

The False Arguments for
the Modern Theory of Open Questions

by

Dr. C. F. W. Walther

Translated by

William Arndt and Alexander Guebert

Concordia Theological Monthly
10 (1939) Nos. 4-11:254-262, 351-357, 415-420,
507-513, 587-595, 656-666, 752-759, 827-834

Public Domain

Walther Library
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana

The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's article entitled
"Die falschen Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,"
Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)

In the foreword of the present volume of this journal we stated in which sense one may without hesitation speak of open questions. At the same time we declared that we reject the modern theory of open questions. It appears necessary, however, that we point out how untenable the arguments are which are advanced in support and justification of this theory. Those that are radical

say: "The Bible is no law codex. To deduce a teaching which must be believed from every incidental utterance of it is a mechanical use of the Bible. What is important is to penetrate into its spirit, to lay hold of its system; everything else is merely framework, unessential, unimportant." It is not necessary to refute this argumentation. It is that of the rationalist. Whoever really accepts the Holy Scriptures as God's Book and Word, that is, whoever is a Christian, will not speak thus. For the Christian the Bible is indeed "a law codex," but not only that. The Son of God Himself declared: "The Scripture cannot be broken," John 10:35. How much more should a Christian consider every word in the Scriptures as binding for himself! For him Holy Scripture is indeed "the Law of the Lord." Whoever thinks that he can find one error in Holy Scripture does not believe in Holy Scripture but in himself; for even if he accepted everything else as true, he would believe it not because Scripture says so but because it agrees with his reason or with his sentiments. Luther writes: "Dear friend, God's Word is God's Word. No one dare tinker with it. Whoever blasphemously gives the lie to God in one word and says that such blaspheming and criticizing is a little matter blasphemes God in His totality and considers *all* blaspheming of God a light matter. God is One who cannot be divided and here be praised and there be reprehended, here be honored and there despised. . . . Consider this: The circumcision of Abraham is an old, dead matter and no longer either necessary or profitable. Yet if I say that God at the time did not command it, my avowal of belief in the Gospel would not help me. That is what St. James means when he says (chap. 2:10), 'For whosoever shall keep the whole Law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.'" (Walch, XX, 965.)

Others appeal to the fact that in this life there can be no absolute unity but merely a fundamental one. They refer to the apostle's statement that in the Church many using the right Foundation build on it wood, hay, and stubble by teaching erroneous human ideas, which indeed do not stand the testing fire, but which do not rob one of eternal salvation because they do not overthrow the one true Foundation, 1 Cor. 3:10-15. (Cp. article "On the Church" in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession.) For this reason, so they assert, the old orthodox dogmaticians taught with respect to doctrines that are non-fundamental one may without jeopardy to one's salvation argue for or against their acceptance. — We reply as follows: This justification of open questions rests on a gross misunderstanding and confusion. In considering the question, What belongs to the fundamental articles which a man must know or which one may not deny? the point

at issue is not what a Christian may accept or reject in matters of faith, but rather how much of divine truth is required in order that a person may arrive at, and be preserved in, saving faith and how much of saving truth a person may be ignorant of or deny and oppose without making the existence and continuance of true, justifying, and saving faith in his heart an impossibility.

We admit that a discussion of this matter is of great importance. In the first place, since the great majority of church-bodies are polluted with many errors, it is important to know in which of them, in spite of the existence of fundamental errors, one may still find true believers and hence members of the true invisible Church. Furthermore, even in orthodox churches in which the Word of God is taught in its purity and the Sacraments are administered according to the Lord's institution, there are many that are weak in Christian understanding and still entertain erroneous views. Therefore it is highly important to know whether such members may nevertheless be regarded as possessing true faith and, in spite of their weakness in spiritual understanding, be saved or whether all such weak Christians must be classed with the lost and condemned. Now, let it be observed that Paul in 1 Cor. 3 by no means wishes to say that a Christian merely has to accept the articles that are fundamental, that everything else belongs to the category of open questions where there is liberty and that nobody should look upon a person askance or censure him when in dealing with matters of this category he either accepts or rejects what the Scriptures clearly teach. On the contrary, St. Paul and all other writers of Holy Scripture testify that a little leaven of false teaching leavens the whole lump, that no man has the liberty to add or subtract anything with respect to the Word of God, and that God looks upon him only as His child who trembleth at His Word, Is. 66:2. It is very evident, too, that our old dogmaticians, in pointing out that in respect to non-fundamental articles there may be a difference of opinion, do not wish to say that among the teachings clearly revealed in God's Word there are open questions concerning which a person may *under all circumstances* take any view at all. This is evident from the fact that among these articles they, for instance, place the following: the everlasting rejection of a number of angels, the immortality of man before the Fall, the irremissibility of the sin against the Holy Ghost, the burial of Christ, the proceeding of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, the creation of the world in six days, the visibility or invisibility of the Church and its marks. Will anybody, be his acquaintance with our fathers ever so slight, hold that they meant to say the Church might tolerate the teaching that the devil will ultimately be saved,

that man originally was subject to death, that Christ was not buried, that the sin against the Holy Ghost can be forgiven, that the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Son, that the world was created in six millennia, etc? Everybody must say that the old dogmaticians looked upon these points as belonging to the non-fundamental articles merely because ignorance as to Scripture-teaching on these matters and the resulting errors do not preclude the possibility of the existence of true, justifying faith.

For this reason Quenstedt also, having, like Hunnius, mentioned among other things the first three points enumerated above, adds: "If these matters are unknown and denied, such a course does not *by itself* inflict injury, since no cause of faith or any fundamental dogma is made invalid through such denial." (*Theol. did.-pol.* I, 352.) By introducing the restriction *by itself*, Quenstedt himself indicates that, if a Christian should come to know or be shown that those non-fundamental articles are clear Scripture-teaching and if he should nevertheless deny or oppose them, such a course would indeed bring him injury, since thereby he would overthrow not indeed the real and dogmatic [the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and of justification by grace through faith] but the organic foundation, Holy Scripture, and thus lose in his heart the essential foundation, Christ. For this reason Aegidius Hunnius confronted the Jesuits Gretser and Tanner at the colloquium of Regensburg in 1601 with the following: "The story of the incest of Judah and Thamar need not become known to all Christians; for there are innumerable believers who are not acquainted with this story; hence this account is not an article of faith, although those people that hear it read from the Bible or read it themselves must believe it as a matter of faith (*licet de fide*) and an account of the Holy Spirit Himself. . . . Indeed, he is a heretic who denies an article of faith; however, not only he but that person also who denies a historical narrative of the Holy Spirit. . . . There are minor errors which are contrary to articles that are less important, which errors the apostle compares to stubble that is burned in the fire of tribulation, in such a way, however, that the erring person himself is saved, since he clings to the foundation of salvation, the Rock, Christ. His work, of course, though built on the right foundation, suffers injury. It is something different if somebody should say contemptuously: 'For me the foundation of salvation is sufficient, and I am satisfied if I fully accept this article,' and if such a person should refuse to receive fuller instruction in the remaining doctrines. It is true that such a person would err with regard to minor articles; however, his error would not be insignificant but be connected with

contempt of the divine Word." (*Colloq. Ratisbonae*, hab. Lauingae, p. 351 sqq.)

Buddeus also, after dwelling on the articles without which the generation and preservation of true, justifying faith in the heart, and hence salvation, is not possible, finally adds: "It will be observed that we do not speak of that which must be believed because it has been revealed by God but of that which a person must believe in order to be saved; for in Holy Scripture many things are contained which we must in true faith accept since they have been revealed to us by God" (even if they do not belong to the articles of faith), "which, however, are not necessarily required for obtaining salvation. Besides, many things are required and therefore necessary if a person is to be a member of a particular Church, and still more, if one is to be a pastor in that Church, even though such matters are not at once required for salvation; and hence we do not speak of them here." (*Institut. th. dogm.* Lips., 1724, p. 41.) Here Buddeus expressly declares that in the doctrine concerning articles of faith the question is not considered what a person who has Holy Scripture and knows it and has been shown what its teachings are must on account of its authority believe. When the question is asked, Which doctrines contained in the Scriptures must be accepted? then it no longer is proper to distinguish between the various doctrines [as to their importance], a distinction which is justified when articles of *faith* are dwelt on. If a man has become convinced that a certain matter is taught in the Holy Scriptures, then his attempt to destroy or remove the smallest letter, even a tittle, of such teaching excludes [him] from the kingdom of heaven, while otherwise a person may entertain even a serious error which involves acceptance of a heresy without losing faith, grace, and salvation.

Nikolaus Hunnius, as is known, was the first one of our theologians who treated the doctrine concerning fundamental articles in a comprehensive and systematic manner. He did this in a writing entitled *Diaskepsis Theologica de Fundamentali Dissensu Doctrinae Evangelicae-Lutheranae et Calvinianae seu Reformatae*. Wittebergae, 1626. He strictly adheres to the position that the "dogmatic foundation is that part of divine doctrine which alone, when it is preached to a person, generates in him justifying and saving faith and without the teaching of which saving faith cannot be begotten" (par. 95), and he removes all those Biblical doctrines from the fundamental articles which are not inseparably connected with the creation of true faith. Hence he writes: "Whatever dogma is not necessary is not a part of the foundation of faith. No dogma is a necessary one if faith can exist without it or has ever existed without it. Such a dogma therefore is not

a part of the foundation of faith. A person may be ignorant of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, of His teaching in the Temple when He was twelve years old, and of many other historical matters; he may be ignorant of the fact that the evangelists and apostles wrote and of what they wrote; he may deny that the prophesied Antichrist has appeared or that the world in its substance will be destroyed. All this does not jeopardize eternal life, and if one is ignorant of these doctrines or denies them, saving faith can nevertheless continue. However, what belongs to the foundation not only cannot be denied, but must not be unknown, that is, faith must not be ignorant of it (*a fide abesse*)." (Par. 237.)

