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A PLEA

FOR

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION,

IN ANSWER TO THE OBJECTIONS OF

THE DEFINITE PLATFORM:

An Address

TO ALL MINISTERS AND LAYMEN OF THE EVANGELICAL
CHURCH OF THE UNITED STATES.

BY

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“The truth shall make you free.”

Jesus Christ.

For the Lutheran Board of Publication.

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A P L E A

FOR

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION,

ETC.

THE Church of our Fathers in this country, has, for a period of several months, been considerably agitated by a small anonymous Pamphlet, which purports to be a recension of the Augsburg Confession, the primitive standard of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the most renowned document of her faith, and for three centuries the unexceptionable password of her adherents.

The recension, appearing under the title of "A Definite Platform," &c., acknowledges that the Augsburg Confession as a *whole* is in perfect harmony with the revealed word of God, and declares that the venerable document is by no means to be done away with in the Church, whose birth it once gloriously proclaimed before the highest powers of Church and State in the old German Empire. And yet, notwithstanding this concession is made, the recension points out a series of *doctrinal errors*, which the Augsburg Confession is said to contain. These reputed errors are so glaring, that a very large portion of the ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of this country, have long since regarded their existence in the Augs-

burg Confession as a matter of fact, not to be disputed any longer; that they have arranged their teaching and preaching in their congregations accordingly, and that they feel themselves conscientiously bound to come out before the Church and the world with this Declaration of Independence, by which the Lutheran public is informed of their absolute freedom from any pollution produced by contact with the errors of the Augsburg Confession.

We give them credit for this honest avowal of their partial apostasy from the most important Confession, the Lutheran Church, as such, has to boast of. We do this the more cheerfully because we expect that they will give us credit for our open and unequivocal free-will offering of a *Plea for the old Augsburg Confession*, and even for those parts which seem to be very unbecoming stains on the face of the old document.

We may as well mention at this point, that we shall in this short tract not speak of the objections, which, in the *Definite Platform* are set forth against some errors, contained in *some other symbolical books* of the Lutheran Church, but that we shall confine ourselves exclusively to the *errors pointed out in the Augsburg Confession*, the work of Luther and Melanchthon themselves, and the only one of our Confessions which was universally received as such by the whole Lutheran Church in all parts of the world.

Of course the accusation against the Augsburg Confession involves an exhibition of Luther and Melanchthon, those pillars of the reformation, as teaching heretical doctrines which are not in accordance with the word of God. There is scarcely anything that can claim a more serious investigation. If there is error in *such* matters with *such* men, if *they* mixed truth with error in their own confessions of faith, in whom may we have confidence? If *they*

misunderstood the Gospel in doctrinal matters, which with them were by no means of secondary consideration, who can claim our confidence and faith as a doctrinal authority? A little poison will make a whole loaf of otherwise good bread a harbinger of death. A confession, wherein a series of doctrinal errors plays such an important position, seems to be of a similar character.

We would to God Luther and Melanchthon could rise from their resting-places before our Lutheran Church, and with their own eloquence and learning, earnestness and power of spirit, plead their own cause, the cause of their God, and of his ever blessed Gospel. But in this grave question, which vitally affects the highest interests of our Lutheran Church, we may be permitted to let them speak in their own written and printed words, and we trust that a candid examination will prove, that our Reformers and their Confession, once delivered at Augsburg, have not been properly understood by those who charge them with doctrinal errors, that to another part they have been grossly misrepresented, and that in the whole, the errors are not on the side of the Augsburg Confession, but on the side of those who agitate our Lutheran Church with the introduction of a fatherless and motherless child, the *Definite Platform*. We shall endeavour to maintain in this controversy a dignified and Christian spirit, as it becomes this holy subject, and those who, differing in some points, know one Master and one service. People on earth will always differ in their opinions. The truth will gain by giving free scope to investigation, and by the illustration of the different sides of the same question.

Before entering into the doctrinal contest, we are in honesty bound to confess, that there are some features in the *Definite Platform*, which, under all circumstances, must

appear very illiberal and improper. The Synods adopting this *Platform*, are expected to make it a principle not to receive into their membership any one who would not subscribe this Definite Platform. That is to say, that a man who has the old Lutheran faith, can no longer be a Lutheran in this new Lutheran Church of the *Definite Platform*. This is taking very strong ground, particularly on the part of those who always did express a strong antipathy against all binding power of the old confessional or symbolical books of our Lutheran Church. The same men would now *unlutheranize* every one who could not or would not coincide with their views.

But this fact appears still more preposterous when we consider, that those very men who intend to change, to an extent, the doctrinal basis of the Lutheran Church, assume the position of representing the real doctrines and spirit of the Lutheran Church. The inconsistency of this behaviour will more plainly appear by a comparison. Suppose some ministers in connexion with the Episcopal Church would, by the way of investigation, come to the conclusion that the principle of Episcopacy, as laid down in the fundamental canons of the Church was wrong, that there were even some other errors connected with the Episcopal system of faith. Would it be regarded as any thing else than a most astounding presumption, for such men to dare to change the character of the church canons, and denounce some of them as errors, and at the same time to maintain, that they themselves are the true representatives of the Episcopal Church, and can unchurch the others? Or what would be the position of a man in connexion with the Baptists who, having convinced himself of the errors of the sacramental doctrine of the Baptist denomination, would, with some others, come out with aspersions of er-

rors against the confessional document of his own church, and who, at the same time, would not only intend to maintain his position in the Baptist communion, but would assume with his adherents, the position of a tribunal in "doctrinal and disciplinarian" matters in that church? That this is exactly the case with us, the sequel will clearly show.

We cannot omit at this point the remark, that those who undertake to change the *doctrinal* basis of a church, take upon themselves an awful responsibility. They know that such an act strikes at the very heart of the church, has a tendency to unsettle the views of her members, and to make her own children mistrust their own mother. Our Lutheran Church has a history of three centuries. She is the first form of the glorious Reformation, which gave new life to the whole church. From this renewed church, as from a new heart of mankind, new, and fresh, and vigorous blood flows in an uninterrupted stream through mighty arteries into the whole world. The sounds produced by those strokes, wherewith Luther, the monk and the giant, nailed his 95 *theses* against the gates of the Cathedral at Wittenberg, still reverberate through the whole church; and the mighty intellect of that man, with whom religion was life, and life religion, has shown itself in the conflict with popish perversions as powerful as in the masterly manner wherewith he, as an advocate of Christ and his atonement on earth, expounded the long-observed mysteries of the Gospel. Melancthon was called the "preceptor Germaniæ," the teacher of all Germany. Let any one examine the theological mastership which this learned and honoured, yet humble disciple of Christ, exhibited in his Apology for the Augsburg Confession—a tract, which, as a theological exposition of our Lutheran faith, is sur-

passed by none, unless by the Augsburg Confession, the work of the same mind and hand—and he will be convinced of the folly of those who presume to think, that he or his mighty coadjutor might be materially benefited by the dogmatical and exegetical instructions of the theological professors and authors of the present times.

These are the authorities, now arraigned before a court of modern theologians, who charge them with having embodied in the first and most prominent confession of our Lutheran Church, a number of errors in matters of faith and doctrine.

We do not believe in the absolute wisdom or infallibility of any man on the face of the globe. We know that Luther and Melancthon were men subject to human infirmities. We believe that they are no more than guides to the fountain of truth, to the Gospel; and whenever we find that they lead us off from the word of God, we are bound not to hesitate in our decided deviation from their views. But the fact is, that they, being the instruments for a mighty work in the hands of God, gave an impulse to a new life of the church, and this they did on no other basis than the everlasting Gospel itself. There can be no mistake that they were not only most eminently endowed for their momentous mission, but that they made the most attentive and scrupulous *study of the Gospel* the very profession of their private and public life. Their own reforming activity, the hosts of opponents they had to encounter, their own position in the church, must have prompted them to do so. They did not arrive at their conclusions in a random way. Nor was it in a precipitate manner that they laid a confession of their faith before the highest powers of the Christian world, and before the supreme bench of the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. They

felt the responsibility of having produced a schism in the one Catholic church, and they knew that on the day of judgment they had to answer for every word which they said. They fought a battle with the superstitions of centuries, and nobody, who ever knew any thing about Luther, would venture to suppose that Luther ever would have given away the breadth of a hair to please man or to soothe the embittered feeling of the mighty on earth. With him every article of faith was not merely the result of a close examination of the Gospel-text, which he would defend as a theologian, but it was a matter bearing upon the peace of his heart. The Lutheran Reformation was eminently no work of the study-room, but of the "closet:" of prayer and deep experience of the inmost man. It was no reformation merely of theology, but of religion and piety. ✓

