithetical decisions which each article expresses and establishes against falsehood and error. On the other hand, not every argument, every explanation, etc., which is actually an accident in a confessional document, can be made into a doctrine of faith that censures the conscience. Symbolic validity has what the symbols want to establish symbolically." (!) (See *Lehre und Wehre*, current February issue p. 62. 63.)

A fifth kind of only conditional acknowledgment of the symbols is that according to which one declares oneself to be committed to certain symbols of both the Lutheran and the Reformed Church, if and insofar as they agree with each other. The United Church [Prussian Union], in which, as is well known, this kind of commitment is customary, not only confessionally excludes several of the main elements of the symbolic doctrine as not binding, but also leaves it undecided which these elements are.

A sixth, even if only indirectly conditional, acceptance of the symbolic books is also to be regarded as one in which even those doctrines which are already clearly presented and laid down in the symbols, as soon as there is dissent among the confessors of these symbols, are regarded as still open questions and may be dealt with accordingly. Just as the Buffalo Synod, through its delegates, Pastors Grabau and von Rohr, demanded at the <Page 14> Leipzig Pastoral Conference of 1853, and again and again thereafter in its *Informatorium*, that the questions of Church and Ministry already irrefutably decided in the symbols be declared open questions and dealt with accordingly. *)

---

*) Contrary to factual truth, the Buffalo Synod, of course, claims that the symbols have decided nothing about those doctrinal matters! Indeed, Superintendent Münchmeyer went so far as to claim at the Leipzig Conference that the Articles of Church and Ministry were "points of doctrine" on which "neither God's Word nor the confessions of our church have given a definite decision!" (See the extract from the "Sächs. Kirchen- und Schul-Blatt" and the report of the Leipzig Conference in *Der Lutheraner*, vol. 10, p. 93).

Finally, the seventh and grossest way of a merely conditional subscription to the church's Confessions is the way of the rationalists to commit themselves not to the letter but to the so-called spirit of the symbolic books. —

We now proceed to answer our question: Why are the symbolic books of our church not to be subscribed conditionally by its ministers, but unconditionally?

Answer: Because subscribing only conditionally runs counter to both

the purpose of the Symbols in general and the purpose of the commitment to it in particular.

Since all parties within Christendom appeal to the Scriptures, papists, enthusiasts and rationalists as well as orthodox Christians; since all say that their doctrine is founded in the Scriptures and that it only needs to be understood and interpreted correctly: the confession that one believes what is written in Scripture is not a clear confession of faith that distinguishes one from the false believers; for despite this declaration, no one knows whether one takes Scripture in its true sense or not, whether one is a papist, or a fanatic, or a nationalist, or an orthodox Christian. For this purpose it is necessary to explain how one understands and interprets the Scriptures with regard to the articles of faith contained therein. Therefore, as far as the purpose of a symbol is concerned, it is: 1. that the Church may thereby clearly and distinctly confess her faith and doctrine before all the world; 2. that she may thereby distinguish herself from all heterodox communities and sects; and 3. that she may have a unanimous, certain, general form and norm of doctrine for her teachers, from and according to which at the same time all other writings and doctrines can and should be judged and regulated, insofar as they are to be tried and accepted. If, however, the Church demands only a conditional recognition of her symbols from her ministers, she thereby takes back before all the world that she really has the faith and doctrine which she has laid down therein; her alleged confession is then not really her confession; therefore she can also be rightly accused of being two-faced and of only deceiving the world with her symbols. If her teachers demand a merely conditional signature under her symbols, the Church does not distinguish herself from the unbelieving sects by her <Page 15> symbols, but places herself on the same level with the sects by her symbols, which admittedly also contain errors. In this case, however, it is finally 3. also without a unanimous, certain and general form and norm of doctrine, according to which everyone can judge himself in teaching, as well as judge all other writings and teachings.

Now as to the other purpose in particular for which the Church requires her teachers to subscribe her symbols, the same is: 1. to ascertain whether those who wish to hold the teaching office in her really have the orthodox understanding of Holy Scripture and the pure and unadulterated faith which she herself has; 2. To bind them by a sacred promise to proclaim this faith to her pure and pure, or to renounce the magisterium in her midst, either not to accept it or, if they were already in it, to abandon it, but not to disturb the Church by false doctrine and to seduce her members to it. However, this purpose of subscribing to the symbols on the part of the ministers of the Church is completely nullified as soon as the latter have to profess the symbols of the Church only conditionally. For by thus apparently allowing its teachers to assume that their symbols may contain teachings contrary to Holy Scripture, the Church itself renounces (1) the assurance of the signer's faith by the signature thus given; and (2) the obligation of its teachers to teach the Word of God purely and unadulterated according to its symbols as the ecclesiastical doctrinal norm. Furthermore, while the congregations, by

committing to their symbols those who wish to assume the teaching office in them, seek a guarantee that neither a teacher with an erroneous conscience nor a willful false teacher can present all kinds of errors to them as authorized to do so, the demand for a merely conditional signature has again deprived the congregations of this guarantee; indeed, they thereby give the false teacher himself a weapon against them and deprive themselves of the right to remove from office anyone who teaches contrary to their symbols. Furthermore, while the union of the teachers in the church to their public confessions is intended to put an end to the eternal disputes over questions already discussed and settled, at least in the orthodox church, and to strengthen church peace, a merely conditional signature lays the foundation for the renewal of all disputes already settled and eternal discord.