In a later paragraph Hunnius writes: "Whatever dogma may be unknown to a person without injury to his faith is not fundamental either in the sense of constituting the foundation or of being an essential part of it. The doctrine of the Sacraments is such a dogma. Hence the doctrine of the Sacraments is not fundamental." (Par. 311.) We adduce these statements of our Hunnius not to prove that he denies that the doctrine of the Sacraments belongs to the fundamental articles in the sense in which the later theologians regard it as such; we rather wish to prove that it is a gross misunderstanding to assume that our old theologians, in distinguishing between fundamental and non-fundamental articles, intended to say that all non-fundamental doctrines are open questions in the modern sense of the term. Hunnius himself feared that careless readers might thus misunderstand him and in advance guarded against such an interpretation of his words. Among other things he writes: "Salutary doctrine is of two kinds. The one is that which is the direct cause of faith or brings about that a man believes in God and Christ; on this doctrine is based his firm confidence of receiving forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. The other is that which indeed does not engender this confidence but nevertheless is placed by God before men either to explain faith or to teach other matters necessary for being a Christian. Whoever errs in the first kind of doctrine errs not only perilously but with respect to faith itself (*circa fidem*); he that errs in the second kind of doctrine errs perilously but not with respect to the doctrine of faith, but from the moral point of view. In the latter case the confidence which constitutes faith is not directly destroyed, that is, there is no direct rejection of the teaching through which confidence is begotten, but the wrath of God is provoked by an error in this sphere. He who denies the stories of Samson, of David, etc., or who denies that circumcision was a divine institution, etc., thereby does not detract anything from the foundation of faith or fundamental doctrine, but he nevertheless errs with peril to his salvation, because by attacking the majestic truth-

fulness of God, he offends Him through a mortal sin and thereby provokes His wrath, a course which means loss of faith and of salvation unless repentance follows. To this category belong the virgin birth of Christ and many other dogmas, whose denial does not overthrow or adulterate (*depravat*) the fundamental articles of faith but arouses the divine wrath, so that faith ceases because the Originator of faith [God] has withdrawn, although the foundation of it still stands. . . . If in the following the expression occurs: "This or that dogma may without injury to the foundation of faith remain unknown or be denied," the sense of the expression is by no means that such denial or ignorance may occur without injury to faith itself, since such a denial may destroy faith even though it does not subvert its [doctrinal] foundation." (§§ 351, 353.) To declare everything that is non-fundamental an open question even if it is clearly revealed in the Word of God is nothing less than saying that the commission of mortal sins is a matter of indifference.

But the question will be asked, Does it not happen frequently, yes, is it not the universal lot of men, that they err in *weakness*, and are we not to receive those that are weak in the faith, and must therefore not their error, caused by weakness, especially if it does not subvert the foundation, be excluded from the category of divisive errors and hence in reality be enumerated among open questions? We reply: An error due to lack of understanding or overhasty decision, hence to weakness, must indeed never be treated as a heresy and may never be looked upon as divisive of church-fellowship, be it ever so gross. Accordingly we see that in the apostolic times even those people were not excluded from the Church who owing to weakness in their understanding of divine truth even taught the fundamental error mentioned Acts 15:1: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." But although in the case of an error caused by weakness the erring brother must be tolerated, we have to say, in the first place, that the error itself must never be tolerated by the Church even if it appears insignificant and not dangerous, provided it opposes a clear word of God. Such an error hence may never be treated as an open question. Neither the Church nor its servants are masters of the Word. On the contrary, to the Church are committed for faithful administration the oracles of God, Rom. 3:2; and its ministers are at the same time ministers of the Word, Luke 1:2, who have been given the command, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of," 2 Tim. 3:14; "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost," 2 Tim. 1:14. Hence Musaeus writes: "God has committed to His Church, as to the spiritual

mother of all believing children of God, not only the chief articles of Christian truth which every simple Christian must believe and without the knowledge and acceptance of which true faith cannot be engendered or preserved, but the whole Christian doctrine pertaining to faith and life, likewise the holy Sacraments, and He expects the Church to keep these treasures pure and unadulterated, to preserve them, defend them against all seducing spirits, to use them, thereby to beget spiritual children for God and bring them up that they may grow in saving knowledge from day to day. It is thereby to strengthen the weak, to cheer those that are troubled, to comfort the timid, to arouse the wicked and the secure sinners, to bring back those that are erring, to seek the lost, and thus to perform most carefully everything that pertains to the duties of a spiritual mother toward God's true children here upon earth, and it has no authority to eliminate any part of Christian doctrine which for this purpose has been committed to it and without whose use it cannot fully perform its function for the edification of its members and the true children of God. What Paul says to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:15; 6:3 ff.; 2 Tim. 3:14; 1:13, 14) he says to the whole Christian Church, and what he demands of *bishops* in general, namely, to hold fast the faithful Word as they have been taught, that they may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers (Titus 1:9), that he demands from all godly, faithful teachers. This is the public function of the Church and of its faithful teachers, that they immovably, rigidly, and firmly adhere not only to the articles and sections of Christian doctrine which every simple Christian must know but to those also which faithful teachers and pastors need to make others wise unto salvation and which are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, as Paul says 2 Tim. 3:15 f. Of these matters it must not permit any part to be adulterated or removed." (*Bedenken vom Consensu Repetito*; cf. *Hist. Syncret.*, p. 1073.) Hence it is certain that, since all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable, the Church may not adulterate or eliminate anything contained in Holy Scripture but must earnestly hold every Biblical truth, even if it should appear insignificant, oppose every unscriptural error, should it seem ever so unimportant.

How is that? we are asked. Do you really wish to excommunicate everybody at once as a heretic who errs in nothing but a non-fundamental article, and do you intend at once to sever fellowship with an organization which is guilty of such a non-fundamental error? That we are far removed from entertaining such a thought we have stated above. What we maintain is this: On the one hand, a non-fundamental error, even if it is contrary

to the clear Word of God, must not be treated as a heresy, but in patient instruction it must be shown to be untenable, be refuted, opposed, and criticized. On the other hand, however, if a church has exhausted all means of bringing such an erring brother to the acknowledgment of the truth and his adherence to the respective error evidently is not due to insufficient intellectual understanding of Scripture-teaching, and hence through this non-fundamental error it becomes manifest that he consciously, stubbornly, and obstinately contradicts the divine Word and that accordingly through his error he subverts the organic foundation of faith [the Scriptures], then such an erring person, like all others that persevere in mortal sins, must no longer be borne with, but fraternal relations with him must be terminated. The same thing applies to a whole church-body which errs in a non-fundamental doctrine. It is very true that in this life absolute unity in faith and doctrine is not possible, and no higher unity than a fundamental one can be attained. This, however, by no means implies that in a church-body errors of a non-fundamental nature which become manifest and which contradict the clear Word of God must not be attacked and that a Church can be regarded as a true church and be treated as such if it either makes such non-fundamental errors a part of its confession and, with injury to the organic foundation, in spite of all admonition, stubbornly clings to these errors or in a unionistic fashion and in a spirit of indifference insists that a deviation from God's clear Word in such points need be of no concern to us.



The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Article "Die falschen Stuetzen
der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen",
Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)
(Continued)

Johann Gerhard, whose authority is adduced against us, is of the same well-founded opinion [that, while in this life not a higher unity than a fundamental one is possible, errors that arise in a church-body should not be treated with indifference, even if they are of a non-fundamental character]. He writes against the papists, who place unity among the marks of the Church: "It must be added that unity of faith and doctrine in the Church is not a perfect and absolute one in this life; for at times controversies occur between members of the true Church through which this holy unity is torn. We therefore have to distinguish between that absolute, perfect unity, free from every form of disharmony, which is found nowhere except in the Church Triumphant, and that fundamental unity, which consists in agreement concerning the principal articles of doctrine, while with respect to a few less important points of faith (*fidei capitibus*) or to ceremonies which are a matter of indifference or to the interpretation of some Scripture-passages controversies will arise. And this is the unity obtaining in the Church Militant; for in this Church there is never found such a definite harmony that no disagreements arise in it. 'For we know in part, and we prophesy in part,' 1 Cor. 13:9."