Those who embark on an expedition against the "Errors" of the Augsburg Confession, ought to bear these things in mind, before they proclaim to the Lutheran Church the arrival of a revised and improved edition of our Confession. They may say, that most of the ministers of the American Lutheran Church do not believe in those doctrines which the Platform points out to us as errors. But of what weight is this? Shall we submit the faith of the church, the authority of Luther, Melancthon, and a whole crowd of learned and pious men of old and new times, to the views of some ministers, whatever their merits may be, whatever their number, as to a *higher* authority? Do not mention the enlightened spirit of the age. What did it prove, that the whole mass of the Israelites in the times of Moses and Aaron forgot the law and the service of the living God, and went to adore a golden calf? Yet that was at that time the climax of

wisdom, the then domineering "spirit of the age." The Lord deliver us from a time-serving spirit in matters of religion and eternal salvation. All our progress in the arts and sciences, in natural and mental philosophy, all the inventions of the age, all the combined results of all the combined researches of all the learned men of all centuries, do not contain the least particle whereby they could save an immortal soul. Nor are they as such the key to unlock the storehouse of God's spiritual treasures; neither can they afford us a deeper and clearer insight into the glorious Gospel, and into the eternal wants of our fallen race. The state of theology and religion of an age, does not at all depend upon the progress of general science and social life. An age may be backward as far as scientific attainments and social refinement are concerned, and yet have attained a high degree of gospel-knowledge. Even in an age of high mental culture, man, in matters of religion, must begin at the same point where the Reformers began. His heart, being blind and sinful, must share in the experience of those who, though backward in worldly intelligence, were enriched with the wisdom that cometh from above. The Gospel finds man always the same. Religion is a thing, that with every generation must be given anew, must take the same start in every man's heart, must operate in the same way, must use in all times the same means, must produce the same ends, must oppose the same enemies. It has nothing to do with time or locality, with nationality or age, with wisdom or power; it is the ever great question between God and every individual man, to be decided by the Gospel, the Magna Charta of the kingdom of heaven. Let the spirit of our enlightened age be whatever it will, we all know that religion is not its *forte*, that the mind of the masses is taken up with

worldly and secular affairs, that religion in our times is rather a mere ornament for respectability sake, thrown over the dress of fashion, than the force and substance of our life. How different was this in the times of the Reformation! There was an outpouring of spirit, of grace, of knowledge, of light and power. The impulse given at that time, is attested by the history of the world. What can be compared to it in the age in which we live? There could not be found a more unsuitable time to undertake a change of church confession than this, our age, the age of materialism, rationalism, and infidelity—of a conflict of views on all the principles bearing upon social and private, ecclesiastical and political life, where no man is to be found who may be said to bear the true stamp of a reformer. Let the spirit of Luther rise before you. He was "every inch a reformer;" his thoughts, the broken spell of nations; his feelings, the pulsations of the heart of a world; his words, facts and "half-battles;" and his weapons, the sword of the Spirit.

We know very well that our Lutheran Church has peculiarities of her own. So has every church. We know that some men do not understand this, and that, therefore, they are always clamorous against church confessions, and raise the cry, the Bible, the Bible, and nothing but the Bible! This would do if all Christianity were to take the first start to-day. But already to-morrow, interpretations and confessions would spring up like mushrooms on a hot-bed. The Bible is the broad, unfathomable ocean, on which all sects and churches spread their canvass, and every one of them steers for a safe port after its own predilections. Every denomination has an individual life, and the law of self-preservation ought to teach her, that she is throwing herself away, if she is not determined to stand by her

banners, and to defend her position. O that our Lutheran Church never had courted the vestibules of her neighbours' sanctuaries as she did! O that she might have understood the peculiar *χαρισματα*, the gifts of grace which God from heaven, has intrusted to her in her doctrines! With them, she has a life of her own; without them, she loses the privilege of an individual character. The experience of the past will teach us at what follies and eccentricities churches may arrive, which have no definite historical position, and are ashamed of their own birth-right, and have no faith in the documents witnessing their origin. They are like those nebulous clouds in the sky which have no solid nucleus, but float on an uncertain track through the universe, attracted by other celestial bodies, with whom, on their errand, they may perchance come in contact. A church must have a confession of her own, and she must stand to it unwaveringly, unless she has lost self-respect and faith in her own self. There may always be some who have their doubts. But these doubts will certainly not claim more respect than the old faith of the church. At least, those who doubt, should not change the foundations of a building which they did not lay.

There is a tendency prevailing to make the Lutheran Church large, and so extend her borders at the expense of her life-blood, her doctrine. May her children be like the sand on the sea-shore and the stars upon the firmament; may her strength ever increase and her foundation be the whole surface of the globe. But let this foundation be strong, and let us not forget that we, as the Lutheran Church, *shake our corner-stone in shaking the Augsburg Confession.* Neither name, nor flesh, nor blood, can make us true Lutherans, but the Lutheran spirit and the Lutheran doctrine.

We have no objections against an ever repeated, rigorous examination and comparison between the Augsburg Confession and the Gospel, the rock on which that corner stone of our church is laid. But we have to offer most emphatically the strongest objections against the officious manner in which some persons raise alarm throughout the church, promulgate their intention to change the Augsburg Confession, and act in such a manner, as if their views in regard to the so called errors of the Augsburg Confession were absolutely above all possibility of error.

Any one who has the least acquaintance with the history of science, knows to what change science is subject. This admits of no exception, in regard to theology. Almost without perceiving it, men may be led to views quite different from those which they formerly embraced. Think of Germany! About fifty years ago almost all the theological chairs, and even the pulpits of that country, were under the control of rank rationalists. This is the period whose theological exploits the Definite Platform unfortunately holds up to us as an authority in the sacramental doctrines. (v. p. 40.) Look at the theological and religious literature of Germany of those times. What a change has taken place in the course of twenty or thirty years! The Lord be ever praised for his blessings, and for the revival of religion, wherewith Germany has been visited! And in the same degree in which piety has been increasing, the old doctrinal standards, once treated like mere superstitious absurdities of by-gone years, have received new honours.

There is nothing stationary in life. We may often, in matters of religion, have felt the immediate power and influence of this or that doctrine, whilst other points of faith stood in the background. But other experiences or re-

newed studies of the Gospel, may at once convince us, that there were treasures laid into our hands, thus far unknown to ourselves. But in this question there is involved not so much the change of private views, as the alteration of a public document. Let us not be hasty in this matter. Perhaps we might have to change again before long. Could any man of sound mind expect beneficial results from such a want of stability in our doctrinal position? Let us pause once more and investigate a little more prayerfully and attentively, before we issue a "writ of errors" against the Augsburg Confession. Let us treat the venerable legacy of our father in the faith, gently and reverently, and let us not forget, that there is no one living now amongst us, who might, even in matters of theological and religious knowledge, sit honourably on the bench of judges against a Luther and a Melancthon.

After these preliminary remarks, called forth by the subject before us, we now proceed to examine the charges of errors, broached against the Augsburg Confession by the "Definite Platform." The space allotted to us, will not admit of as minute an examination as these subjects require. But we will endeavour to point out in the most concise manner, those principles and facts which will have a bearing upon the decision of this doctrinal controversy.

FIRST ERROR.

THE APPROVAL OF THE CEREMONIES OF THE MASS.

This is the first accusation against the Augsburg Confession. We will give it an unprejudiced examination. The charge is a very grave one. Only think of a protestant church approving of that act of popery, by which

the very substance of the perversion in doctrine and practice is brought to light. †

But the charge directed against our Lutheran Church, is a very unjust one. We will preface the refutation of it by the remark, that in those times, when our Augsburg Confession was formed, the term "Missa," "Mass," was one in general use for the eucharist.* To this term, as best known to all those, most of them Catholics, before whom the Augsburg Confession was first read, on the 25th of June, 1530, the authors of the Confession accommodated themselves.

The article in the Augsburg Confession bearing upon this question is the 24th. Before hearing what it says, we will remember that it is the third article of the second part of the whole Augsburg Confession. This second part is ushered in with the superscription, "*Articles on which there is dispute; enumeration of the ABUSES which we have abrogated.*"

We see that Art. 24th has the title, *The mass*. We see that the mass is here enumerated amongst the *abuses* on which there is dispute between Lutherans and Romanists, and that the Lutherans have abrogated the *abuses* practised in the Roman Church in connexion with the *mass*, or the Lord's Supper. So much for the present on

* Thus we read in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Art. 12: *Mass is held in our churches on every Sunday and festival, when the sacrament is administered to those who desire it, but only after they have been examined and absolved. Besides, Christian ceremonies are likewise observed in reading, singing, praying, &c.* In olden times, the celebration of the eucharist was much more frequent than now, in the church in general. We see here distinctly, that *Mass* means nothing else but the Lord's Supper. The ceremonies, reading, singing, praying, kneeling, standing, and so on, seem to be rather innocent. In later years, the term *Mass* in this sense was entirely given up by the Reformers.

the expression of the *Definite Platform* in this respect, viz., the Augsburg Confession contains the approval of the ceremonies of the Romish mass.