It is said, of course, that it is impossible to recognize the teaching of the symbolic books otherwise than in so far as they agree with Holy Scripture, for in so far as they were written by men we cannot possibly base our faith on them. I answer: Quite true, but the signature is precisely a question of whether the person to be appointed to the magisterium has already recognized and believes that they agree with Holy Scripture. A declaration that one accepts the symbols if, and not because, they agree with Scripture is not a commitment to the symbols, <page 16> but merely to the conscience and opinions of the person making the commitment. Every honest Calvinist Reformed can declare without compunction that he heartily accepts our Book of Concord, provided it agrees with Scripture, and yet regard the decrees of the Synod of Dort alone as purely biblical.

It is further said that there can be no better interpretation of the symbols than according to Scripture. I answer: 1. According to Scripture one can only interpret that which by its nature and necessity agrees with Scripture; therefore no human Scripture can be interpreted according to Scripture, but only Scripture itself. But just as divine Scripture is to be interpreted from itself, so also every human Scripture is to be interpreted from itself, but to be examined and, where necessary, improved according to sacred Scripture. If a human writing is to be interpreted according to Scripture, the former is to be made equal to the latter and it is to be declared in advance that even what is not understood in the symbols must necessarily agree with Scripture, which could only be said of a new direct revelation. Secondly, for this very reason the symbols should be signed by the teachers in the church, so that it can be ascertained whether they have also recognized the interpretation and understanding of Scripture laid down in the symbols as correct and therefore also want to interpret Scripture as the church they profess to want to serve does

If, therefore, the Church were to require its teachers not to interpret the Scriptures according to the symbols, but to interpret the symbols according to the Scriptures, the Church would not have the guarantee through the signature that the committed teacher understands and interprets the Scriptures as they do, but — as he himself considers it right; thus the Church would actually make the personal conviction of each of its teachers the symbol to which it is committed!

It is also said that a commitment to a doctrinal confession can obviously only be about the essentials and not the non-essentials. I answer: Without doubt! — But in a doctrinal confession everything that belongs to the doctrinal content belongs to its essence, for the essence of a doctrinal creed is precisely the doctrine. Quite apart from the fact that one person may regard this and another something else as an essential part of the symbols. Some may understand by the non-essentials really non-fundamental things which, because they are not clearly revealed in God's Word, can really be doubted or even denied and disputed without harm: yet it is obvious that, for example, those who declare that they stand on the doctrinal basis of the so-called Lutheran General Synod here, regard even the indisputably fundamental doctrines of the means of grace as non-essential parts of the confession.

It is also said that one must obviously only accept in the Symbols what is confessedly said in them, since they are confessions and not theological doctrinal compendium. I answer: At any rate! But all the doctrinal expositions contained in the Symbols <page 17> have been made into parts of the Church's Confession by their inclusion in them. If the question of whether something in the Confessions belongs to the Confession were to depend on the formula sometimes used in them: "We believe, teach and confess" and the like, then the greater part of what is contained in our Confessions, even the whole of Luther's two catechisms together with the whole Apology, would be excluded from them. There is therefore no doubt that an unqualified, honest confession of one symbol is incomparably more valuable than a somehow qualified confession of the whole Book of Concord; indeed, the latter hangs the cloak of orthodoxy itself around the heresy.

It is further said: But is it not absolutely necessary to understand the Symbols in no other way than historically? I answer: Rightly understood, indeed; if nothing else is understood by it than that history throws the necessary light on "how the Holy Scriptures were understood and interpreted in controversial articles in the Church of God by those then living, and how the same contrary doctrine was rejected and condemned." [FC Ep Rule and Norm, 8] But if, as the Iowa Synod does, the historical view is opposed to the dogmatic view, then the historical view alone is evidently claimed to have to not accept dogmas or doctrinal articles contained in the Symbols as eternal truths, but to be able to reject them as non-binding contemporary opinions.

It is further argued that if the United Church [Prussian Union] commits itself to the symbols of both the Lutheran and the Reformed Church, insofar as both symbols agree with each other, but goes back to Scripture in the points of difference, then the United Church is at least justified against the accusation that it is confessionless and therefore not a church, not even an irreligious church, but a group held together solely by the bond of indifferentism. I answer: To declare the commonality of several mutually contradictory and condemning symbols, which only profound theologians can find in them, to be the confession of an ecclesiastical community, is so utterly contrary to the nature and purpose of an ecclesiastical confession that it needs no proof. Such a declaration saves the appearance of a confession, but thereby only builds a canopy

of Gallionism (Acts 18:12-17). There is no doubt that a Lutheran (or even a Reformed) who accepts the mutual symbols in the manner indicated, instead of confessing his faith, shamefully denies it.. The Uniteds seem to have felt this themselves, therefore they partly refuse to find and exhibit the consensus of both symbols, partly they have now and then taken the liberty of declaring the Augsburg Confession to be their common confession; but as they do not specify which Augsburg Confession they understand by it, whether the Lutheran unaltered, or the Melanchthonian altered, or the Zwinglian, they have thereby laid aside one sham and put on another of the same kind.

It is further said: should not these be regarded as open questions, <Page 18> on which even the most faithful and decided Lutherans differ? I answer: one commits a *petitio principii* (i.e. one proves with that which is to be proved [or "begging the question"]); faithful and decided Lutherans are precisely only those who believe what the Lutheran Church believes according to its Confessions. Far, therefore, from the questioning of certain doctrinal points of the Lutheran Symbols on the part of supposed decided Lutherans turning these doctrinal points into open questions again, this questioning of the Lutheran Confessions rather reveals that those supposed decided Lutherans are not what they are taken to be; and whoever allows such doctrines to be treated as open questions by supposed Lutherans only betrays the fortress of our church confession.