Having next quoted a beautiful passage from the works of Augustine, Gerhard continues thus: "Here Augustine discloses the cause of disagreements in the Church. The truly pious are not yet perfectly renewed but retain remnants of the flesh. Hence they do not arrive at an accurate and perfect knowledge of the mysteries of faith but err and waver with respect to some of them. The flesh in the regenerate still strives against the spirit, for which reason it can easily happen, especially if the temptation of the devil also enters, that, giving way to wrong, carnal ideas, they create dissensions in the Church; however, if they do not become guilty of stubbornness and if the foundation is not shaken, they are not at once cut off from the body of the Church on this account. This is proved by the examples given in Acts 11:2; Gal. 2:11; Acts 15:39. In the Corinthian church divisions had arisen, profanations of the Eucharist had crept in, there were acrimonious debates about adiaphora, some persons doubted the article of the resurrection, etc.; in spite of all this, however, Paul does not refuse to call the assembly a church, but in addressing it, he terms it still a church of God, 1 Cor. 1:2. In the church of the Galatians the article of justification had been corrupted through the adulterations of false apostles; but since the members were still open to instruction and some of them still retained the true faith, Paul still calls the Galatian congregations, churches, Gal. 1:2. This is acknowledged even by Bellarmine." Having finally adduced several instances of dissension in the ancient Church, Gerhard concludes: "Hence it is certain that a total and real absolute unity cannot be hoped for in this life. And therefore not every disagreement at once dissolves union and unity in the Church." (*Loc. de Eccles.*, § 231.) It is clear that Gerhard in this passage does not intend to call those non-fundamental teachings which are clearly revealed in the Word of God open questions; he merely wishes to show that on account of doctrinal differences which arise in such points the essential unity of the Church is not at once destroyed, and the body is thereby not at once deprived of its status as a Church, and those individual members who in such points through their false teaching "dissolve unity" must not "at once be cut off," "unless stubbornness enters in and the foundation is shaken." How little Gerhard is of the opinion that those errors on account of which real unity in a Church is not at once nullified must be regarded as open questions we see from the fact that in his enumeration he includes even fundamental errors. His position is that all erring members must be tolerated as long as they are not stubborn and, though clinging to an error, are willing to remain on the proper foundation. That also is the only thing which we maintain, namely, that the time for separating from brethren on account of an error

which doctrinally is non-fundamental has only then arrived when those who are erring stubbornly reject all instruction from the divine Word and thus become manifest as people who, though they apparently do not wish to violate the dogmatic foundation, the analogy of faith, nevertheless shake and subvert the organic foundation, Holy Scripture itself, as far as they are concerned. It is something altogether unheard of to say that everything which does not belong to the fundamental articles must be put into the category of open questions. It may well happen that a simple-minded Christian will oppose some important secondary fundamental article and nevertheless possess true saving faith in his heart, while he who knowingly, contrary to Holy Scripture and the Confessions, would deny merely that the suffering of Christ took place *under Pontius Pilate* (a historical detail which certainly does not belong to the fundamental articles) would surely not be a true believer. Through nothing does an erring person manifest more clearly that his error is of a fundamental nature than by showing that in his error he rejects the Word of God, a thing which may take place in opposing non-fundamental as well as fundamental Bible-teachings; in fact, the fashion in which he handles mere problems may bring this to light. Accordingly, to name but one author, the Wittenberg theologian Carl Gottlob Hofmann (died 1774) writes: "Non-fundamental articles" (in which class he with Baier enumerates also the so-called theological problems) "often can assume the nature of fundamental articles if the reason on account of which they are unknown or denied is something that opposes the foundation of faith. For instance, the article of the propagation of the soul is not a fundamental article whether you maintain that it occurs *per traducem* or through a new creation; but if you hold that this propagation takes place *per traducem* in order to demonstrate that spirits are material beings, then you may become guilty of a fundamental error; for according to such a view the angels and God Himself are classed among beings that are corporeal. The article pertaining to the Copernican system likewise is not a fundamental one, but it can easily happen that a person denying the movement of the sun around the earth adds as his conclusion that the writers of the Old Testament were altogether uncultured and ignorant people (*admodum rudes*). In this way the infallibility of the holy writers and thereby the teaching of the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture are attacked." (*Theol. Thet. Praecogn.*, c. 11., § 26, p. 112.)

We are far removed from the position which severs fraternal relations with an individual and stops having church-fellowship with a church-body if in their understanding of Bible-teaching they are not dogmatically correct. We by no means consider such

correctness a condition of fellowship. If that were our position, we should have to contend against ourselves; for while we notice incorrect views, that is, errors, in others, other people may notice such imperfections in one or the other of us. No; as soon as an individual or a whole church-body manifests the attitude of willingness to submit unconditionally to the whole Word of God and not to teach anything that opposes the foundation of Christian faith, be it the real or the dogmatic or the organic foundation, we extend in every case with joy the hand of fellowship to such an individual, and we are altogether willing and ready to cultivate church-fellowship with such an organization. This, however, is our position and practise, not because we consider any teaching clearly revealed in the Word of God an open question which one may either affirm or deny and concerning which there is liberty of opinion, but because we know that there are errors which proceed from weakness, just as there are sins that are caused by weakness, and that a Christian may intellectually err even with respect to a fundamental matter without subverting the foundation in his heart, not to mention how wrong it would be to assume that a person necessarily destroys the foundation of faith if he errs in a non-fundamental point. Nevertheless we consider it our duty to criticize, refute, oppose, contend against, and reprove whatever error becomes manifest in the teaching of those who wish to be our brethren, whether this error pertains to a fundamental or a non-fundamental teaching of the Word of God. By taking this course, we merely follow all faithful servants of God, from the prophets and apostles down to the most recent recognized faithful ministers of our Church. The result, of course, is that the Church never for a long time enjoys peace and that precisely the orthodox Church usually presents the appearance of a body torn by internal dissensions. But this, far from being an indictment of a servant of God and of the Church, is rather an indication and seal that the servant of God is faithful, and it gives the Church the assurance that it belongs to the *ecclesia militans*. For this reason Gerhard writes: "From the zealous warfare which pious and faithful teachers conduct against false doctrine one may not unjustly conclude that they are instruments of the Holy Spirit and that their teaching undoubtedly is true. It is an attribute of faithful teachers that they endeavor to purge the Church completely of all creations of Satan regardless of who the persons may be that have introduced or are introducing them. Therefore, even when very insignificant adulterations occur and they observe them, they will not for one hour close their eyes indulgently (*connivent*). When there is bright light, you see even little specks of dust; if there is darkness, the largest stumps obstructing your path are not noticed." (*Loc. Th., De Eccles., § 247.*)

Now, what is to be done if a person teaches an error which indeed is non-fundamental but opposes a clear Word of God and if he has been convicted by the clear word so that he is not able to reply? What is to be done if such an erring person stubbornly insists on maintaining his error, refuses to be instructed, and it becomes evident that he clings to his error not through weakness of intellect, but because he is unwilling to yield to the Word of God? What is to be done if he by clinging to his error does indeed not subvert the real or dogmatic but the organic foundation of faith, the authority of Holy Scripture? Are we, after he has been made conscious of his error and all admonitions have been in vain, to drop the controversy and tolerate the error? Are we to bring about peace in this manner, that we declare the point in debate an open question because it does not pertain to a fundamental article of faith? What human being, what angel, has the right to excuse us from obedience to the Word of God? Who can destroy and dissolve the Word of God even in one small tittle? Is not the only one who does that the Antichrist, the man of sin and son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God? And, we repeat, can there be a clearer proof that a body is not a true Church of God than if it will not unconditionally submit to the divine Word? Can it in this case, in true faith, hold the other teachings which it claims to accept and believe? Never! Whoever demands that a matter taught clearly in the Holy Scriptures be made an open question for him believes nothing on account of its being in the Word of God; otherwise he would believe and accept everything. Luther therefore is right when he says: "The Church, as St. Paul says, is subject and obedient to Christ, in fear and esteem. How could a person distinguish between the true Church of Christ and the church of the devil except through obedience and disobedience toward Christ, especially if disobedience, although people have become conscious of it and know it, excuses itself flagrantly and impudently and insists on being right? The holy Church, it is true, sins and stumbles or errs, as the Lord's Prayer teaches, but it does not defend or excuse its error; on the contrary, it humbly asks for forgiveness and makes amends wherever it can. Its sin then is forgiven and no longer placed to its account. If I cannot distinguish the true from the false Church through obedience, on the one hand, and stubborn disobedience, on the other, I no longer can have any opinion about the character of a Church." (Luther pertaining to his *Buch von der Winkelmesse*, 1534; XIX, 1579.)

Luther writes furthermore: "Here you see what St. Paul thinks

of a little error in doctrine which apparently is insignificant, or even seems to represent the truth. He considers it so grave and dangerous that he is justified in denouncing its sponsors as false prophets, even though they appear to be eminent people. Therefore it is not right for us to consider the leaven of false teaching a little matter. Let it be as little as it pleases; if it is not watched, it will result in the collapse of truth and salvation and in the denial of God. For if the Word is adulterated and God denied and blasphemed (a result which will necessarily follow), all hope of salvation is gone. But whether or not *we* are blasphemed, denounced, and killed is not of any moment; for He is still living who can again raise and rescue us from the curse, death, and hell. For this reason we should learn to accord great and high esteem to the majesty and glory of the Word; for it is not such a small and light matter as the false enthusiasts of our day imagine, but one single tittle of it is greater and of more weight than heaven and earth. Hence we in this instance do not concern ourselves with Christian unity or love, but we straightway express our judgment, that is, we condemn and denounce all those who even in the smallest particle adulterate and change the majesty of the Word; for 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' (Comments on Gal. 5:12, VIII, 2669 f.) A little above this passage Luther had written, "Christian doctrine does not belong to us, but to God, who has made us merely its servants and ministers; hence we cannot drop or yield the smallest tittle or letter of it." (Comments on Gal. 5:9.)

On the other hand, that a point can become divisive only after the respective error has in vain been proved from the Holy Scriptures, after all repeated admonitions have been without fruit, and after it has become evident that the erring person is inwardly convinced of his error and that he therefore consciously contends against the foundation of faith, either the real or dogmatic or merely the organic foundation, Luther states emphatically in the well-known passage: "Augustine says with respect to himself: *Errare potero, haereticus non ero*; that is, I can err, but I do not want to become a heretic. The reason is this: Heretics not only err, but they refuse to be instructed; they defend their error as right and contend against the truth which they have come to know and against their own conscience. Of such people Paul says, Titus 3:10, 11: 'A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted and sinneth,' being *autocatacritos*, that is, he deliberately and finally chooses to remain in the condemnation resulting from his error. But St. Augustine will gladly confess his error and accept instruction. Hence he cannot become a heretic even if he should err.