The Platform does not mean to say, that the Augsburg Confession does approve of the *doctrines* of the Romish Church in regard to the Lord's Supper. Certainly the difference between the two churches on this point is established beyond all doubt. But let us compare the Romish doctrine and usages, and the doctrine and usages of the Augsburg Confession in their main features regarding this question.

The Romish Church teaches, that by "transubstantiation" bread and wine are in substance changed into the body and blood of Christ. The Augsburg Confession teaches, on her part, nothing of the kind. We shall hereafter hear what her positive teaching on this point is. (v. Confession, Augsburg, Art. 10.)

The Romish Church teaches, that by the sacramental service of the priest, the sacrifice of Christ is repeated with every celebration of the mass. The Augsburg Confession expressly rejects this in the strongest terms: saying, 1. That Christ has offered himself *once* for all the sins of the world. 2. That we receive grace from God not *by works, opus operatum*, but by faith in Christ, and that the Romish Church teaches wrong by exhibiting the celebration of the mass or the Lord's Supper as a *meritorious work*. 3. That *sacraments* as such are by no means instituted to serve as a sacrifice or atonement for our sins, because the atonement is performed by Christ's death, but *as a means to awaken our faith and to comfort the hearts and consciences of men, by reminding them through this sacrament, that Christ has promised them grace and forgiveness of sins*. These are the very words of the Augsburg Confession. (Art. 24.)

Again: The Romish Church teaches, that nobody but the priest should be allowed to partake of the bread *and the cup*. This abuse had been abolished in the Lutheran Church long before the Diet of Augsburg; and the Augsburg Confession in her 22d Art., which is the very first amongst those which refute the *Romish abuses*, declares that in the Lutheran Churches, according to the plain words of Christ, the *lay-members* receive the bread *and the cup* as well as the ministers.

Again: In the Romish Church the priest may celebrate the Lord's Supper without any church members being present. This, the Augsburg Confession rejects, and maintains, that *with us* the Lord's Supper is reinstated as a *true communion*, where the ministers *and others* appear as participants. (Art. 24.)

Again: The Popish Church used to have processions and similar parades in connexion with the mass. This, too, the Lutheran Church has abolished. (v. Augsburg Confession, Art. 22.)

Article 24 sums up by saying, that "with us the Lord's Supper *remains in its proper use, as they observed it in the Church in olden times, as can be proved from St. Paul, 1 Cor. xi., and by the writings of many Church fathers.*"

Having all these facts and quotations from the Augsburg Confession before us, what shall we say to the charge of the *Definite Platform*, that the Augsburg Confession *approves* of the ceremonies of the mass? Any one reading this accusation, as it stands out in bold relief, might think that the Augsburg Confession swallows down without any hesitation or scruples, all the popish paraphernalia of the mass like the whale swallowed Jonah. But it turns out to be a misrepresentation, calculated to arouse in the

hearts of many less informed members of the Lutheran Church, misgivings against their own spiritual mother.

★ We know very well that Luther did not give to the celebration of the Lord's Supper that shape which it has at the present time in most of our Lutheran Churches and in others. But let us not forget, that Luther regarded outward forms and signs as being of secondary importance, and that he, in his times, knew the minds of his people well enough, and that he did not go with them to extremes, which might have endangered the very essence of religion in them, and eradicated truth with the error, and the useful with the useless, by at once changing every particle of forms of worship, in vogue with them from time immemorial. This has been the case with so many extremes when in the hour of excitement, sickly enthusiasm, forgetting all historical connexion with the past, planted something worse in the place of popery. Again: Luther and Melancthon maintained the principle, that no man should make laws absolutely binding in matters of religion, where the Gospel did not bind the consciences by such laws. They contended for freedom in points regarding forms of worship. Let us hear what the Augsburg Confession teaches in her 8th Article:—“*It is sufficient for the real unity of the Christian church, that the preaching is done in harmony, with, and according to the true, unaltered meaning of the Gospel, and that the sacraments are administered according to the word of God. But it is not necessary for the real unity of the church, that there are everywhere the same ceremonies instituted by men.*” This is the broad basis of our Augsburg Confession. Let us thank God for this spirit of liberty which makes our Lutheran Church a home for the spirit and not a stronghold for the letter, and which gives us freedom in religion in all matters of

forms and ceremonies, and other non-essentials. We, in our times, do not celebrate the Lord's Supper, as the Lord himself celebrated it with his disciples. With us the whole arrangement is a different one. At the time of its institution, there were no women at the table; there is no special law of Christ that they should be admitted now. But certainly we have a right, yea, a duty to admit them, and our Lord's Supper, whatever other differences in point of outward forms may take place, is nevertheless the Lord's Supper.

Luther manifested great anxiety in reference to the real beauty and the becoming manner of congregational worship. He desired the celebration of the sacrament to be a solemn act, edifying in all the parts of its administration. But he was very far from making his taste a binding law, although his taste in this respect was certainly a good one, by which many of us might be benefited.

To sum up this whole argument, we will mention that already, in 1526, Luther edited a formula under the title, "The German Mass," wherein he gave a beautiful ritual for the Lord's Supper, to be conducted in the German, and which, in its main features, is in use yet in hundreds of Lutheran Churches.

With this evidence before us, we must confess that we cannot understand how members of the Lutheran Church can prefer, against our Augsburg Confession, the odious charge of her "approval of the ceremonies of the mass," whilst the Augsburg Confession itself enumerates the mass amongst those *abuses* the Lutheran Church had abolished.

SECOND ERROR.

PRIVATE CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION.

The *Definite Platform* maintains, that the Augsburg Confession commits a gross error by making *private confession and absolution* one of the standard Lutheran principles.

In the first place, we will remark, that the accusation is quite likely to arouse a feeling, as if the Lutheran doctrine had rather a tendency to chime in with the Roman error of *auricular* confession and *priestly* absolution. No charge against the Augsburg Confession could possibly be more unjust than this one, for which there is in fact no shadow of right.

Let us remember, that the 25th Art. of the Augsburg Confession, which bears the title "*on confession,*" is one of those which treat, as we have stated above, on "*abuses abolished* in the Lutheran community."

We will now listen to what the Augsburg Confession says in Art. 25, against those Roman abuses connected with confession.

"*The ministers of our communion have not done away with confession. We retain the custom of administering the Lord's Supper to those only who have previously confessed and heard absolution. On this occasion we diligently instruct our people how comforting the word of absolution is, how highly they ought to prize it; for it is not to be regarded as the mere voice or word of a present man, but as the word of God, who is the forgiver of sin. For absolution is pronounced in the name of God,*

and according to his command. We teach most diligently of this command and power of the keys, how comforting, how necessary it is for the terrified consciences; also, that it is God's WILL that we believe in this absolution, as if we could hear the voice of God from on high, and that we should be joyful in the spirit, and be certain that through such faith we shall receive forgiveness of sins. The ministers who formerly have said a great deal about confession, did not mention a word about these necessary doctrines, but they did torment the consciences with requiring long enumerations of sins, with satisfactions, and indulgences, and pilgrimages, &c. Even many of our antagonists do confess, themselves, that this chapter, on true Christian penance, is now treated and taught a great deal more becomingly than it has been for a long time."

"Our teaching in regard to confession is, that no one is expected to mention his sins one by one, because this is impossible; (v. Ps. xix. 13, and Jer. xvii. 9.) Poor frail human nature is so deeply imbued with sin, that man is unable to see and to know all his sins, and it would avail us but little if we were to be absolved only of those sins which we are able to enumerate."

Here the Augsburg Confession introduces quotations from church fathers which fully coincide with these principles. She winds up the whole paragraph with the remarkable words of Chrysostom, that "*Confession is not a commandment of the Gospel, but instituted by the church.*" It concludes by saying, that the Lutheran communion retains confession on account of *absolution*, which is the *main point* of it, and on account of some other less important reasons.