Finally, it is also said that the holy apostle himself says: "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6); it is therefore obviously quite contrary to the spirit of a truly evangelical church to make laws of faith and to bind consciences to the dead letter of the symbols with the same. To this I reply: By requiring him to subscribe to the symbols, and that unconditionally, no law is imposed on him who wishes to assume the teaching office in the Church; he is only required to make a confession of faith, so that the Church may know whether or not it can confer on him the teaching office in its midst with a clear conscience. If he has the faith of the Church, he cannot regard this demand as a legal yoke; rather, it can be nothing but his heart's delight and joy to confess publicly and solemnly with his mouth the faith he holds in his heart, and to promise sacredly that he will preach the same and no other faith until his death. But if he does not have the faith of the Church, no one compels him to confess it or even to swear to it; on the contrary, the Church demands a precisely formulated and unconditional subscription for this very reason, so that no one can be bound by it who does not fully agree with it in faith. A distinction between the spirit and the letter of the Symbols, however, is nothing but an annulment of both, for it is precisely the letter of the symbol and nothing else that is the bearer and revealer of its spirit. Or if one understands the spirit of the symbol to be the principle established in it, that Holy Scripture is the only rule and guideline of doctrine, then a signature made in this sense would obviously be quite equivalent to a denial of it, for it is not a question of the rule of how right faith is obtained, but of the result of the application of the rule, of right faith itself.

Finally, whatever may be the conditions by which alone one wishes to subscribe to the Symbols, any one which concerns the doctrinal

content and which leaves it to the person making the obligation to determine those individual items which are reserved by the condition as non-binding, is a loophole which is opened to dishonesty, to mock the Church and to frustrate the purpose of the Symbols and the subscription to them. <page 19>

But can there not be honest, upright men who are either unable to examine the whole Book of Concord according to God's Word and finally to say with certainty that the whole doctrinal content of the same agrees exactly with Scripture, or who are challenged in their conscience by doubts about certain points? Certainly; but such men are either unfit, or in the state in which they find themselves, incapable of assuming the teaching office in the Church; for a bishop must above all be doctrinally sound and powerful to exhort by sound doctrine and to reprove the gainsayers. 1 Tim. 3, 2. Tit. 1, 9.

But how? — Would it not be possible that the Symbols of the orthodox Church also contains errors in less important matters? I answer: In itself that would be possible; but the fact that something is possible does not prove that it is real. Only men who have despaired of finding the truth, only skeptics who are always learning and never come to the knowledge of the truth, can assert: This was written by men, therefore it must contain error. [Cp. David Scaer's remarks about Pieper and the *Brief Statement*.] But if the latter were really proved in our symbols, then the bar would also be broken over our symbols; they would then not be symbols of the true, pure, orthodox church, but of a false, impure, unbelieving church, and no honest man could subscribe to them. But in spite of all the world, all unbelievers and misbelievers, be commanded to find a doctrinal error in our Concordia! All the enemies of our Church have tried in vain for 300 years; they have been put to shame. They have proved that our symbols contain contradictions to their blind reason, and we gladly concede this to them; but they have left it to them to prove that they contradict the holy divine Scriptures, even in the very letter. A similar attempt by those who want to be regarded as the most faithful sons of our Church will therefore be just as futile and disgraceful. By attempting to prove that the voice of their alleged spiritual mother in the public confessions of the same is in part the voice of error, they will prove nothing more than that they are bastards who, because they do not believe the holy divine Scriptures, revile the Church as a liar who confesses what she found in the Scriptures as the faith of her heart.

Before we conclude, we consider it necessary to address two further questions.

The first is this: Is it according to the declarations contained in our symbols that these symbols are not conditionally but unconditionally subscribed to by the ministers of our Church? I answer: There can be no doubt about this. For example, at the end <page 20> of the Augsburg Confession it says: "Only those things have been recounted whereof we thought that it was necessary to speak, in order that it might be understood that in doctrine and in ceremonies nothing has been received on our part against Scripture or the Church Catholic." [AC, Conclusion, 5;] *Triglotta* [*Harrison references the Triglotta*? Why not Kolb-Wengert??], p. 95] Thus it is also said of the Augsburg Confession in the Formula of

Concord: "To the same Christian Augsburg Confession, which is well founded in the Word of God, we hereby confess once again from the bottom of our hearts, we remain with the same simple, bright and pure mind, as the words entail, and consider the said Confession to be a purely Christian symbol, in which true Christians of this time are to be found next to God's Word, just as Christian symbols and confessions were set up in the Church of God over a number of great disputes that took place, to which the pure teachers and listeners professed with their hearts and mouths at that time. We also intend, by the grace of the Almighty, to persevere to the end with the more reported Christian confession, as it was delivered by Emperor Carolo Anno 30 etc., and our intention is not to deviate in the least (in the Latin original it says: *vel transversum, ut ajunt, unguem*, i.e. not even, as one speaks, a finger's breadth) from the much-mentioned confession, neither in this nor in other writings." (*Triglotta*, p. 847; "Introduction to the Formula of Concord") The same is also said in the preface to the Book of Concord of the other earlier symbols, the ecumenical ones, the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles and the two catechisms, when it says there: one does not want to deviate from it "at all" (*ne latum quidem unguem*, i.e. not even a finger's breadth) "neither in *rebus* nor *phrasibus*" (neither in relation to the things taught nor the manner of speaking of them) "but rather, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to persevere and remain cintemptuously in it, also to "regulate all religious disputes and their declarations according to it" (*ad hanc veram normam et declarationem purioris doctrinae*, i.e. according to this true norm and declaration of pure doctrine)." (*Triglotta*, p. 23) Finally, in the Formula of Concord all the previous Lutheran symbols as called: "a unanimous, certain, general form of doctrine, to which our evangelical churches all and in general profess, from and according to which, because it is taken from God's Word" (i.e. not insofar as it is taken from God's Word), "all other writings, insofar as they are to be tried and accepted, are to be judged and regulated." (fol. 257. b. [(*Triglotta*, p. 855; FC SD Rule and Norm 10)]) From all these explanations it is indisputably clear that our Symbolical Books themselves demand an unconditional subscription, and that he who would only subscribe them conditionally denies what they themselves grant. [zusprechen]

Moreover, what the symbols say about the extent of their binding force is confirmed by the Formula of Concord by the way in which it uses the earlier symbols themselves as a norm.