All other saints take the same course and willingly throw their hay, stubble, and wood into the fire in order that they may remain on the saving foundation. This very thing we also have done and are still doing." (*Concerning Councils and Churches*, A. D. 1539, XVI, 2663 f.) As long therefore as the erring person has not been convicted of subverting the organic foundation through his error, and as long as he has not become stubborn in his attitude, no error constitutes him a heretic. The same thing applies to a whole church-body. Yes, should the error pertain to less principal points clearly revealed in the Scriptures but of a non-fundamental character, then even a stubborn clinging to such points does not make a teacher a heretic but merely a schismatic, and his association does not get to be a sect, but a schismatic body. Accordingly in our Church, Flacius, who stubbornly defended the erroneous teaching that sin belongs to a man's essence, and Huber, who stubbornly taught that predestination is universal, did not become heretics but schismatics, whom orthodox churches could not admit to their pulpits, and if these men had founded church-bodies embodying the errors of their leaders in their doctrinal platform, these bodies, *caeteris paribus*, would not have been sects but schismatic associations. For this reason Quenstedt writes: "There are, furthermore, less principal articles of faith which Holy Scripture teaches us to believe but whose rejection does not necessarily involve loss of salvation. The denial of these articles does not by itself but merely through a more remote inference oppose a fundamental article of faith and destroy it. Such a denial makes a person a schismatic, for instance, the rejection of the teaching that sin does not belong to man's essence, that predestination is not universal, etc." (*Theol. Didactico-polem.*, I, 355.) Calov also, to mention one more instance, willingly admits with Gerhard that, for example, "the accusation of heresy must not be raised on account of a dissension in the question pertaining to the baptism of John, since in our time this question has nothing to do with salvation." But he at once adds: "By no means is it permitted to believe and argue for or against a matter where the Holy Spirit has given us a decision," which Calov held to be the case in this instance. (*Syst.*, I, 953.)

The following sections of this article are intended to show that the advocates of the modern theory of open questions try to support it by advancing the view that everything must belong to the category of open questions which has not been decided in the Symbolical Books or in which even recognized orthodox teachers have erred, or, finally, whatever, though contained in the Scriptures, has not been clearly revealed there.

A.

(To be continued)

The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Article Entitled "Die falschen Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,"
Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)

(Continued)

A further argument for this theory is the view that evidently for ecclesiastical unity not more is required than agreement in the teachings laid down in the public confession of the Church; that these are the only ones fixed by the Church itself; that on these only the Church has made pronouncements and decisions; and that everything else has to be considered as belonging to the category of open questions.

This view was voiced, for instance, by the pastors of the Iowa Synod when they in 1859 published the following "Declaration" in their synodical organ: "We treat the teaching pertaining to the 'last things' as an open question, that is, as a question in which there may be a difference of opinion without disturbance of church-fellowship and concerning which in the symbols of our Church no confessional decision has been laid down, *for which reason* both views may exist in the Church alongside each other."

In its synodical report of 1858 the same synod had made this declaration: "Accordingly we dare not deny that beside the teachings which are symbolically fixed there is found a sphere of theological knowledge containing open questions which have not as yet been answered by the Church and symbolically defined because the Church cannot symbolically fix anything unless it has passed through controversy and hence become a vital question for the Church" (pp. 14, 15). Asking German theologians for their opinion, the Iowa Synod stated in 1866: "Since concerning these

matters" (the questions pertaining to the ministerial office and the last things) "until now no universal agreement has come about in the Lutheran Church, we are of the opinion that these things, or at least those that are most controverted, had best be entirely eliminated from the public proclamation of the Church. . . . Briefly stated, we consider the teachings mentioned as open questions." (Quoted from Guericke's *Journal* in *L. & W.*, Vol. XIII, 363.)

Pastor Loehe, in listing the points in which there is a difference between the Saxon pastors in Missouri and Pastor Grabau, mentions as the fifth class the following: "matters which, as open questions, might be reserved for future more complete understanding." Among these matters he places the doctrine of ordination (whether or not ordination rests on divine institution) and of the relation between the ministerial office and the validity of the Sacrament, and these alleged open questions he terms something "that has come down to us as not yet fully determined," points which "rather belong to the *dubia*, the unfinished matters," "on which the Lutheran Church for three hundred years did not face the necessity of making a decision," "questions which have not yet been concluded and which the Church for three centuries has been satisfied to regard as unfinished business and almost, as it were, to ignore." (*Unsere kirchliche Lage*. By W. Loehe. Noerdlingen, 1850, pp. 91, 114, 118, 119.) In the same way Pastor Loehe writes furthermore: "I do not say *a priori* that the ministerial office is really a necessary condition for the validity and power of the Sacrament. I will leave that matter in abeyance. But because the Lutheran practise does not agree with the usual view and, at any rate for the practical minister, it is essential to have a definite theory, it seems to me that, since the confessional writings are silent on this question, the matter is still undecided although urgently requiring a decision, and I consider it best to look at it in this light." (*Ib.*, p. 117.)

A similar declaration was given by all the members of the theological faculty in Dorpat who were present at the time, Professors and Doctors Harnack, Kurtz, v. Oettingen, v. Engelhardt, and Volck, in a theological opinion on agreement in matters of doctrine, written and published at the request of the Iowa Synod. In this opinion we read among other things: "The Confessions are, as it were, the mile-stones indicating the development of the Church. . . . Accordingly our Confessions contain, in addition to those articles and doctrines of faith that have been symbolically discussed and fixed, such elements also of the universal Christian and ecclesiastical creed (we refer to the Apostolic Creed) as partly are still in the process of development, partly are not yet at all or merely by way of beginning affected by the historical evolution of doctrine, because the Church has had occasion to

express itself on them hitherto merely from one point of view or because they have not as yet become the subject of more thorough explanation and definition. In both cases, it is true, that which has been symbolically gained and fixed is presupposed as the norm and basis for further study and confessional pronouncements of the Church; however, in this period different opinions and convictions are not only unavoidable but justified and permissible. This presupposes, of course, that such matters, in the first place, are subject to the conditions which underlie the confessional activity of the Church itself, that is, that they do not contradict the Word of God and the ecclesiastical *consensus doctrinae* and that furthermore the claim be not made that they possess the dignity of publicly accepted dogmas, whose rejection would be divisive of church-fellowship. On the contrary, they must be regarded merely as what they are, Christian convictions and exegetical conclusions, which, though made conscientiously and agreeing with the analogy of faith, nevertheless have a private and individual character. Yes, even relative errors which at this stage of affairs are unavoidable can be borne by the Church without endangering its doctrinal unity. It will have to take this course, if for no other reason than that it is not yet in a position to point to the error as one condemned by the Church. . . . It is only after this exposition of the difference between a confession and confessional writings and, furthermore, the exposition of the historical nature of our Confessions, which constantly grow and develop (a characteristic on which rests the contrast, on the one hand, between fixed and developing, that is, not yet finished, dogmas in the Confessions themselves and, on the other hand, the distinction between ecclesiastical dogmas and Christian theological convictions), that we are able definitely to dispose of our question. . . . For the Church and its existenee (and that is the vital issue in the consideration of this question) at present merely that is fundamental, as we have shown, which the Church has obtained from the Scriptures as saving knowledge and has laid down in its Symbolical Books as its confession. . . . An articulate and explicit unity in those teachings that have not yet become ecclesiastical dogmas but which at the same time do not contradict the *consensus fidei* of the dogmas that have been accepted, can by no means be demanded, and the reason is simply this, that there exists as yet no acknowledged norm for their ecclesiastical status, and the question as to their agreement with Scripture is still a matter of undecided controversy. Accordingly these truths, viewed from the position of consensus in doctrine, are for the Church still open questions, left to the Christian and denominational conscience of the individual and to his investigation of Scripture-teaching. It

may be that different convictions will arise, but these may exist alongside each other without endangering the doctrinal unity in the Church. For it is dissension only in the fundamental truths taught by the Church that is incompatible with the '*consentire de doctrina*' which the Augsburg Confession terms 'indispensable for the *unitas ecclesiae*.'

"If we now survey our whole exposition, our answer to your first question must be to the effect: 1. that it not only is not contrary to the spirit and character of the Church and its strict confessional unity required for church-fellowship but altogether in keeping with it if we distinguish between fundamental doctrines, that is, in this case, doctrines that have been defined in the confessional writings, and doctrines that are *not yet* fundamental, that is, such as have up to this time become subject to a decision of the Church either only in part or not at all." Finally, in keeping with the foregoing, the faculty speaks of "justified freedom in the Church with reference to doctrinal questions that are still open." (*Opinion of the Theological Faculty of Dorpat*, etc., pp. 12-16, 31.)

In these declarations a distinction is made between those teachings which have been laid down in the Symbolical Books and those which have not been thus defined; between the teachings which have passed through controversies, have been publicly and frequently proved to be Scriptural, been shown to be of high importance for faith and life and to have an indissoluble connection with the totality of doctrine, and have been thoroughly expounded and presented in their richness and fulness, and those doctrines concerning which such statements cannot be made. We, too, admit that there is a great difference between these two classes. Without doubt errors, for instance, in the doctrine pertaining to the person of Christ after the Arian, Nestorian, and Eutychian controversies have an altogether different significance from what they had before. The same must be said of errors in the doctrine of original sin, of free will, of nature and grace, after the Pelagian controversies, of errors in the teaching of justification after the Reformation, of errors in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper after the so-called Sacramentarian controversy, and errors of a Lutheran minister pertaining to any doctrine found in the Symbolical Books after the latter had been written and accepted by our Church. To deny this difference would be equivalent to denying the blessing which God always has in store for His Church when He permits errorists to attack its treasure, Is. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:19.