Now let us sum up the points bearing upon the question before us. We see that our Lutheran standard has no-

thing at all to do with auricular confession, as practised in the Roman Church. There, the penitent is required (we mention one point of many,) to relate at least all his "mortal sins," (a discrimination of sins which we do not recognise) and to relate them with all their concomitants, the circumstances under which the sins were committed, the motives which prompted the will to them, the ends which were produced by them. Our Augsburg Confession rejects all this, and all the awful ballast of human laws and inventions of priestcraft, which make the confessional chair more influential than the Pope's chair at Rome.

Again: Our Lutheran Church knows of no priesthood in the sense of the word in the Roman Church. Our church maintains the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers in Christ. Already, in 1521, Luther published his celebrated tract on this subject. It is easy to understand what the consequences of this true Christian doctrine must be for the doctrine of confession. The Lutheran minister does not stand there like the embodiment of the power of hell or heaven, not like the representative of a caste endowed with the exclusive prerogative to decide on the eternal fate of poor miserable sinners.

We will here introduce the formula of *absolution* used at Wittenberg, the cradle of the Lutheran Reformation, in the year 1559. After the admonition to repentance and faith in Christ, the minister shall say: "*Therefore to all such as are here present with a penitent and believing spirit, who turn themselves to God and fear his anger at their sins, who believe that their sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ, and who earnestly resolve to die unto sin, to all such I proclaim the forgiveness of their sins according to the word of the Lord: Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them. Therefore, according*

to the command of Christ, I pronounce to you this forgiveness, that your sins are pardoned for the sake of Jesus Christ. And of this voice of the Gospel you ought to accept, and enjoy true comfort in Christ, and walk faithfully and obediently before God, having a good conscience." This is nothing but what the Bible authorizes, and has been the practice of the Lutheran Church from the beginning until the present time, even in this country.

Again: Our Augsburg Confession avowedly says, that *confession* is an institution ordered by the church, and not resting on a special dictate of the Gospel. But the Augsburg Confession, having refuted and rejected the Romish errors, has certainly a right to maintain what may be in the hands of a faithful ministry a most excellent means to bring repentance and consolation nearer to the hearts of sinners.

We all know how urgently the Gospel enjoins us to beware of an unworthy participation of the body and blood of Christ. The Church could not do better than institute a particular service, preparatory to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. There, an occasion is given to move the hearts of men, to preach to them repentance, and to warn them of a portentous responsibility. And all those who are lingering after the comfort of forgiveness of sins, can there, at the same time, hear the blessed word of pardon, pronounced according to the command of Christ.

A man who doubts whether a minister of Christ has a right to pronounce absolution in the name of Christ, must never for a moment have held up to his earnest, attentive consideration and reflection, the words of Christ: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven!" Matt. xviii. 18. It has been the view of the Lu-

theran theologians from the beginning, that these words of Christ apply to the ecclesiastical rights of the whole congregation. The connexion of the whole passage, together with other Scriptural passages, proves indisputably, that this verse finds its application, not to the Apostles only, but to the whole church, and every individual member thereof, the rights and obligations of the regular pastor remaining intact. De Wette, kurze Erklaerung der Evang. Matth. 3 Ausgabe, 1845, p. 196, 197. Rud. Stier's Reden des Herrn Jesu, 2 Ausg. 2 Theil, p. 246, sgg.

Of course, in the congregation as such, the minister is the duly appointed officer, who, in the name of Christ, will proclaim the good tidings of forgiveness to the penitent, and the awful wrath of God to the impenitent and to the hypocrite. But this does not forbid, that under certain circumstances a member of the church may confess his sins to another member, and be comforted by the cheering exhortation of his brother, who is no minister.

We may well ask now, whether the Augsburg Confession commits an *error* in maintaining private confession under all those restrictions related above. We allow a minister to hear a confession from his whole flock. Why in the name of common sense should we regard it as wrong in him to hear the confession of the individual members thereof?

Thousands of times the spell of sin might be broken if there only would be an open confession on the part of the sinner, before another brother, who could be the spiritual guide to the fountain of mercy and life.

Of course, this requires the most solid confidence on the part of the confessing brother, and the most sacred reservation on the part of the other. We would to God that all our church members had that confidence in our

ministers! What a praise this would be to those ministers; it would speak volumes for them!

But alas! the state of things is deplorable enough. Under the influence of a revival-excitement, scenes have often been witnessed bordering very near upon, not private, but auricular confession. There is a testimony even in this in favour of the Augsburg Confession.

Let us not proclaim *error* where the question is not to be settled by a mere chiming in with a popular prejudice. Our Augsburg Confession contains, also, in this point, a doctrine which may expect a very close and scrupulous examination before being held up by her own confessors to contempt on account of supposed "error."

THIRD ERROR.

DENIAL OF THE DIVINE OBLIGATION OF THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

By this accusation the Augsburg Confession seems to be placed in a very bad predicament. The *Definite Platform* exposes the old, long revered Document to a just scorn to all orthodox Christendom, showing its very ungodliness in a most essential point. What good may be expected from a Church, whose first and best Confession teaches that the keeping of the Christian Sabbath is not a *divine obligation*?

We will here state that the *Definite Platform* admits of a little freedom of opinion on this subject. For, enumerating the errors in the Augsburg Confession and in

some other symbolical books of our Church, it says: "At the same time, whilst we will not admit into our Synod any one who believes in Exorcism, private Confession, and Absolution or the ceremonies of the Mass, we grant liberty in regard to the other omitted topics, and are willing, as heretofore, to admit ministers who receive them, provided they regard them as non-essential, etc." Among those *other omitted topics* is the denial of the divine obligation of the Christian Sabbath.

We will clear the way somewhat for further remarks on this subject by simply stating, that our Augsburg Confession nowhere, in any way, teaches that we should not keep the Christian Sabbath in a Christian way, or that the keeping of the Christian Sabbath rightly understood, is not a divine obligation. On the contrary, our Augsburg Confession lays down, in regard to this point, the Gospel rule that we should have order in all things, particularly in Church matters, and that we should certainly not scandalize our brethren by breaking the established order of the Church in this respect, by breaking the sacred rest of the Christian Sabbath.

It seems to us to be a duty towards the Augsburg Confession to mention, at this place, that she nowhere speaks of the Sabbath with any intention to settle the difficult question of the origin of our Christian Sunday, which superseded the Old Testament Sabbath, (Saturday.) The Augsburg Confession speaks of the Sabbath *incidentally* in Art. 28, which treats on the *Power of the Bishops*.

The *Definite Platform* reads thus, p. 27: "The Sabbath must be universally obligatory, and the abrogation of the Mosaic ritual can, at most, only repeal those ceremonial additions which that ritual made, and must leave the original Sabbath as it found it. Now whilst the

Apostles and first Christians, under the inspired guidance, for a season attended worship on the Jewish Sabbath, yet they observed the day of the Lord's resurrection, the first day of the week, as their day of special religious convocations; and this inspired example is obligatory on Christians in all ages. Still the essence of the institution consists, not in the particular day of the week, though that is now fixed, but in the religious observance of one day in seven."

We may easily see that the difference between the Augsburg Confession and the *Definite Platform* does not at all consist in the negation of a divine obligation to keep the Christian Sabbath on the part of the Augsburg Confession, and on the affirmation of such an obligation on the part of the *Definite Platform*. The Augsburg Confession striving against the abuses of the power of the Bishops, mentions bad practices of the Bishops in regard to the Sabbath and other days. She incidentally asserts that she regards every Christian as in duty bound to keep the Sabbath, and without entering, in any way, into all the details connected with this subject, she reminds the Christian reader of a well known Apostolic dictate, to beware of giving offence to another brother.

It is a well known fact that the Roman Church regards the Christian Sabbath as a *holy day* set apart for the particular service of God. Thus she regards the Christian Sabbath, whatever her teachings concerning the manner of keeping this holy day may have been. But we will remember that there was no dispute about the Jewish or divine institution of the Christian Sabbath between the Roman Church and the Reformers. The Roman Church regards everything *divine* which she holds and teaches, no matter whether Christ himself, or whether his representatives on earth, did institute those things she holds and

teaches. On this latter point there was no dispute between Rome and Wittenberg, that is to say, Luther and Melancthon had received from the older Church the doctrine and practice of the Christian Sabbath as a holy day, as a divine institution and obligation, and they had not a word to say against this view of the Sabbath. But they had a great deal to say against the abuses by virtue of which the Bishops made the Sabbath a day of sin and dishonour to God and to his Church, instead of making it a day devoted to his glory. Let us not forget that the Christian Sabbath days were those very days on which Luther raised his voice and pronounced, with an eloquence unsurpassed by any pulpit orator since three centuries, the glorious Gospel, and that he and his co-operators, particularly on *Sundays*, by preaching and teaching led the multitude of their hearers back to the chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The work of the Reformation progressed on Sundays more than on any other days. *Luther and Melancthon have reinstated the true Christian Sabbath*; they felt the divine obligation of this holy day; and for this very reason they would not permit that on this day of the Lord anything else should be given to his people than his pure, everlasting Gospel and his divine ordinances.