The other remaining question to be considered here is this: Is our assertion that the symbols of our church are to be necessarily subscribed to by the teachers of the same confirmed by the <page 21> practice of our church? - To answer this question, we shall now give a few historical notes.

When the Augsburg Confession was handed over, the confessors were able to begin this confession with the words: "First of all, it is taught and held with one accord," or, as it says in the original Latin: "*Ecclesiae*

magno consensu apud nos docent, i.e. "Our churches, with common consent." [*Triglotta*, p. 43] Only Luther had previously been sent the Confession for review and respective correction, and he had given the written answer: "I have read over Master Philipp's Apologia (i.e. the Augsburg Confession), I like it almost (i.e. very) well, and know nothing to improve or change in it." It had not been sent to anyone else for prior examination, for it was known that this confession only exemplifies the faith that lived in all the hearts that had been awakened by the voice of the pure gospel that resounded so powerfully at that time..

However, the more obvious the protection enjoyed by the confessors of the Gospel brought to light by Luther became, the more false spirits were soon to be found who sought to market their dreams under this secure shield. As early as 1532, therefore, as Melanchthon reports, *)

---

*) See *Corpus Reformatorum*. Vol. XII. p. 6-7. in: "Oratio, in qua refutatur calumnia Osiandri" &c.

Luther, together with Justus Jonas and Bugenhagen, established that those who wished to assume the teaching office and receive ordination should first "affirm that they accept the unadulterated doctrine of the Gospel and understand it as it is contained in the Apostolic, Nicene and Athanasian Symbolum and as it is presented in the Confession which our churches presented to Emperor Carl at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, and that they should promise to persevere in this opinion with the help of God and to faithfully perform their office in the Church. Likewise, if new disputes should arise about which there are no clear pronouncements, that they should take counsel with other elders in our and the associated churches." **)

**) "Ut adfirment, se amplecti incorruptam Evangelii doctrinam, et eam sic intelligere, ut in symbolis Apostolico, Niceno et Athanasiano commemoratur, et in Confessione, quam Eccl. nostrae exhibuerunt Carolo imperatori in conventu Augustano anno 1530, recitatur, et promittant, in ea sententia se Deo juvante constanter perseveraturos esse, et fideliter facturos officium in Ecclesia. Item, si incident controversiae novae, de quibus non extant perspicua judicia, ut deliberent cum aliis senioribus in nostra Ecclesia et conjunctis." L. c.

Later, as the Concordia Formula reports, in addition to the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Schmalkaldic Articles and Luther's Large and Small Catechism were "signed by the most distinguished, highly enlightened theologians" and "all Protestant churches and schools had them inside". To all of these, however, the Concordian Formula was finally added. Far from demanding only a conditional commitment to these symbols from its teachers, it has rather always made a quite definite, round, <page 22> unconditional subscription of them an indispensable condition for taking up an office in its midst; indeed, as a rule, it has even demanded an additional promise with regard to certain points not expressly mentioned in the symbols.

After the introduction of the Formula of Concord in Saxony, the religious oath to be taken by all church and school servants since 1602 reads as follows: "You shall vow and swear that you will remain and persevere in the pure and Christian knowledge of these lands, as it is

contained in the first unaltered Augsburg Confession and repeated and declared in the Christian Book of Concord and preserved against all falsifications, constantly, without any falsification, and that you will not practice anything secretly or publicly against it, even if you notice that others want to do so, you will not restrain yourselves from doing so, but will immediately reveal it without fear. God forbid, which he would graciously avert, that you yourselves, through human folly and delusion, should turn away from such pure doctrine and knowledge of God, either to the Papists, Calvinists, or others of the above-mentioned pure confession, sects which have been exposed and rejected in the religious peace, (then you shall swear that) you will immediately report this to the proper place, on the basis of the oath you have taken, and await further decree and resolution; and all this faithfully and without danger." *)

---

*) S. Abriß der meißnisch-albertinisch-sächsischen Kirchengeschichte. By Hasse. Leipzig, 1816, II. 75.

Furthermore, a Leipzig Licentiate of Theology had to swear as follows: "I, N. N., swear to you, the dean and the theological faculty, that I adhere to the holy teachings of Christ as they have been handed down in the writings of the apostles and prophets and as they are contained in the received Symbols and in the Augsburg Confession delivered to Emperor Charles V in 1530, as well as in its Apology, in the Smalcald Articles, in both Lutheran catechisms and in the Book of Concord, and that I want to fight all godless, dark, heretical and unionistic opinions to the best of my ability and faithfully keep the statutes of the faculty, so help me God through His holy gospel." **)

**) Ego, N., juro vobis, Decano et Facultati theologicae, me sanctam Christi doctrinam in scriptis prophetarum et Apostolorum traditam, inque receptis symbolis et Aug. Conf..., anno 1530 Imperatori Carolo V. exhibita, nec non ejusdem Apologia, Smalcaldicis articulis, utroque Catechismo Lutheri et in libro christianae Concordiae ex plicatam integre secuturum et omnia prava, obscura, haeretica et syncretistica dogmata pro viribus impugnaturum esse, et servaturum statuta Facultatis bona fide; sic me adjuvet Deus per sanctum suum evangelium." (See the abgenöthigte Schutzschrift des Ministeriums in Hamburg. 1691. p. 10.)