We heartily subscribe to the words of Dannhauer: "Fundamental articles can, it is true, without injury to one's salvation

be both unknown and denied either before they have been revealed (for without injury to her salvation Eve did not know that the Messiah would be the Son of a virgin, for as yet the revelation pertaining to the Virgin Birth, found in Is. 7, had not been given; Nathanael is called a true Israelite even though he denied that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah) or before a clear and sufficient explanation of the revelation. For this reason the fundamental errors of the Church Fathers who were swept into not yet sufficiently unfolded (*evolutas*) controversies, before the ice was broken, are called spots or imperfections (*naevi*), not heresies. But after these matters have been revealed, they can neither remain unknown nor be denied without injury to one's salvation.* They cannot remain unknown because we owe God progress in that which is good, Matt. 25:14 ff.; Heb. 5:12; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:14. Everybody is obligated to *strive* for perfection though not to reach perfection. Hence the unbelief of a person becomes more or less excusable according to the degree of the light offered him. Unbelief which directly opposes the foundation of faith condemns a person; the degree of the punishment varies with the degree of unbelief and the latter again with the degree of the light that had been furnished. Thus the ignorance of barbarians is more excusable than that of Christians, that of the latter more than that of Lutherans; among the latter, again, the ignorance of the rank and file is more excusable than that of the men who possess golden opportunities for progress; the ignorance of laymen is more excusable than that of teachers, and among the latter the ignorance of those who have devoted themselves entirely to the study of theology is less excusable than that of the others. Nor dare these articles be denied, because whoever denies one article denies all, just as he who breaks one link in a chain breaks all." (*Christeis. Witenbergae, 1696, p. 45. s.*)

Dannhauer writes at another place: "An error which evidently opposes a fundamental article can more readily be pardoned when it has not yet been sufficiently revealed or explained than after such revelation and explanation have been given. Nathanael could err with respect to the person of Jesus of Nazareth without injury to his salvation; he could not do it, however, after the resurrection of Christ and the proclamation of the apostles through which it was made manifest to the whole world that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. According to this principle the initial error of Flacius could be regarded pardonable because in the heat of the controversy he at first did not see that by implication his

* We hold that Dannhauer is here speaking of normal situations obtaining in Christian countries, where everybody can be expected to come into some contact with the New Testament message. — A.

view made God the cause of sin. What could be pardoned in Flacius could not be pardoned in his followers. This is true likewise with respect to the inference drawn from an article and opposing faith or an article of faith if the inference has been thoroughly explained and it is of a nature which everybody can easily understand. People, as a rule, are not so dense as to let themselves be deceived where simple mathematical processes are involved. Now, whoever can handle figures can understand, and more easily at that, inferences drawn from doctrines of faith" (*Sigalion*. Argentor., 1668, p. 201 s.).

All this, as stated above, we heartily accept; but to construct on the basis of this difference the theory sponsored in the quotations submitted we have to oppose as both illogical and dangerous.

(To be continued)

A.



The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Article Entitled "Die falschen Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,"

Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)

(Continued)

[In support of our rejection of the theory sponsored in the quotations submitted, we point to the following:]

In the first place, it is not true that our dogmas come into existence gradually and that hence there are articles of faith "which are still in the process of formation, and others which as yet have either not at all or merely by way of beginning been drawn into the stream of events in which dogmas take shape." It is not true that some articles of faith have come down to us "as undecided, unfinished questions, incomplete structures, as open questions," because concerning these things one does not yet find unanimous agreement in the Lutheran Church. This theory, held and advocated with more or less emphasis by almost all modern theologians, though entirely unknown to the old orthodox theologians of our Church, we consider the *πρωτον ψευδος* of modern theology; as we view it, it is merely a daughter of Rationalism appearing in Christian dress, a sister of Romanism hiding behind a Protestant mask, and a fruitful mother of large families of heresies. With respect to the Rationalists it is well known that they were the first to describe dogmas not as the unchangeable, divine, fundamental truths of Christianity but as doctrinal opinions which had arisen in a scientific process or which had been elevated by the various denominations to the position of ecclesiastical teaching and were considered authoritative in the respective age. For this reason they strictly distinguished between doctrines of the Church and of the Bible; the former they looked upon as a presentation of beliefs of the Church which come and go and are subject to constant change, the latter as a presentation of the eternal Christian doctrine, having validity for all time, although, of course, they identified these eternal doctrines with the thin, watery soup cooked in the kitchen of their own common sense. One of the chief representatives of this crass Rationalism, Bretschneider, writes, for instance: "We must distinguish between Christian theology" (which in the mind of Bretschneider is Rationalism) "and dogmatic, a distinction based on the name itself, for *δόγμα* means *placitum*, opinion, and that correctly describes dogmatic. It represents the subjective view of individual parties or teachers. As soon as these subjective views were fixed by some public authority, public dogmatic arose, which, using the word

in the wider sense, might be called a presentation of the teachings submitted in the various confessions. This process started in the third century and was carried on through the Christian councils and the confessions, or symbols, which they sanctioned. Dogmatic was enlarged when various churches and parties arose which publicly stated their opinion concerning Christian teaching." In the following Bretschneider, however, admits that after the Reformation dogmatic was regarded in our Church as identical with Christian or Biblical theology. (*Handbuch der Dogm. der ev.-luth. K. von Bretschneider*. Reutlingen, 1823. I:24 f.) Essentially Schleiermacher did not change this rationalistic view when he began his dogmatic with these words: "Dogmatic theology is the science pertaining to the relation of the various doctrines obtaining at a certain time in a Christian denomination." He then proceeds: "Every presentation of doctrine, regardless of its comprehensiveness and perfection, in the course of time loses its original significance and retains merely a historical importance. For unnoticeable changes take place all the time wherever there is a lively exchange of thought; changes depend on various factors making for development." (*Der christl. Glaube*. Reutlingen, 1828. I:11, 12.) In calling the theory of a successive development of doctrine as taught by modern theologians a daughter of Rationalism coming in a Christian dress, we, of course, do not intend to impute to these men the view that the dogmas of the Church are nothing but temporary opinions having the sanction of church-bodies. What we wish to maintain is merely that the view prevailing at present, holding doctrines to be merely the results of historical movements, is of rationalistic origin. No proof is needed to show that Roman Catholics also teach the gradual rise of dogma; but a few years ago we beheld the spectacle of the present Pope's declaring the teaching of the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception, which before had been considered an open question, to be a dogma and now binding for all "believers," and just now, according to reports, the alleged heir of Peter's episcopal throne is preparing to enrich his Church again through a new dogma by decreeing his own infallibility. While modern Lutheran theologians are far removed from the position which would vindicate the right of the Roman Church or even the Pope to create new articles of faith, their theory that dogmas come into existence gradually, that on certain points a "unanimous consensus" arises, or that the Church has finally "pronounced" and "decided" with respect to such matters, is nothing but a sister of Romanism, having put on a Protestant mask.

There are especially two reasons why an orthodox Christian cannot adopt but must decidedly reject this theory. In the first

place, this theory opposes the clear teaching of the Word of God that the Church at all times is one, and one only. Clearly and definitely Christ says: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd," John 10:16. This *unitas ecclesiae* which all Christendom confesses in the Nicene Creed is before everything else a unity in the doctrine of faith. In this point substantially even the Church of the Old Testament is one with that of the New Testament. Peter says at the first apostolic council: "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they," Acts 15:11, and Paul testifies before Agrippa: "I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come," Acts 26:22; cf. 13:32, 33. How otherwise could Christ and the apostles have justly appealed to the Old Testament with respect to all teachings they proclaimed and have asked their hearers to examine according to this norm everything that they preached (John 5:39, 45-47; Acts 17:11) if they had set forth a new doctrine of faith not yet revealed to the Jewish Church in the writings of the Old Covenant? If we accordingly have to believe that even the Old and New Testament churches in their teachings are one, how much more is this true of the Church of the New Testament in its various periods of existence! Paul states clearly that the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets," Eph. 2:20. This foundation of the apostles and prophets, however, is nothing else than the total number of articles of faith taught by the apostles and prophets. Clear, furthermore, is the expression of the apostle in which he terms the Church the mother of all believers, Gal. 4:26. This position, however, the Church holds because it possesses, preserves, and uses that doctrine through which men are brought to the knowledge of the true saving faith and are kept in it, and because in this manner the Church constantly perpetuates itself. Referring to the faith of the Church in general, the Scriptures speak of "one faith," Eph. 4:5; they furthermore do not point to it as something which the Church would have to seek, to discover, and to acquire through a struggle, but they refer to it as the faith which was once delivered unto the saints and for which the Church would have to contend, Jude 3. While in the Word of God the true disciples of Christ, or the true members of the Church, are represented as the people that know the truth, John 8:32, it is merely the hypocrites, outwardly joined to the Church, who are described as people that are "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," 2 Tim. 3:7. The modern theory, however, which holds that dogmas are formed gradually,