We trust that we have succeeded in convincing our readers that the charge of a denial of the divine institution and obligation of the Christian Sabbath, brought forth against the Augsburg Confession, is not based on a true and clear interpretation of those words in the Augsburg Confession which treat on this subject.

We may be allowed to state, that the manner in which the Sabbath was, and is kept in a large part of Europe, in the Roman and in the Protestant Church, is not suited to the holy purposes of the day. The Augsburg Confession

is no book of morals for the Christian, no illustration of all his duties. She prevents no Lutheran from keeping the Sabbath as strictly as possible. But she would oppose the idea that the keeping of the Sabbath as such, is a meritorious work in the sight of God. The Sabbath is not the aim, but a means to promote edification, a means to accomplish the ultimate end of a Christian life, increase in godliness. The Sabbath will be subservient to this, not merely by our refraining from worldly employment as such, but by our spiritual intercourse with God and with his revealed word, and by every thing that will have a tendency to improve in us the knowledge of divine things, and the love of God and our fellow-men. Certainly the Augsburg Confession will fully approve of all this. And what more can be required?

Remembering all the abuses practised by the Romish priests and bishops in regard to the keeping of the Sabbath and festivals, we will not wonder that the Augsburg Confession contends for evangelical freedom in this point. She opposes the abuses, not the proper and useful observance of the day. The Romish Church laid intolerable burdens upon men's consciences in regard to innumerable usages, customary in those times. All this she did under the pretext of being the divinely appointed and inspired guide of the world. Whatever she ordered was to be regarded as divinely instituted. Against her doctrine, that certain duties imposed by her upon Christians in regard to the Sabbath, would be the very thing pleasing to God, and that by fulfilling them we would certainly have the gates of heaven opened to us, against this erroneous teaching the Augsburg Confession contends in defending the conscience and freedom of a Christian in regard to the Sabbath. On this account, and on no other, she intro-

duces those remarkable words of St. Paul: "Let no man 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. ii. 16, 17.

We may well ask whether the Apostle would have written these words if he had entertained the view that the Sabbath in the New Testament is in the same degree and manner binding upon us in which the Sabbath in the Old Testament has been to the Jews. No Christian regards the Jewish festivals of Pascha, etc., binding upon him. Still they are ordered with the same emphasis and had to be kept as strictly as Sabbaths, 2 Thes. v. 11, 16. We may also remind our readers of that well known passage in the Acts, ch. xv. Some Christians who formerly had belonged to the sect of the Pharisees required from Christians who formerly had been Gentiles a strict observance of all the enjoinders of the Mosaic Law. But their propositions did not meet with the approval of the convention of the apostles and members of the church. Amongst those restrictions, laid upon the Gentile Christians, the Sabbath is not even mentioned, v. 28, 29.

It is an indisputable fact that the primitive Christians did not keep the Christian Sabbath in as strict a way as the Jewish Sabbath had been kept. They at first met daily for social edification, Acts ii. 46; xix. 9. By and by Sunday was distinguished from the other days as the day of the resurrection of Christ. The Christians converted from Judaism, and their descendants, seem to have kept the Sabbath *and the Sunday* as holy days.

That the celebration of our Christian Sabbath is of Apostolic origin we do not deny. But that they gave particular instruction that the Christian Sabbath had

taken the place of the Old Testament Sabbath, this is nowhere stated.

The *Definite Platform* calls their example of observing the day of the Lord's resurrection an *inspired* one. This seems to involve a principle against which we must guard ourselves. The Apostles were certainly inspired in their *writings*, which we have yet in the New Testament. Even in them they sometimes make a distinction between the Lord's dictates and between their own opinions. But that their *example* should be called *inspired* includes the principle that they were inspired, *not liable to errors also in their actions*. This is not warranted by the Scriptures. The example which Peter gave (Gal. ii. 12, 13,) when he *dissembled* was certainly not an *inspired* one. We say this merely with regard to the principle which is involved in this matter. We have not the least doubt that the Apostles did the will of God in celebrating the day of Christ's resurrection as a holy day. This the Augsburg Confession, on her part, does by no means deny. The *Definite Platform* bases the divine obligation of the Christian Sabbath on the example of the Apostles. The Augsburg Confession teaches that it is an ordinance made by the Church.

The *Definite Platform* does not mention a particular dictate of the Lord Jesus Christ in this respect, because there is no such dictate extant. Consequently the ordinance was instituted by the Church after Christ.

It is easy to see that the difference between the Augsburg Confession and the *Definite Platform* is, by no means, as great as it at first might appear. And both are unanimous in their declaration against all abuses which will have a tendency to impede the holiness of the Lord's day. Both are harmonious also in this point, that the "essence

of the Old Testament institution consists, not in the particular day of the week, though that is now fixed, but in the religious observance of one day in seven." *Definite Platform*, p. 28.

Whatever theological or exegetical arguments may be brought forward to prove that all the rules of the Old Testament Sabbath apply to the Christian Sabbath, they rest on no special, clear, unequivocal dictate of Christ himself. This the Reformers have felt, and on this account they are guarded in their expressions regarding the divine institution of our Christian Sabbath. The more stress we lay upon our divine obligation to keep all the rules, restrictions, observances, &c., connected in the Mosaic Law with the Sabbath ordinance, the more we shall subject ourselves to the remark that the Christian change of the day, the Christian keeping of the Sunday instead of the divinely and expressly appointed seventh day, is not quite in accordance with that rigorous strictness, which in regard to all the other points of the Sabbath Law, is enjoined upon us.

We may as well state here that all those passages in the New Testament which speak of the Christian Sabbath (Sunday,) are not sufficient to give us a thoroughly satisfactory information about the manner and strictness with which the primitive Christians kept their Sabbath, the day of the resurrection of Christ. It is certain that it was with them a day of religious convocation, of prayer, of reading the gospel, and hearing the word, and of benevolence, 1 Cor. xvi. 2, Acts xx. 7. But these things together with the celebration of the Lord's supper were, as we have already remarked, even of a daily use with the first Christians, Acts ii. 46. The expression "Lord's Day," in Rev. i. 10, is of a doubtful interpretation.

Most probably it means, in the connexion in which it stands (v. 7, etc.,) the day of judgment.

There can be no difficulty in perfectly understanding the position the Augsburg Confession has taken in this question.

We have already mentioned that it was one of the greatest and grossest abuses of Popery to appoint Holy days and Festivals almost without number. In the same manner the Sabbath was often abused, being appointed as a day for a pilgrimage or for the performance of similar pious usages and ceremonies to obtain the blessing of forgiveness of sins.

The miserable and perverted doctrine that obedience to such ecclesiastical ordinances was a meritorious work was one of the thousand means employed in those times to keep the people in bondage and so torment the conscience. It was at the same time quite calculated to destroy the last particle of *faith* in Christ and in his atonement. Against this great and ruinous error that same article comes out in the strongest terms, censuring all the superstition connected with the adoration of saints, with fasting, with refraining from certain meals, and with similar laws and traditions. The Augsburg Confession says, that "innumerable human dictates" of this sort had sprung up by the authority of the ecclesiastic powers, which were by no means entitled to order any such thing, in direct opposition to the word of God.

We would call upon all our readers to examine that 28th Article of the Augsburg Confession for themselves. It sets forth with surprising force the two vital principles of the Protestant Church; first, the absolute authority of the Gospel in matters of faith; and secondly, salvation by the free grace of God in Christ through faith alone. Confession, Art. 4, 6, 20.

It is a masterly illustration of the perversion of religion in the Popish Church brought about by the abuses of ecclesiastical power, and, at the same time, it is a most beautiful exposition of the teachings of the Bible in regard to the ecclesiastical office and to its holy duties. The Augsburg Confession, notwithstanding her definite assertion that the Christian Sabbath (Sunday) rests on no special dictate of the word of God, maintains that by necessity and by right the Church instituted our Christian Sabbath, and that we ought to keep it. But, at the same time, she holds to the great principle that neither the keeping of any day nor any other good work as such is the means of salvation.

We may conclude this chapter with the remark that, also in this case, the Augsburg Confession stands on pure and solid gospel ground, and that no individual, who will rightly consider the whole complex of thoughts and sentences in that article, will charge her with *error*. We may well introduce here a quotation she contains in this very article, *We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth*, 2 Cor. xiii. 8.