Now, as it appears from the foregoing that our Church has demanded from her teachers an unconditional recognition of her symbols according to their doctrinal content, so it can also be historically proved that she has rejected a merely conditional signature as contrary to the purpose of the same.

When in 1539 Duke Henry of Saxony set about reforming the University of Leipzig, and to this end demanded that the theologians of this university, after receiving instruction, accept the <Page 23> Augsburg Confession and its Apology and teach according to these confessions, but those theologians declared: "that they did not want to oppose the Apology and Confession, provided they did not oppose the Gospel and the truth," *) this ambiguous declaration was rejected.

---

*) “Quod non velint resistere Apologiae atque Confessioni, in quantum non repugnet evangelio et veritati." (See: C. G. Hofmanns Ref.-Hist. der Stadt und Universität Leipzig. p. 405.)

The first theologian within the Lutheran Church to declare his opposition to the association of the teachers of the Church with the doctrine of the ecclesiastical symbols was the Königsberg theologian Andreas Osiander. This arrogant, argumentative man had already aroused suspicion during Luther's lifetime that he disagreed with Luther's teaching, especially on justification. But at that time he was still wary of coming out into the open with his dreams. As soon as Luther had died, however, he himself declared to his old friend Moibanus on a journey through Breslau: "Now the lion is dead, he doesn't ask much about the foxes." **)

**) Innocence Nachrr. 1731. S. 173.

Now he published his favorite doctrine that the essential righteousness of Christ is our justification and that we become partakers of it through union with Christ. Melanchthon wrote against this. Osiander replied in a pamphlet entitled: "Refutation of Melanchthon's Unfounded, Unserviceable Reply Against my Confession." In this essay he said, among other things: "Parents would do well to consider if they allowed their sons to become doctors or magistrates at Wittenberg. For there the money would be taken from them, and if the parents then thought that their son was an excellent, well-trained man in the Holy Scriptures, who could shut the mouths of all the fanatics and heretics, behold, he would be a poor prisoner, entangled with oaths in his conscience and confused. For he had sworn to God's Word and sworn on Philippi's doctrine, had had the gag tied in his mouth that he would not speak anything final in important matters of faith, he had first discussed it with the elders who hold the Confession, and with them he must stick to his oath in the unanimity of the Confession, if the Holy Scriptures said otherwise, or he would have to be reproached for breaking his oath. He is therefore a secret ally of such a conspiracy, which looks more to men than to God's Word and is therefore not a little harmful to Christianity." ***)

***) S. Erlanger Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche. New series. Vol. I. p. 358.

Melanchthon defended himself against these accusations in a speech first printed in 1553. It states, among other things: "He (Osiander) prides himself on having retained freedom and not having tolerated these bonds. In the great licentiousness and anarchy of this time, many take pleasure in this shouting, who take unrestricted freedom to invent opinions and, like (the philosopher of doubt) Pyrrho, to cast doubt on everything <pages 24> that has been correctly handed down. But the pious and the prudent see not without great pain where this furious rebuke is headed, namely, that the younger and more righteous should not even be reminded of modesty. For wild, impudent men, puffed up with admiration of themselves, cannot be held in check either by such promises or by other restraints. - But first I will speak of the originators of

our habit and of the intention behind it. This vow was not only recently devised by us, but was introduced by this college about 20 years ago, namely by Luther, Jonas and the pastor of this congregation, Dr. Pomeranus [Bugenhagen]. Osiander does great dishonor to these sincere men when he sows the suspicion that they wanted to set up a tyranny, since it is now clear that they had the most honorable cause for their plan. At that time, too, many enthusiastic people roamed about, who soon afterward spread new follies, Anabaptists, Servet, Campanus, Stenkfeld, etc. And there is no lack of such pests at any time. Therefore, as much as human diligence could prevent it, this senate wanted to remind good ingenia of modesty and show them the barriers that were not easy to break through; it also wanted to restrain the restless minds as much as it could. This was also the custom of the old church, in which no tyrants ruled and the sources of doctrine were still pure. Subscription was required in godly synods. In the Nicene Synod, not only the bishops, but also Emperor Constantine, signed the decrees of the same synod with their own hand. Also, no one was admitted to the ministry of the Gospel without prior examination and explicit confession, in which those called to teach declared that they were devoted to the unadulterated teaching of the Gospel and promised not to throw it away." *)

---

*) "Gloriatur, se libertatem retinuisse nec admississe haec vincula. Hi clamores in tanta licentia et α^αρχ'.α hujus temporis plausibiles sunt apud multos, qui infinitam licentiam sibi sumunt, fingendi opiniones et Pyrrhonio more labefactandi omnia recte tradita. Sed pii et prudentes non sine magno dolore vident, quid moliatur haec furiosa reprehensio, videlicet, ut ne admoneantur quidem juniores et saniores de modestia. Nam homines feri, petulantes, inflati admiratione sui, τετοσω/ζ/νο', nec his promissionibus, nec aliis vinculis coerceri possunt.-Primum autcrn de autoribus nostrae consuetudinis et de eorum consilio dicam. Non recens a nobis excogitata est haec promissio, sed instituta ab hoc collegio ante annos fere viginti, videlicet a Luthero, Jona, et pastore hujus ecclesiae Dr. Pomerano. Hos integerrimos viros magna injuria adficit Osiander, cum serit suspicionem, quod voluerint tyrannidem constituere, cum honestissima causa consilii in conspectu sit. Et tunc vagabantur multi fanatici homines, qui subinde nova deliramenta spargebant, Anabaptistae, Servetus, Campanus, Stenkfeldius et alii. Et non desunt tales furiae ullo tempore. Quantum igitur humana diligentia cavere potuit, voluit hic senatus bona ingenia de modestia commonefacere, et metas ostendere, extra quas non temere erumpendum esset, voluit et frenare, quantum posset, minus quietos. Hic mos fuit et ecclesiae veteris, in qua nondum tyranni dominabantur et adhuc fontes doctrinae puri erant. Petebatur subscriptio in Synodis piis. In Nicena Synodo non episcopi tantum, sed etiam Constantinus imperator sua manu decretis ejus Synodi subscripsit. Nec ad ministerium evangelii admittebantur ulli, nisi praecessisent δογ.*ιμαβία* seu examen et expressa professio, in qua vocati ad docendum adfirmabant, se amplecti incorruptam evangelii doctrinam, et promittebant, se eam non abjecturos esse," (Corp. Reform. Vol. XII, p. 7.)