makes the Church a philosophical school, whose task it is eternally to be looking for the truth, while according to the Word of God the Church is the mistress ("Hausehre") to whom the truth has been entrusted as her most precious treasure, as the good thing which has been committed unto her to keep it by the Holy Ghost, 2 Tim. 1:13, 14; 1 Tim. 6:20. Through this theory the Church is made to resemble the human being who after his birth is still unconscious, gradually, however, as the years progress, becomes conscious of his environments, gathers knowledge, and by and by arrives at the state of maturity, while according to the testimony of the apostle the Corinthian Church, for instance, was already in the apostolic age enriched "in all utterance and in all knowledge," so that the Corinthian Christians "did not come behind in any gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Cor. 1:5, 7. It is true that the Word of God prophesies, and the history of the Church confirms, that the Church does not always stand before us in the same brilliant light of pure public preaching, that it rather, to use the figure of the ancients, in this respect decreases and increases like the moon, that it experiences times of special gracious visitation and then again declines. But it is an error to say that the Church from century to century accumulates an ever-growing fund of divine teachings and according to the law of historical development arrives at constantly enhanced depths and riches of knowledge. We admit that the Church all the time, through "men that arise in its midst and who speak perverse things to draw away disciples after them," Acts 20:30, is compelled to formulate with increasing precision the pure doctrine which it possesses in order that the fraudulent errorists may be unmasked and false teachings be kept from creeping into it through ambiguous phraseology; but this does not imply that the number of its dogmas grows; they are through this activity merely safeguarded ever more carefully against the danger of becoming perverted. That Christ is *ὁμοούσιος* with the Father, that the union of the divine and human nature in Christ took place *ἀσυγγύτως, ἀτρέπως, ἀδιαιρέτως, ἀχωρίστως*, that Mary was *θεοτόκος*, that "in, with, and under" the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper Christ's body and blood are actually present, are given, and are orally received by worthy and unworthy communicants,—these are, it is true, dogmatic expressions which were not found in the orthodox Church till the days of Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, and Zwingli; but they are not new dogmas. Furthermore, we do not deny that through continued searching of the Scriptures by the Church some things are by and by cleared up which before, through imperfect acquaintance with the languages and history, had been unknown; we admit that in this manner the content of the various doctrines

of faith at times is set forth and unfolded in a higher degree than before and that from this point of view we may indeed speak of a progress in knowledge. But this by no means implies the gradual origin and increase of dogmas which modern theology teaches; we must rather say that through this course that which already is known receives new confirmation, or the Church becomes aware of certain inferences and corollaries of its dogmas which it had not noticed before. It must not be forgotten that it is by agreement with the Church of all ages in matters of doctrine, that is, by the so-called *successio doctrinalis*, that the Church of any given period must prove itself not to be a new, a false Church, but a part of the Church universal.

That our Church never entertained the idea of a gradual formation of dogmas but that this notion arose in the period of decay, hardly requires any proof. At the conclusion of the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession our Church expressly appeals not only to its agreement with Holy Scripture, but with "the Church catholic" (*ecclesia catholica*), yes, even with the old "Roman" Church "as known from its writers." Hence the authors declare [in the German version] they hold their "opponents cannot be at variance with them in these articles." How emphatically Luther stresses his agreement with the old Church and how he again and again asserts that all dogmas which he teaches are not new but that the Church of the Reformation has remained loyal to the old Church and its teachings, that contrariwise the papistic Church has defected from the old Church and its teachings and has become a new and therefore a false Church, is well known. Let the reader compare the elaborate proof which Luther submits in his essay against Duke Heinrich von Braunschweig, in which he among other things, to quote merely a few brief sentences, writes: "We invent nothing new but stay with, and adhere to, the old Word of God as the Church possessed it; for this reason we with it constitute the true old Church, as one body, which teaches and believes one divine Word. Hence the papists again blaspheme Christ Himself, the apostles, and all Christianity by calling us innovators and heretics. For they do not find anything with us except the old treasure of the ancient Church, true likeness and complete unity with the latter." (XVII, 1659.) In another passage Luther writes: "The Christian Church is dispersed throughout the whole world; it believes as I believe, and I believe as it believes; we have no collision or discrepancy in our faith." (*Comments on John 7:40*; VII, 2347.) For this reason Luther says expressly: "We on our part have never asked for a council to reform our churches." (XVII, 1693.) Hence, while modern theologians consider the history of dogma at best as the

history of the formation of dogma and treat it as such, the old orthodox theologians treating this subject rather manifest the tendency to furnish the proof that the true doctrine always was to be found in the Church and that we Lutherans therefore, on the basis of the *successio doctrinalis*, may well make the claim that our congregations are orthodox. Hence Heinrich Eckhart, for instance, in the title of his patristic compendium, characterizes this work as one "in which the agreement of pious antiquity with the confession of our churches is demonstrated in every article of theological instruction, and the clamor of the opponents alleging newness of doctrine on our part is proved false." (*Compendium Theol. Patrum*, etc. Jenae, 1606.) To give another example, J. W. Baier, in the foreword of his excellent *History of Dogma*, defines this branch of theological study thus: "It is historical theology which reports the doctrine of religion and the treatment accorded it in the various generations and periods in order that a person may thereby convince himself of the unbroken preservation of the true doctrine and of the succession of the true Church." (*Compend. Theol. Historicae*. Vinariae, 1699.)

The attitude of our Church toward the modern theory of dogmatic evolution may furthermore be gathered from the attributes with which our Church invests articles of faith. H. Kromayer, for instance, writes: "We promise, 1. that the articles which one must know to be saved are articles belonging to all times, that is, that they are found in both the Old and the New Testament, just as the apostle says Eph. 4:5, 'one Lord, one faith' (that is, the faith which is believed, not *by* which one believes, faith in the objective sense, that is, the doctrine which is to be accepted by faith, is meant, and not subjective faith, which apprehends the merits of Christ and is differentiated from the objects to which it is directed"). (*Theol. Positivo-Polem.* Lips., 1677, p. 1.) Calovius ascribes seven attributes to the articles of faith: 1. truth and certainty; 2. sublimity, the quality of transcending the powers of apprehension of human reason; 3. incapability of being proved scientifically [*Inevidenz*]; 4. necessity; 5. connection with the way of salvation; 6. mutual relationship; 7. harmony. With respect to number 4 he states: "The articles of faith have to be believed, and hence they are unchangeable and always have the same quality, as far as that which is to be believed is concerned. . . . This necessity, however, is of various kinds." (*System*. I, 771 sq.)

Again, our orthodox theologians definitely reject the view that there is a gradual formation of articles of faith. With respect to the argument that no one can say that the articles of faith increase, Musaeus, for instance, states: "It does not matter that the view is expressed that the fundamental articles of faith in the

Church cannot increase. This we by no means deny; on the contrary, we all confess with one mouth that everything that one must believe to be saved was already taught orally by the apostles and that it was received into the Holy Scriptures and thus handed down in written form to posterity and that nothing deserves to be placed among the necessary articles of faith excepting that which is contained in Holy Scripture and on that basis was always taught in the catholic Church and always believed. This is true, even if an angel from heaven should teach something new and different, Gal. 1:8. But it is one thing to say that the fundamental articles cannot grow and another thing that the heresies which oppose the foundation of faith cannot grow. . . . The truth contained in each article of faith is one and simple. The error, however, through which it may, directly or indirectly, be shaken or subverted is of various kinds and complex. The primitive Church merely taught and expounded the truth in words that were sufficiently clear, without regard to foreign and subtle, at that time neither existent nor known, interpretations, which in the course of time the impiety of men has invented for the perversion of the true sense of Scripture. But after these perversions of Scripture had begun to invade the Church and thereby heresies had taken their rise, the teachers of the Church began to explain the truth of faith more distinctly and to guard the true sense of the Scriptures against the fictitious interpretations of the human mind." (*Tractatus de Ecclesia*. Jenae, 1671. II, 317 sq.) J. Adam Scherzer, a Leipzig theologian, writes thus: "The schoolmen say that the articles of faith grew with respect to conscious apprehension (*quoad cognitionem explicitam*); this is the secret and arcanum for the progress of scholastic theology." (*System. Theol.* Lips., 1704, p. 8.) This applies likewise to modern theology in the Lutheran Church. The assumption that dogmas are formed only gradually is its moving principle. As long as this assumption is granted, it is impossible to stop the bringing in of innovations and the process of dissolution, and the return to the one old, immutable, everlasting truth of the Church universal is effectually blocked.

A.

(To be continued)



The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Article Entitled "Die falschen
Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,"

Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)

(Continued)

The assumption of a successive origin of dogmas through so-called decisions of the Church, by which some men seek to uphold the modern theory of open questions, militates, in the second place, against the relationship existing between Scripture and Christian faith. Besides its clarity, which should enable every one to comprehend its articles of faith, and, furthermore, its power to generate faith in those articles, Scripture possesses 1) perfection or sufficiency, *i. e.*, the attribute of containing and presenting in clear and convincing words all the dogmas which one must know and believe in order to be saved; and 2) canonical, normative authority, according to which it alone decides whether a certain dogma is truly Christian or not. Scripture, in short, is the only criterion for de-

termining the Christian religion and theology, the only source of Christian truth from which we can actually draw reliable facts, the only rule and norm of all faith and life, and the supreme judge, rendering the final decision in all controversies on any points of faith.