FOURTH AND FIFTH ERRORS.

BAPTISMAL REGENERATION AND THE REAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE LORD'S SUPPER.

WE may introduce these two subjects at the same time, and with some general remarks on the nature of the Sacraments. We will, at this place, state that it is not our intention to enter, in this short essay, into all the details

of exegetical and dogmatical questions connected with the whole doctrine on the Sacraments, and profoundly and scrupulously expounded in so many theological treatises of former and later date. Our intention is simply to throw out some hints calculated to prove that the framers of the Augsburg Confession entered upon the preparation of this important document with the utmost caution and consideration, and adopted the doctrines as therein set forth, by no means upon trifling or superficial grounds, but after the most careful and diligent study of the word of truth; and that, therefore, every Lutheran should reflect very seriously before he prefers against this our Mother symbol so grave a charge as that of *error*.

The Definite Platform asserts that the whole sacramental doctrine of the Augsburg Confession is perverted, not in regard of the number of Sacraments, in antithesis to the number of Sacraments in the Roman Church, but in regard of the importance which the Augsburg Confession ascribes to the two sacraments.

Here the Augsburg Confession and the Definite Platform are indeed very far apart. We may state that the great difference between the two appears very prominently at first sight. The Lutheran doctrine maintains that the sacraments have an *intrinsic value*. The *Definite Platform* seems to regard them as mere signs which may have a tendency to promote piety. The Lutheran Church always regarded her teachings on this question as the Shibboleth of the Lutheran Church, as her peculiar signature. The Definite Platform regards this very point for which the true adherents of the Lutheran Church, from Luther down to the present day, have fought with the weapons of the word of God as the blemish of the Lutheran doctrine. The Augsburg Confession, ascribing

the highest value to the sacraments, treats the sacramental doctrine as one of superior consideration. The Definite Platform, ascribing less value to the sacraments, must regard this whole question as being of secondary importance.

We may well ask, what is the doctrine of the Definite Platform on the Sacraments? The answer is, that the Definite Platform regards them as mere signs, by which a man professes, that he believes in Christ, and by which his edification may be improved, provided he is in the right state of a pious mind.

What is the Lutheran doctrine? She teaches that God makes, by his almighty power, the two sacraments, his own institutions on earth, means to convey grace to those who are brought in contact with his kingdom on earth; he is able, in his wonderful wisdom and power, to do great things by seemingly small means, and he is in his ways not at all bound to our capacity of understanding, but we are bound to believe in his word without doubt and without skeptical criticism. He is able to accomplish by the Holy Baptism, performed in the mysterious name of the ever-adored Trinity, a work of regeneration in the heart of the little child.* And Christ, the God-man, is able to

* The expression used in the Augsburg Confession, Art. 2, is, *regenerated by Baptism and the Holy Ghost*, (v. John iii. 5.) This doctrine, however, is not to be understood as if the new creation was fully completed by new generation. It is complete in as far as a live seed is complete in itself. This does, by no means, exclude subsequent development brought about by favourable internal and external influences. It is the clear doctrine of the Gospel that regeneration is brought about by holy Baptism, St. John iii. 5; Rom. vi. 3, 4; Gal. iii. 26, 27; Eph. v. 25, sgg; Tit. iii. 5; 1 St. Pet. iii. 21. Those passages of the New Testament where it seems that the Holy Ghost was given before or after Baptism are the very proof for our doctrine. In addition to the *extraordinary* gifts of the Spirit, (Acts x. 47; viii. 15-17,) Baptism was re-

make us poor earthly creatures partakers of his celestial nature (2 Pet. i. 4,) in the most solemn rite of his Church, which is, therefore, communion between Christ and man in the fullest manner possible on earth.

The Lutheran Church certainly regards the sacraments as mysteries. As such the primitive Church regarded them. She had, so to speak, in the whole a deeper feeling that the Church on earth is a *supernatural structure*, a world from on high in the midst of this world below, than we have. We may not be inclined to deny this view of the Church, still we draw the demarkation line for the exclusion of the supernatural influence rather in an optional way.

We are at every point of the surface of the Church territory surrounded by supernatural mysteries. A supernatural mystery is the Holy Trinity, three persons in one God, the incarnation of God, the dwelling of Almighty God in the "form of a servant," the communion of a divine nature with man's nature in one person, the miraculous generation, the whole life and death of this person, and his resurrection and reappearance in the shape of man, the regeneration of man, which is a new life planted in a soul already living and united with it, though entirely changing it, yea, a dwelling of God himself in man; all these things and a thousand others are *undeniable mysteries*. Still no true Christian denies them. He will stand by them because they stand by the Bible. Should

garded as necessary. But the Gospel and the Augsburg Confession nowhere teach that *faith in Christ* is unnecessary on the part of a baptized individual, or that we do not want a daily renewal of the baptismal covenant by repentance and prayer. The life seed may lay apparently dead for a long time until at last the blessed time of a "*revival*" will come.

there be no Bible ground at all for regarding the sacramental institutions of Christ as divine, supernatural mysteries, which certainly means something more than mere signs? *Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it*, Isa. lxxv. 8.

Those who oppose the doctrine of an intrinsic value of the sacraments, must necessarily regard them as mere signs, or as certain forms and ceremonies, whose performance is obligatory upon Christians, because therewith we publicly profess our faith in Christ, and strengthen by our own action, our communion with him. The *Definite Platform* says: (p. 38.) "The design of the Holy Supper is to show forth the Lord's death, to profess the name of the Redeemer before the world, to confirm the previous faith of the communicant, to bring him into closest communion with his blessed Saviour, and to secure his special spiritual blessings." It is easy to see, that all these benefits may as well be derived from any other religious exercise. But why does the *Definite Platform* finish that sentence with the words, "*but not to bestow forgiveness for sins upon the unregenerate?*" Does the Augsburg Confession in any way teach any such doctrine? Or does any exposition of our Lutheran faith?

By regarding the sacraments as merely symbolical and representative acts which may have a tendency to improve the communion between Christ and the believer, the religion of the New Testament is apparently placed on the same standing with the Old Testament covenant. In the Old Testament we find ceremonies, forms and types, which foreshadow the things which were to come. But with Christ the types were abolished. With him, every thing is a *reality*; he did not come to establish any thing that should not, in itself, be an *essential*. In this, we see one of the great excellencies, by which the glory of the new habita-

tion of God on earth, the New Testament, surpasses that of the temporary tabernacle of the Old.

To us it seems very improbable, that Christ should ever have instituted his two sacraments as mere forms. We may even say, that Christ might have chosen something more original, if he intended to make his disciples known by these signs of profession. For the sign of Baptism was used before Christ by John the Baptist; and even the Lord's Supper seems to stand in some external relation to a certain usage, sacred to the Jewish families of old. We are far from saying, that the sacraments are no signs. The Augsburg Confession itself calls them *signs by which we may externally know the Christian*. (Art. 13.) But at the same time, the Augsburg Confession ascribes to the sacraments a higher value by virtue of the institution of Christ. We know, that John the Baptist preached baptism and repentance. Should the baptism ordered by Christ, and administered in *the name of the Holy Trinity*, possess no greater efficacy?

We, for our part, should certainly not only lay no stress at all upon Infant Baptism; but we would protest against it, if we could convince ourselves that the dedicatory sacrament was a mere sign. For we are fully persuaded, that the professional act would be a great deal more edifying, being performed on an older person than a child. The child would not lose in the least by not being baptized; i. e., by not going through a mere, and as far as the child is concerned, unintelligible ceremony, for it might be under Christian influence, and the professional act, performed in later years, would, without doubt, be much more impressive.

Of course, the main stress in the decision of the whole sacramental question must be laid on the *words of Christ*,

touching the sacraments. We need not repeat them here. To say the least, the Lutheran doctrine is exegetically well founded upon them. It is a strange thing, that those same men who so decidedly speak of our Christian Sabbath as a "*divine institution,*" for which they have no word of Christ, seem so anxious to interpret in the most shallow manner the very words of Christ, wherewith he instituted his sacraments. We cannot suppose our Saviour saying one thing, whilst meaning another. Thus, for instance, in saying, I am the way, the vine, the door, he does not mean to say, I *represent* the way, &c. He *is* these things personally and really. So, also, when he says to his disciples, *this is my body, this is my blood.* So much for the *figurative* interpretation of Christ's words upon which the *Definite Platform* lays so much stress. Our understanding of them may be "*contradicted by the clear and indisputable testimony of our senses.*" (*Definite Platform, p. 39.*) The same might be said in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, which the authors of the *Definite Platform* do maintain.