The more danger of falsification of the pure Lutheran doctrine arose in the following period, the more precisely and definitely the formula of the signature under the symbols was formulated. <Page 25> It was only with the emergence of Pietism within the Lutheran Church that people

began to work here and there towards making the formula of the subscription conditional. Although [Philipp] Spener's declarations already contain the seeds of this, he is still rather cautious. He writes: "If someone were so weak that he would not dare to join from this scruple other than with the condition *quatenus*, provided the books agree with God's Word, because even ignorantly something in the symbolic books would not be found to correspond to the divine Word, (so) hold out that one could spare his conscience, and since one could see, moreover, that there was no deceit in him, could take pleasure in it. It is reasonable, then, to hold that under this clause, if one could easily conceal a fraud, he would, since he would hold that the symbolic books are not unanimous, but erroneous, even in actual points of faith with God's Word, nevertheless sign for worldly reasons with such a condition that the connection is not thus ordinarily stipulated, but (*absolutely*) demanded and performed: *quia*, because such books (namely, as much as each one after examination understood the matter, because without this no one can go further) are according to Scripture. For if this were not done, the purpose of those who require the bond, which is to have an assurance of the faith of their subjects, would not be maintained under such a condition by those who wish to be deceitful, and it would become a mockery; in that one could fraudulently subscribe a book in this way, which he would certainly consider erroneous, if there were only something good in it. Therefore I have not bound myself under this condition, but only unconditionally." *)

---

*) S. Speners *Aufrichtige Uebereinstimmung mit der A. C.* p. 91. 92.

As little as one can agree with Spener when he wants the hypothetical formula to be preserved for the scrupulous, since such scrupulous men are incapable of rightly leading the preaching ministry and it is generally more important that the whole church does not make the priceless jewel of its orthodox confession uncertain than that it wins the service of a man stuck in erroneous beliefs: Spener's above-mentioned declaration is a fine testimony that he still trembled before the consequences which later pietists drew; until finally the Rationalists came, who with a bold hand dragged down the already undermined fortifications of the church and planted the banner of their reason and the so-called *common sense* on its ruins. If our church, now [in 1858] lying in the dust [from Pietism, Rationalism], is to rise again, and if a church is not to arise under the best of appearances, which, apart from the name Lutheran, has nothing of the Church of the Reformation, then no amount of cries of churchliness will help, no amount of exact re-establishment of old external customs and ceremonies, no amount of vesting of the ministry with special glory and power, but nothing else but an ever more lively re-appropriation of the old, orthodox church confession and unconditional re-confession of the same.

[*CTM* 18 (April **1947**), no. 4 p. 253: *That our Synod in its centennial year*

[1947] still holds high the banner of "God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure" is due to Walther's indefatigable efforts in the classroom, at pastoral conferences and Synodical conventions, and through the printed word to exalt the priceless treasure contained in our Symbolical Books. One way in which we, the heirs of God's grace, can show our gratitude is a renewed study of the Book of Concord. Editorial Committee] [Harrison reprinted this presumably to suggest that the LC-MS "still holds high the banner of 'God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure'". But even he admitted in his prefacing remarks that the omission of references to other American Lutherans in *CTM* **1947** were "an indication perhaps of where the Synod was headed already in 1947." One may note that Harrison, while speaking of the omission of "most of the critical reference to other American Lutherans", himself omitted the prominent name of Loehe in Germany, a rather glaring omission, since Walther certainly highlighted Loehe's name in this very essay, Harrison's own translation p. 16-17, original above p. 13. Now, at the end of his translation he wants to reprint their admittedly tainted translation?]

A second subject of extensive discussion was the

Private Confession.

With regard to this subject, it was noted above all that we had spoken long enough about private confession and expressed our wishes that it should take place everywhere in order to find it time to see for ourselves and to find out whether and to what extent it had been accepted, and if it had remained a mere talk, what was the reason for this? The first obstacle to holding private confession was cited as the lack of space and time in some places, as the churches were often very small and without a sacristy, so that it would not be possible to speak to individuals; in addition, some parishioners lived six or even several miles away, so that it was often just too impossible for them to come on Sundays and then again on Sundays. To this it was replied that there were enough examples of how these difficulties had been overcome in quite a few places in this country as well as in Germany, and that it was in fact a small matter to overcome them. Where this does not happen, it seems to be only because there is no righteous desire for the delicious consolation that is offered here, either because there is a lack of proper knowledge of this institution or a lack of proper seriousness. The main causes of our difficulties in the introduction of private confession are to be sought in the past. Our poor people have for the most part been terribly neglected in Germany, so that the people have not only forgotten what Lutheranism is, but they have mostly had a different doctrine. We now receive them here from the most diverse parts of Germany, and it takes some time before preachers and parishioners get to know each other to some extent. From a young age, people have been very wary of this institute as a supposedly papist one. As soon as one tries to work towards the introduction of private confession, there is often the greatest mistrust, even open aversion to the preacher, apart from the fact that some people are still unable to distinguish between the person and the office of the pastor. As long as people do not recognize the context of the whole Lutheran doctrine, there is little point in giving reasons. While at the time of the Reformation the people as a whole stood in simplicity and had a hearty trust in their pastors, we have a generation that prefers to reflect; but to recognize the advantage, the comfort and glory of private confession is truly not a matter of reason. That is why one must not rush towards the goal. Little is to be gained, indeed the blessing is completely lost, if in this way some are induced to comply, unwillingly enough, while others never follow. The general introduction of private confession is not just about the present members and their descendants. Every year we receive an influx of new members, who then have to overcome all the difficulties all over again, indeed many of them will not want to join for the sake of this cause, since even many of our old members are fearful. All we can do is <Page 27> to first make the people truly Lutheran in knowledge, attitude and feeling, and then work to ensure that the congregations expressly declare that they also agree with the Augsburg Confession on this point, so that the preacher retains his right to teach publicly and privately on this subject as well, and where the need is then first awakened in individuals to make use of private confession, they will