No special proof is necessary for these statements among those who want to be true Protestants. But the Scriptural principle mentioned above is unequivocally rejected by all those modern theologians who claim that dogmas are gradually formulated and finally established by the unanimous consent and decisions of the Church. Their opinion is that, as long as the Church has not yet definitely spoken, certain dogmas cannot be considered as conclusively settled, because they are "still pending and unfinished," "still in a nascent stage," "not yet fundamental doctrines," "for the time being only private and individual points of view which in themselves may be well-founded Christian convictions and the current results of conscientious and faithful Bible-study," and consequently "differing opinions and convictions are not only unavoidable but also justified and permissible, since the question regarding their Scripturalness is still undecided." Therefore, they say, since these dogmas are still "open questions," every one must have the privilege of exercising his "permissible ecclesiastical freedom" therein, or "perhaps it would be better to exclude altogether from the Christian pulpit those points which are most in dispute."

From their point of view, then, any one has the liberty to accept or reject what God has revealed and decided in His Word as long as the Church has not yet spoken and rendered her decision; but as soon as the Church has spoken, all liberty has come to an end!

This hypothesis fills every Christian with consternation, because he not only believes that the Bible *contains* the Word of God, but that the Bible *is* the Word of God and because he clearly discerns the destructive consequences which accompany the theory under consideration. This hypothesis is also diametrically opposed to the perspicuity, power, perfection, canonicity, and authority of Holy Writ. Scripture calls itself a light, a lamp, the sure testimony of the Lord, making wise the simple, 2 Pet. 1:19; Ps. 119:105; 19:8. It declares itself to be quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, Heb. 4:12. The apostle testifies that the Holy Scriptures make one wise unto salvation and thoroughly furnish the man of God unto all good works, 2 Tim. 3:15-17. Scripture lays a curse upon those who add or detract anything from it, Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18, 19. God through the prophet calls to those who consult the dead: "To the Law and the Testimony! If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them," Is. 8:20. Christ causes Abraham to answer the petition of the rich

man in hell with the words "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead," Luke 16:29, 31. The apostle writes at the close of his doctrinal discussion: "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God," Gal. 6:16. Scripture speaks of itself as the river of the city of God which is full of water. Ps. 46:4; 65:9.—Against all these powerful divine testimonies the theory according to which dogmas are built up gradually through decisions of the Church rises in opposition. It substitutes the Church for Scripture, man and his decision for God and the divine decision. And this substitution surrenders the foremost principle of true Protestantism and adopts the principle of the antichristian Papacy, with all its errors and abominations, as the foundation of our Church.

But thanks be to God! Our Church has definitely rejected that theory thetically and antithetically both in its public Confessions and in the private writings of its faithful servants.

Our Church, accordingly, begins her confession in the Formula of Concord with the following words: "We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with (all) teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone, as it is written, Ps. 119:105: 'Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.' And St. Paul: 'Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed,' Gal. 1:8. Other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers, whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures but all of them together be subjected to them, and should not be received otherwise or further than as witnesses, [which are to show] in what manner after the time of the apostles, and at what places, this (pure) doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved." (*Trigl.*, p. 777.)—The Thorough Declaration calls Scripture "the pure, clear fountain of Israel" (*Trigl.*, p. 851).—In the Smalcald Articles the confession of our Church reads as follows: "For it will not do to frame articles of faith from the works or words of the holy Fathers. . . . The rule is: The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel." (*Trigl.*, p. 467.) These pronouncements of our Church openly and solemnly reject the theory that in addition to Scripture the Church also is a source of Christian dogmas, *i. e.*, that certain doctrines are open questions as long as the Church has not uttered her decisive voice, but become dogmas binding upon heart and conscience when the Church has rendered her decision. If this supposition and procedure were correct, then

articles of faith would be established not only by the Word of God but also by the Church.

In the following words Luther gives expression to the voice of our Church on the right of establishing articles of faith through councils or otherwise: "The Christian Church has no power to set up any article of faith; she has never done so and will never attempt it. All articles of faith are revealed in Holy Scripture, making it unnecessary for man to add some supplements. The Christian Church has no power to decree articles of faith like a judge or a supreme authority; she has never yet done so and will never attempt it." (Article on the Power of the Christian Church, A. D. 1530, beginning with the following introductory sentence: "Dr. M. Luther, pastor of the holy church in Wittenberg, is ready to defend the following points against the whole satanic brood and all the gates of hell," XIX:958.) On the power of the Church assembled in councils Luther furthermore wrote: "In the first place, a church council has no power to set up new articles of faith, in spite of the fact that the Holy Spirit is present in the sessions. Even the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:11) established no new article of faith; St. Peter merely pointed out the fact that all their forefathers had also believed this same article—salvation alone through the grace of Christ without the works of the Law. In the second place, a Church council has the power and the duty to suppress and condemn new articles of faith according to the will of God in Holy Writ and the example of the faithful fathers." (Essay on Councils and Churches, A. D. 1539, XVI:2250.) All true servants of our Church follow Luther in this judgment. Thus Baier, one of the later servants of our Church, says: "It is manifest that the work of councils does not consist in establishing new dogmas, but in expounding, confirming, and defending the revealed dogmas in clear, idiomatic speech." (*Com. Th. Posit.*, III, 13, 31.)

Ancient councils, indeed, at times adopted the phraseology of the Apostolic Council: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us" (Acts 15:28), but J. Dan. Arcularius has written correctly: "Although the words 'The Holy Spirit has passed judgment in this question,' etc., have been used repeatedly in many councils and confessions of faith, yet our Church has never used these words, neither in the Augsburg Confession nor in the Thorough Declaration; she has always cited the words of Scripture, because they are the foundation upon which her doctrine rests." (*The Unbiased Confession of Faith*, etc., 1692, p. 131 f.) Therefore Dannhauer, who refers to Arcularius on this question, expressed himself in the following manner: "Athanasius says: 'In the question concerning the celebration of Easter the Nicene Fathers did not hesitate to

add: "We have decided [*visum est*], that all ought to submit themselves"; but in regard to faith they did not write: "We have decided"; but: "The Catholic Church believes." And therefore the deciding authority of councils is not that of a judge but that of a servant in points of faith which can be contradicted by a single Paphnutius if he teaches something on the basis of Scripture which is more correct." (*Christeis. Proth.*, p. 94.)

In like manner our Church has always consistently refused to consider the demand that it should wait for the "decision" of a council or of the Church before it accepts or rejects any point in an article of faith. Therefore Luther wrote: "This is a strong argument which disconcerts many. They know our doctrine is right and are unable to advance anything against it. Yet they stand before us like an old horse and say nothing more than: 'The holy Christian Church has not yet passed judgment upon it and approved it.' With the words 'Christian Church' they arrest the attention of both the simple-minded and the conceited. . . . 'How is this?' they say; 'the Christian Church has not yet passed her decision; Christendom has not yet spoken'; and then they wait for councils and diets, where the doctors assemble, deliberate, and draw their conclusions. As long as this procedure is not followed, they remain neutral. Now both the foolish and the 'wise' determine to wait until the Christian Church has come to some conclusion; for one man is speaking this way, another otherwise; the Christian Church is still undecided; we want to continue in the faith of our fathers until a conclusion is reached as to what is right; and then they turn up their noses at the simple-minded. We do not deny, for instance, that Jesus was to come out of Bethlehem, but for that reason we do not say that He was not to come out of Galilee, John 7:40-43. Furthermore, this also is true: Whoever is not in the Christian Church and teaches doctrines not acceptable to the Church is a false preacher through and through. . . . But when they say they desire to wait until the Church has uttered her voice, let the devil do the waiting; I shall not tarry that long. For the Christian Church has already decided everything. . . . This deciding is not accomplished through some outward assembly. There is a spiritual council, and no convention of men is necessary for that. We may hold a council to decide how we should fast and pray, how we should clothe ourselves, how articles of faith are correctly confirmed and confessed, or how other questions should be judged, as was done in the Council of Nicaea. But no council is necessary to decide whether the Christian doctrine is right. I say I accept Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar and believe that the Gospel is true and holy. Should some one reply: Well, your faith is wrong, then trouble begins. There-

fore a spiritual council is necessary that my brother may believe as I believe and preach, that all Christians everywhere may have the same faith and be united. . . . The Christian Church is not an assemblage of bishops' and cardinals' hats. Such a concourse may be or may grow into a council, but it is not the Christian Church. For the Church cannot be gathered into one locality; she is scattered throughout the whole world. She believes as I believe; and I believe as she believes. There is nothing conflicting or dissimilar in our belief. . . . Let this be your attitude: If you want to be the true Church and bear her precious name, give this proper proof thereof: teach doctrine correctly, as the holy Christian Church teaches it; live as she lives; give evidence of your faith and the fruit of faith; prove that you are the Christian Church." Luther accordingly says that a doctrine does not become certain through the decision of the Church; but when the Church passes a correct decision, then it becomes certain that she is the true Church. Christians indeed believe the Church as a ministering judge, but only as a judge that examines and confirms, not as one that hands down decrees by virtue of his office or authority. (On John 7: 40-44, VIII:97-102.)