The words of the Apostles on the same topic, by no means favour the merely symbolical view of the sacraments. It is a well known fact, that even Calvin, this great master in exegesis, would, just on account of the exegetical difficulties which stood in his way, not coincide with those who regarded the sacraments as mere signs, though he was in other respects more inclined in this direction.

Let this suffice on this momentous question. May we feel that the authors of the Augsburg Confession had most urgent reasons for not coming to the conclusion, that Christ's sacramental ordinances were nothing but mere signs, without any intrinsic value. We should not be willing to give up Luther's deep theological insight against the reasoning

of a Zwinglius, with whom, at least in this respect, the rationalists coincide, who have of late attacked with one stroke both God's word and Luther's doctrine. The authors of the *Definite Platform* in saying, (p. 40) that "the great mass of the whole Lutheran Church, before the year 1817, had rejected the doctrine of the real presence," know very well, that this was the very period in which the "great mass of the whole Lutheran Church" was more than at any other time, infected with rationalism, which has done unspeakable injury to theology, as well as to practical piety.

Surrendering our Lutheran ground in the sacramental doctrine, we have thrown overboard, indeed, her most peculiar feature, by which, more than by any thing else, we differ from other churches, and have an originality of our own.

It is of comparatively recent date, that such innovations and neologies have been introduced into the *American Lutheran Church*. Yet, in the times of the revered father, H. M. Mühlenberg, D. D., the candidates for the Lutheran ministry were *bound to teach according to the unaltered Augsburg Confession*, as the Rev. S. S. Schmucker, D. D., tells us in his *The American Lutheran Church*, 1851, p. 171.

It is a fact, that other denominations do not teach in this respect as we do. But why should we accommodate ourselves to their views? There is not the least doubt, that the theological authorities for the Lutheran view of the sacraments are, as far as the acuteness and scientific abilities in general are concerned, perfectly equal to those who oppose it. Certainly the last thing Lutherans ought to propose should be, to change at once the sacramental doctrine of our Augsburg Confession. The Episcopalians

maintain their episcopal views in spite of all Christendom, besides themselves: so do other denominations. They are right in doing so. It might be expected that thousands would join them, if they only would change colours in this or that respect. But it stands to reason, that their true interest is, to preserve their own original character. There is a great difference of views amongst the Episcopalians, just in regard to the sacraments, and many of the Episcopalianians are, in this respect, more inclined to the Lutheran view, than to the Zwinglian. We have not heard that, on this account, any of them propose to change their old confessions and rituals.

In bringing our remarks to a conclusion we may be allowed to state that we shall feel perfectly satisfied if our endeavour to defend the doctrinal position taken by the framers of the Augsburg Confession has, at least, proved that they were well enough supported by the Gospel in their views, that they acted considerately and carefully in all their teachings, and that the position of those who charge the Augsburg Confession with errors is by no means so strong and so well-founded as to admit of no objections. We have addressed ourselves in this short *Plea* neither to the prejudices nor to the passions of the many who either praise the relics of old at the expense of all the good the present time has, or sometimes are so perfectly carried away by the exploits of the present generation that they have not even a feeling of veneration for the greatness of those who, in former centuries, have laid the foundation as the workmen of God to build his temple on earth, and on whose shoulders we stand.

We are very far from charging the authors of the Definite Platform with this latter fault. Still, we think that they have in too rash a manner come to the conclusion

that they are right and that the Augsburg Confession is wrong, and that the time to change the confessional standard of our Church has arrived. We may indulge the hope not to have treated them unfairly or unfriendly. It will do no harm to go once more over the disputed ground, and to ponder with a prayerful and searching spirit once more over all the questions bearing upon our Church doctrine, before we would propose to proclaim publicly our partial apostacy from the faith of Luther and from the Augsburg Confession. It may seem honest but it is nevertheless unbecoming and unwise to attack our own standard which we ought rather to defend. We shall at least, by undertaking a change of our Church confession expose ourselves to the suspicion that we either regard our own views as above all doubt, and that we venture to master Luther and Melancthon, or that we are influenced by a spirit foreign to our Church, and that the views of other Churches and confessions have gained ground in our own mind against the teachings of our own Mother Church.

This latter point deserves unprejudiced consideration. We raise it not to bring vituperation upon those amongst us who are imbued with doctrinal views quite adverse to the original Lutheran doctrine. The circumstances under which our Church was built up in this country are to blame if there be anything to blame. The history of our Church, in this respect, has been very unfortunate. Soon after the organization of our Lutheran Zion on a solid basis, in the times of Rev. Father H. M. Muhlenberg, D. D., very deplorable influences combined to alienate the members of the Lutheran Church from the original and peculiar teachings of their own confession. From Germany an influx of rationalistic tendencies and views pre-

vailed, and the German theological literature of the latter part of the last and of the beginning of the present century could but destroy, not only faith in our Church doctrine, but, at the same time, and, in the same degree, the faith in the inspired word of God. Our own Church, in this country, was then without the necessary institutions for a regular education of a ministry to advance her interests and to defend her cause and her doctrines. Many of our ministers were obliged to receive their mental and theological education by the instructions given in literary institutions of other denominations. Here, of course, they could not expect to hear the cause of our German reformers and of their doctrines advocated. Perhaps we may, in reference to this, be permitted to use the phrase that, "the talk was all on one side." Certainly the consequences of this state of things were not favourable for our Church. This course of training was not suited to make our ministry feel at home in their Lutheran Confession. On the other hand we know that a great many most worthy and diligent men in our ministry were not so situated, that they could enjoy the benefits of a solid literary and theological education. The efforts of those men who exerted themselves in establishing seminaries and other institutes of learning for our Lutheran Church, and who have, by the grace of God, met with such signal success, must be kept in perpetual and grateful remembrance.

But it is easy to perceive that under those unfavourable circumstances, and labouring against such a strong outward pressure, our Lutheran home became rather uncomfortable for many of its own children, and they thought it no harm to take out a pillar at this place, to raise a partition wall at another place, to invite strangers into the

family circle, and to suit the old home to their convenience. With one word, the Lutheran Church has not been true enough to her own genius. We have done away with the peculiar doctrines, with our old forms of worship and with the old Lutheran Church usages. However well meant all this may have been, it weakened us internally, it made us lose our own individual Church character, and it exposed us to the ridicule of others who regarded the Lutheran Church rather in the light of "a dissolving view" whose atoms were to be consubstantiated with other Churches. But we trust they will be mistaken. The Lutheran Church has a mission to the world: it is a mission more of the *spirit* than of the *body*. Her doctrines are the last things of which she ought to think little.

We are sorry to see that it is just the *Augsburg Confession* which has been the object of attack on account of the presupposed *errors* contained in her. The Augsburg Confession is the mother symbol of our Church: it has always enjoyed a well merited preference amongst all the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church.

It is free from those scholastic subtleties and from that condemnatory spirit which has often exposed some of our symbolical books to rather a condemnatory treatment. The Augsburg Confession entirely abstains from all radical tendencies and breathes such a liberal spirit in all matters not regulated by an especial dictate of the gospel, that, just on this account, no book of similar character can likely be compared with her. Her history, the history of her genesis is so closely connected with the history of the whole Church and the World, that we cannot look upon this document without feelings of emotion and veneration. In defending it in its unaltered condition we cannot expose ourselves to the objection of making

human laws and traditions a substitute for the gospel, or of laying burdens upon the consciences of men against the clear will of our only master, Jesus Christ. The Augsburg Confession binds us to the gospel as to the word of God. In this very point lies her strength. Justly would other Churches charge us with a great want of propriety and pious feeling if we, even by a public act, would change the character of this Palladium not only of the Lutheran, but of the whole Protestant Evangelical Church.

Some say that the peculiar doctrines of the Lutheran church stand in the way of her greater extension, and expose us to censure from foreign quarters. Is not this the case with the Episcopalians and with others? Nothing stands in our way, but that other Churches and the world in general do not know how excellent our doctrines are, and over what a treasure of deep, solid, comforting Bible truth our Church is set to watch. The misrepresentations of the Definite Platform are, by no means, calculated to enlighten the public at large in regard to the Lutheran Church doctrine, but they may strengthen the unfounded prejudices entertained against them by many, and particularly by those lacking in theological and religious knowledge. Even many of us know more about the peculiarities of other Churches, and even practise them, than we know and practise of our own. Let us use the most stringent caution against outward influences whatever benefits they may seem to offer. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*. Not every present is a real gift. Let us study our own Church, her history, her doctrines, her character, more and better. We have every right to be proud of her, and need not at all tell the world that we are now

going to wash her, and to clean her, and to dress her up after a new fashion.*

There can be no doubt that the propositions of the *Definite Platform*, if carried out, will not give rest and peace to our Lutheran Church, but that they will produce contention and strife. Let those who raised this question reflect once more, and perhaps the Spirit of God will teach them that their beginning was not a good one, not subservient to the real wants of the Lutheran Church.