not be looked upon with disdain by others in any way. Once a few have been won over in this way, more will soon follow, as the dear Gospel becomes more and more widely accepted. Where the latter is not the case, and where there is no living realization that the voice of the minister of the Word is the voice of God, then the blessing of private confession is lost.

It was said that young people in particular should be encouraged to make use of private confession at their Confirmation and in later years, where there would then be a special opportunity to monitor them and expand their still weak knowledge, and where they could then gradually gain a more general acceptance. No one would object to the boys making use of private confession. To this it was replied that the purpose of private confession was not to exercise superintendence over anyone, but that it was for all poor sinners who were in fear and distress and wanted to know that they had a merciful God, and that even where the confirmands came willingly and gladly, indeed, where one had many a beautiful experience with them, one often never saw them again in the confessional. They soon lose the consciousness of being schoolchildren: they want to do it now, just like the old people. What good is it if they recommend private confession to them as more excellent and then keep away from it themselves? Surely it is best that the old should begin, and thus set a good example to the young. Everyone should reasonably know that we want to retain private confession for the sake of the inestimable consolation of private absolution. But the older a Christian becomes, the clearer it becomes to him that he is rapidly approaching his end and judgment, the more sin accumulates in his conscience and his desire for consolation; the more need he has for absolution, and that ten times over, whereas this is the case once for the young. Both the northern and the middle synods have well kept in mind that a general introduction of private confession in the congregations by any compulsion would be un-Lutheran, contrary to our purpose and highly harmful. Nevertheless, it is very important to ask why private confession is not only not generally practiced, but mostly not practiced at all, even in congregations that have been served by us for a long time, where many know the context of the doctrine and have experienced what the law and the gospel are? Admittedly, we live in a time when there is much reflection, but when sin is also particularly powerful, and the gospel is opened to our churches in its full power and its clearest understanding, especially in the articles on justification and the forgiveness of sins. Should there not now and then be a real need for poor consciences? Even though the lack of **<page 28>** private confession often makes us fear the opposite, especially in older congregations, should the need be found among many and many a poor heart desire to be so sure of having a gracious God and forgiveness of sins in Christ? Where this need is found, should we not be comforted in such a way that we can cheerfully say: "Now I know for certain that Christ died for me too!" Should we not also use the most glorious means that private confession offers us to obtain this certainty? To introduce it in order to appear as true Lutherans in the eyes of some after-Lutherans is an abomination that we despise and curse; But the fact that there is so little desire for it is a circumstance

that must fill us with astonishment and pain in the judgment of our congregations, since it is a sign that the sense of sin and the need for salvation must still be very much lacking in them, for where this is not the case, the pastors would already be urged and forced to hear confession and to grant private absolution. Or should perhaps the main blame lie with the pastors themselves? Have we not properly or sufficiently explained the nature of private confession? If not, then we should show every diligence to make it clear to people that our forgiveness is indeed God's forgiveness, and testify to them that private confession can truly not be called an innovation, since it has existed in our Church for over 300 years, and was only abolished about 50 years ago, in times of general unbelief. What is certain is that private confession is and must remain a matter of Christian freedom. If our dear Fathers, after the Quedlinburg Colloquy, found reason enough to leave Luther's baptismal booklet out of the Book of Concord on account of exorcism, "because some congregations were still tender", we should certainly also bear in mind that this would not mean seeking souls if we wanted to consider the general introduction of private confession under present circumstances. The very fact that it is confirmed in the 11th Article of the Augsburg Confession. Confession, and according to which private absolution is not to fall, should be sufficient for a Lutheran to recognize that it is certainly not contrary to the analogy of the faith of the Lutheran Church, but is extolled by it as Christian and truly evangelical. We should not speak of it as if we did not consider those who do not come to it to be true Christians; that would of course only make people more unwilling. We should not put it on anyone's conscience, since according to our own confession it is and remains a human institution. But to put it in the right light, to praise it to the highest, and to ask God to give us a sweet heart and a sweet mouth, to lay the comfort and glory of private confession at the heart of the congregations, we should do this, and be careful that instead of exercising the caution of love in this, we do not fall into human caution, for which there is often greater danger with us than to be lacking in the other direction, because this would weaken the divine power which we are supposed to exercise over the conscience through the Gospel. If we were too cautious, it would easily arouse suspicion that we had something special in mind, for otherwise **<Page 29>** we would probably open our mouths. We must speak in such a way that everyone can see how we have a happy conscience about it, and whether all the devils and the whole of hell are raging against us again. There is no need for a special congregational resolution recognizing the legitimacy of private confession alongside general confession. This is a roof that is completely self-explanatory and cannot offend anyone, and woe betide the preacher who does not want to offer the consolation of absolution to every poor sinner who asks for it! It is impossible that we could and should allow ourselves to be forbidden an institution which our fathers, for the sake of poor consciences, did not allow themselves to be deprived of, despite the earlier abuse of it in papist auricular confession, which only too often became apparent to them as a terrible torture of conscience, so that they would rather have kept their heads. One should not say that confession or any other conversation with the pastor could be a substitute for private

confession. Everyone should ask themselves whether on such occasions they have gained the joy of saying: "Well, thank God, now you know for sure that your sins are forgiven!" as one does in the confessional. Here it becomes quite clear to the poor sinners how they cannot praise God enough that they have a man among them who has nothing else to do but to speak forgiveness to them, since this is really the office of our preachers. A troubled conscience should, if it had to, gladly run from one end of the earth to the other to recover such a man and from him the exuberant consolation.

At the conclusion of this meeting, the Synod formally declared its agreement with the principles established by the Northern and Central Districts on private confession.

In what cases can a pastor accept a call from another congregation without the consent of his previous congregation?

The Synod had the opportunity to discuss this important issue and established the following principles:

In order to recognize clearly that a call from one congregation to another is a divine one, two things are necessary: first, the conviction that the person called can serve the church more beneficially in the new field with his gifts, and second, that his former congregation will leave him in peace. Objections can be made on both points. The person called often does not recognize himself that his gifts correspond to the importance of the new calling, while other insightful and experienced people recognize this quite well, so that he must first allow himself to be determined by the testimony of these others; or else the congregation does not want to let him go. If in the latter case he is clearly convinced that he should go according to God's will, then not only malice but also lack of knowledge must be taken into account. Every Christian admits **<Page 30>** that he should not give way to the former. But even if the latter is the cause that the church does not want to let him go, he must go, because no one can let his conscience be bound by the conscience of others, and must then testify to the church: "You are mistaken, and therefore I must not follow you, however sorry I am that you believe I am doing wrong. You will see later that this is not so." But, of course, such behavior requires the utmost clarity that the second calling is obviously stronger than the first. Which is the stronger calling depends on where the need is greatest and where the gifts of those called can be best utilized to their full extent. If it is not so obvious, as is the case in the new congregation, that every Christian who can judge such things can see it, then the preacher should be careful not to go against the will of the congregation.

Shortage of teachers to supply vacant communities.

On the occasion of no less than five requests for preachers, the Synod once again found itself in the sad position of having to ignore these requests for the time being for lack of available preachers or candidates, and was thus once again vividly reminded of the profound malaise in our Synod that small neighboring congregations, which could easily come together to form a larger congregation, and could be served

by a single pastor, who would have one or more schoolteachers at his side to provide the parish schools with Christian instruction, each one prefers to appoint its own preacher, who must then also hold school and thus consume his best energies without being able to sufficiently preside over both offices: It therefore saw itself urgently prompted to consider ways and means of remedying this state of affairs, which is highly detrimental to the spiritual care of so many thousands of immortal souls who have been dearly bought with the blood of Christ, and of preventing it in the future. In conclusion, it hereby adopts the following resolutions:

(1) Pastors should take serious care when making appointments that they do not contribute to the limitation and multiplication of this grievance either by accepting an appointment from such a small congregation, which could easily be served from a neighboring congregation, or by not accepting an appointment merely because of the selfish wishes of such a congregation.

2. the honorable presidents and all those to whom such congregations turn for the supply of preachers want to keep the same consideration firmly in mind, and want to do all possible diligence to dissuade them from such an unwholesome project by thoroughly explaining the reasons against it.

3. The synodal congregations in question should consider with a fear of God that the common commandment of love makes it their unavoidable duty to put their own advantage before the common good, **<Page 31>** especially when it concerns the salvation of immortal souls; that, moreover, the advantage is only an illusory one, in that not only, as already mentioned, both offices - the parish and school office - cannot be sufficiently provided for by a single person, and yet the afflicted pastor is worn out before the time is up: but also that such congregations lose sight of the whole more and more and then inevitably become more and more narrow-minded and selfish.

4. Let both the pastors and the dear fathers of families in our synodal congregations take it seriously to heart that we are unable to respond to these petitions because still too few fathers recognize it as their sacred duty, Therefore, the pastors want to make every effort to faithfully report and admonish such fathers to the Word of God about their duty, but that they should be willing to fulfill this sacred duty in all kindness.

Pastor Löhe and the Last Unction.

A member of the Synod drew the Synod's attention to the report in the March issue of "Lehre und Wehre" [v. 4, p. 90-94] about the unction performed on a sick person by Pastor Löhe in the Deaconess Institute in Neuendettelsau.

The Synod recognized it as its duty to address this in the following resolutions.

Resolved:

1. The Synod deems it a reckless presumption that a minister of the Church who is bound to the confessions of the Church should presume on his own hand to introduce a ceremony which must give offense to the whole Church.

2. The Synod considers it outrageous when Pastor Löhe invokes Christian freedom and thus performs the ceremony in obedience to an apostolic command.
3. The Synod declares it to be a betrayal of the Lutheran Church to say that the latter had only evaded its duty to obey this command, which was supposedly not temporary but given for all time, by subterfuge.
4. The Synod declares it to be a blasphemous offense against God's Word and an antichristian denial of the Gospel to say that this ceremony is performed in obedience to a divine command, and yet at the same time to cast doubt not only on whether the Lord will grant the sick person bodily healing, but even on whether he will also grant him peace, i.e. the forgiveness of sins.
5. The Synod cherishes the confident hope that, as a result of such atrocious phenomena, the eyes of all honest Lutherans in Germany, too, may be opened to the goal to which such a Romanizing direction as that of Pastor Löhe, deeply mourned by the Synod, necessarily leads.