May they, and all others, into whose hands this address may fall, be deeply impressed with the conviction that our intention in thus speaking openly and candidly, has not been to wound, but to heal, not to attack, but to defend. To this sincere purpose, for which stronger hands might have been better suited, we will, with an earnest prayer for God's blessing upon our Lutheran Zion, and upon all his kingdom on earth, dedicate this "*Plea for the Augsburg Confession.*"

* It seems to us that this fault-finding with the *Augsb. Conf.* has of late become with some a sort of *mania*, and that those very men, who are now engaged in exposing those supposed *errors*, formerly entertained quite different views, for a proof of which assertion we refer the reader to the Rev. Professor S. S. Schmucker, D. D.'s article on *Confession*, in his *Popular Theology*, 1834, p. 258, where the Doctor defends the ground taken by our Reformers in this question.

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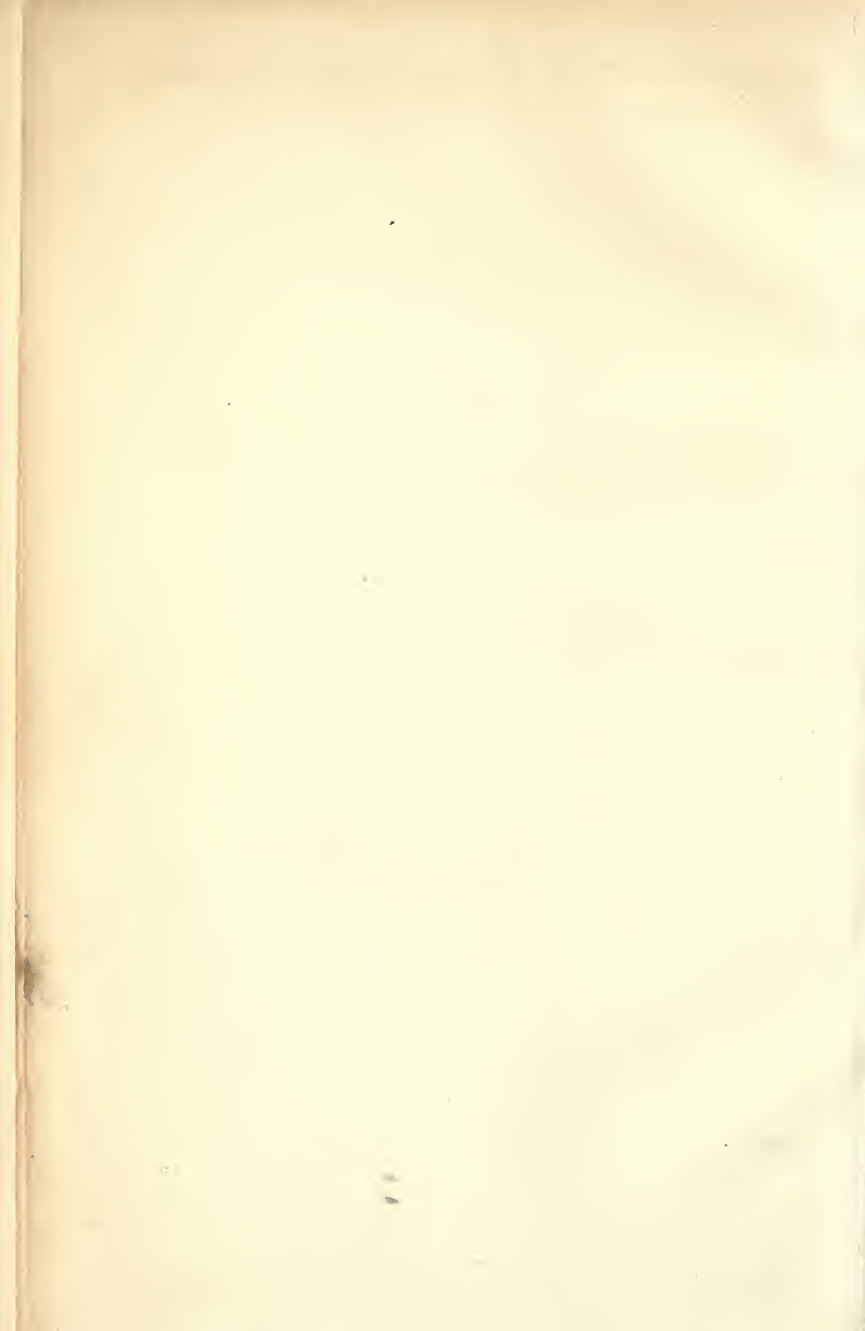
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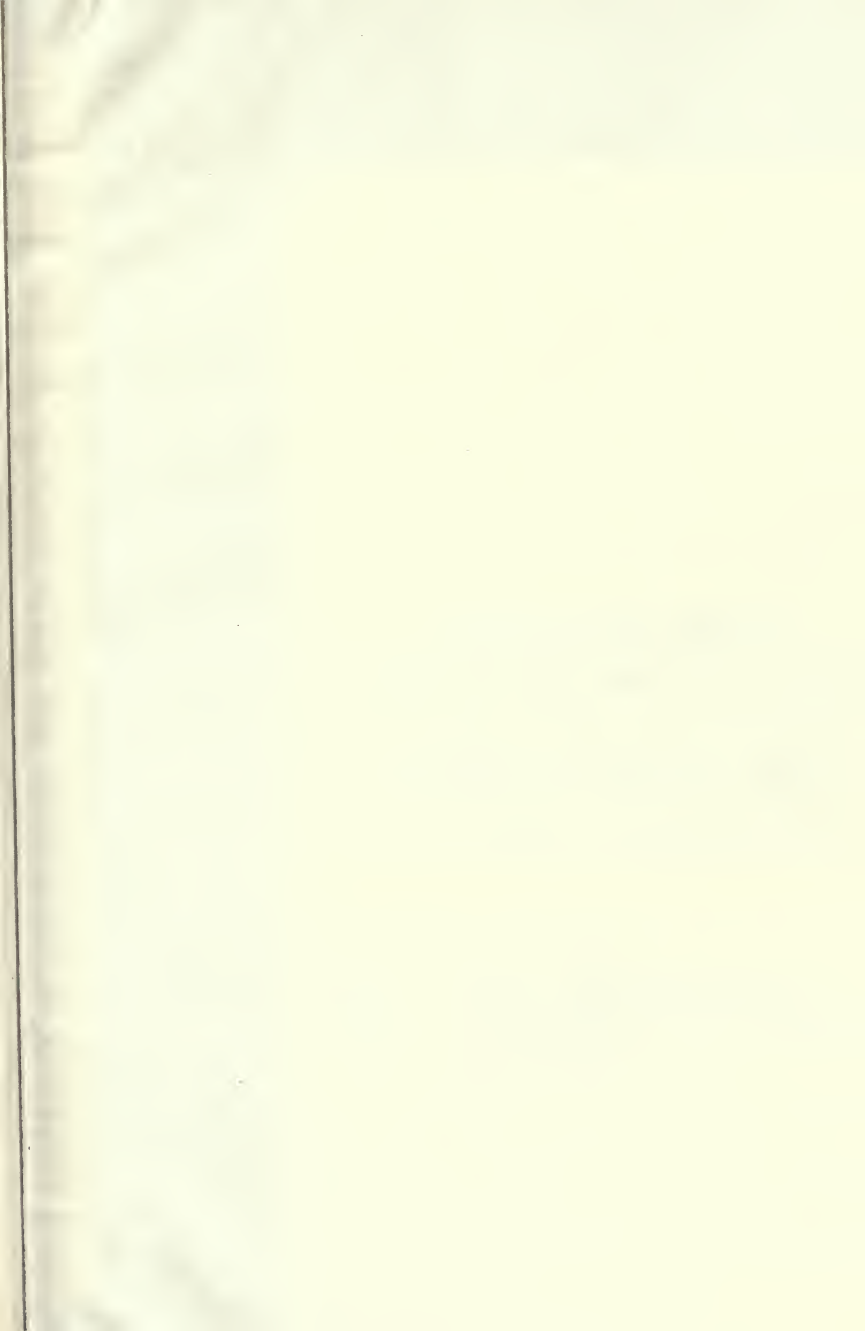
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