The following words are also from Luther's pen: "A saying is the Word of God not because it is proclaimed by the Church, but because the Word of God is proclaimed, therefore there exists the Church. The Church does not create the Word, but is made through the Word. The presence of the Word of God in any locality is a sure sign of the existence of the Church in that place. So St. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 14:24, 25: . . . 'just as an unbeliever prostrates himself and confesses that God is truly present because he hears them prophesying.' Not the Church but the Word of God has moved him, whereby he has been overcome and judged." (On the Abuse of the Mass, A. D. 1521. XIX:1081.) Again, in regard to waiting for the decision of the Church Luther wrote as follows: "Who in the mean time is preaching to the Christians, while the schism is being adjusted and settled? Yes, it is easy to juggle with councils and the Fathers when one fools around with letters of the alphabet or constantly postpones a council, as has been done for the past twenty years, and has no thought for the souls that should be fed with reliable doctrine, as Christ says in John 21:6: *Pasce oves meas.*" (Article on Councils and Churches, A. D. 1539, XVI:2178.) Some indeed answer that the controverted doctrines, or "at least those points which are most in dispute, had better be excluded altogether from proclamation in the Christian pulpit." What prudent advice! What, then, "happens to the souls that one should feed with reliable doctrine?" Or has God perhaps revealed unnecessary things? Indeed, is certainty on any point

of faith an unnecessary thing when a controversy has arisen and consciences are disturbed over those points? "Good consciences," says the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, "are crying out for the truth and sound instruction from the Word of God; and for them death is not so bitter as doubt in some point of faith." (Of Confession and Satisfaction, *Trigl.*, p. 290, 32.) "But it is likely that there are many in many places who waver concerning matters of no light importance and yet do not hear such teachers as are able to heal their consciences." (*Trigl.*, p. 291, 33.) God preserve us from such a perpetual "interim" which some men would bring upon our Church today through such principles!

Just one more testimony from our beloved Luther. In the introduction to a sermon by Guettel, in 1541, he wrote as follows: "Guettel is writing against the *expectantes*, i. e., those who are waiting for a council. They may be wise and prudent people who thus wait and stake their salvation upon some human ordinance, but they are fulfilling the proverb: A wise man will not commit a small folly; or they must be entirely ignorant and inexperienced concerning the Christian faith, not being able to discern the wide difference between the Word of God and the word of man. I would, however, not fault them for this, because up to the present time the world, deceived by the Pope, was forced to believe that decrees of councils were just as valid as, yes, even more valid than, the Word of God, which (thank God) at the present time not even the ducks and the geese, the mice and the lice, among us would believe if it were possible for them to believe something. But he who does not hear anything cannot learn anything, and he who cannot or will not hear cannot or will not learn and know. Such *expectantes* we commend to the mercy of God." (XIV:392.)

Dannhauer therefore classifies the practise of the Roman Catholic Church as conservative syncretism because it permits freedom *in non decisis*, i. e., freedom in points not yet decided by the Church. Gerhard declares this practise to be skepticism. The statement of the Jesuit Dillinger "Just as in the days of the most ancient Fathers, so today in the interest of unity of faith and peace differing opinions are permissible in those points of religion which the Church has not yet defined as long as every one is ready to submit himself to the judgment of the Church" is answered by Gerhard as follows: "What absurdity! Since the Pope can establish new articles of faith, the papists can never be certain about dogmas, but must always remain skeptics. . . . According to Bellarmin's admission the Church cannot make any book canonical, but only declare it to be canonical. In like manner an opinion is heretical even when no 'decision' has confirmed it. . . . The certainty of dogmas does not depend on the judgment of the Church, but on

the divine revelation in Holy Writ, a fact which Christ and the apostles ever hold before our eyes. . . . The certainty of Holy Writ disappears if its statements must first be confirmed by the decrees of the Church. Then also all means of sound Bible interpretation which have been employed with great success by the entire Church are surrendered and cast overboard." (*Consideratio Quarund. Quaestt.*, etc. Jenae, 1631, p. 1.)

It is indeed true that our Church, together with the Roman Church, has always denied the validity of a private interpretation of Scripture, but each Church in an entirely different sense. In the Roman Church a private interpretation is that of an unofficial individual, and the correct interpretation is that which has been approved by the Church in her public decrees. But our Church considers that interpretation private which, according to 2 Pet. 1:20, rests on human reason and biased points of view; for when the apostle says "that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation" (*ιδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται*; Vulgate: *propria interpretatione non fit*), he does not mean to say that the official interpretation of the Church is the correct one, but rather that an interpretation is acceptable only then when it corresponds with the intention of the Holy Spirit, who inspired the holy writers. Therefore Kromayer wrote as follows: "We must give a more ready ear to a plain layman when he adduces Scripture than to a whole council which takes a stand contrary to Scripture. We must be more ready to believe Mary, the eye-witness, than the deceitful crowd of Jews. For the fact that a multitude of persons errs does not make the error right. In Ex. 23:2 God gave the command "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (*i. e.*, when it has deviated from the straight path of truth). Hence, we must pay more attention to the principle upon which a man bases his support for a certain truth than to the person speaking and writing. Even though a whole council expounded Scripture contrary to the intention of one of the holy writers, we should look upon such an exposition as a private interpretation, 2 Pet. 1:20. Consequently, mere private opinion which offers biased Bible interpretation is rejected, not the exposition of a private individual who permits Scripture to interpret itself. In the Nicene Council the contention of one man, Bishop Paphnutius, prevailed, for he defended the right of the clergy to marry, although the sentiment of the council had been against it."

May God graciously prevent that modern theology, having originated in our old fatherland, gain ground among us! Let us be on our guard against it, because it makes the validity of a doctrine as a Christian dogma depend on the decree of the Church. In doing

so, this theology has placed itself on the same level with the Roman Catholic Church.

In our next article we shall refute the position of the Dorpat theologians, who claim that "even the most well-founded Christian conviction and current result of conscientious and faithful Bible-study" cannot be considered "dogmas of the Church" before the Church has given her authoritative voice. That this distinction between Biblical and ecclesiastical dogmas is untenable will be our topic next time.

Oak Glen, Ill.

ALEX. W. C. GUEBERT, translator

Page 595

(To be continued)



The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Article Entitled "Die falschen Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,"
Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)

(Continued)

After having shown that the theory of open questions cannot be supported by assuming a gradual growth of dogmas through successive decisions of the Church, we shall prove in the following paragraphs that a doctrine must not first gain a so-called symbolical recognition before it can become a dogma of the Church and must not therefore be placed in the category of open questions until such recognition has been achieved.

In the first place, this so-called symbolical recognition cannot be established from the historical development of symbols. The doctrines embodied in the Symbols were not included in the various articles in order that they might become doctrines of the Church but were included because they already were doctrines of the

21) A strong movement in this direction is going on at present in Germany. And over here the *Lutheran* (Feb. 5, 1931) is protesting against the Galesburg rule, comparing it with "the interdict of the Middle Ages" and denouncing it as "an unpardonable misuse of ecclesiastical powers."—It should have said with Luther: "It shocks one to hear that in one and the same church, at one and the same altar, the two parties [Lutheran and Reformed] should take and receive one and the same Sacrament, with one party believing that it receives nothing but bread and wine and the other believing that it receives the true body and blood of Christ. And I often ask myself whether it is possible that a preacher and pastor could be so callous and wicked as to tolerate such a thing," etc. (17, 2016.)—"When, in 1817, Professor Scheibel refused to join the rest of the Breslau faculty in a union celebration of the Lord's Supper, he explained his refusal by saying that he could not participate until some one provided him with a Calvinistic exposition of the passage 1 Cor. 10:16." (H. Sasse, *Here We Stand*, p. 150.)

Church. When the Augsburg Confession was submitted to Emperor Charles V, the Evangelical Estates declared: "In obedience to Your Imperial Majesty's wishes we offer, in this matter of religion, the Confession of our preachers and of ourselves, showing what manner of doctrines from the Holy Scriptures and the pure Word of God has been up to this time set forth in our lands, dukedoms, dominions, and cities, and taught in our churches." (*Trigl.*, p. 39.) This statement does not say what manner of doctrine the followers of Luther were going to preach, teach, and defend, but what manner of doctrine they had been teaching, and intended to teach, upon the basis of Scripture, the pure Word of God. The Symbols are not a law imposed upon the Church, prescribing what she must believe and confess in days to come, but a confession, a protocol of what she already believes and professes. The Augsburg Confession, therefore, was not accepted as a confession of our whole Church because it had been drawn up, and was submitted, by her princes and her most learned theologians. It was accepted because it set forth the faith that was throbbing in the hearts of all true Lutherans. The Augustana, accordingly, begins with these words: "*Ecclesiae magno consensu apud nos docent,*" i. e., "Our Churches, with common consent, do teach," a statement which must be supplied or repeated in every article of the Confession. Likewise all the other Lutheran Confessions are nothing more than the expression of the living faith of our Church. The fact that our Church accepted Melancthon's Apology, Luther's two Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord prepared by Chemnitz and other theologians as her public Confessions does not lend any support to the argument of those men who contend that the doctrines set forth in these confessional writings were thereby for the first time made official dogmas of our Church. These doctrines had been the teaching of the Church before. In the Symbols they merely received ecclesiastical approval and were accepted. At Trent and Dort the procedure was different. There men with widely varying opinions and of conflicting schools of thought gathered around conference tables as authoritative representatives of the Church. They fixed "decrees" and "canons." Questions which up to that time had been regarded as "open," "unsettled," "unfinished," in the Roman and Reformed churches were declared to be "answered by the Church," definitely "decided," and henceforth "fundamental truths which must be taught by the Church." Is it not extremely difficult to explain how men who espouse the Trent and Dort procedure can still accuse conscientious, confessional Lutherans of making a codex of laws out of the Symbols?

In the second place, our Confessions do not claim to be

a complete system of all doctrines taught by our Church. They are just a summary of the chief doctrines which our Church was compelled to defend in the critical Reformation period. The two Catechisms, for instance, are called enchiridia, handbooks, "small, plain, simple manuals of the chief parts of Christian doctrine to be used by pastors and preachers in the instruction of the young and old." Therefore the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession close with this thought: "This is about the sum of our doctrine which is preached and taught in our churches that men may receive true Christian instruction, that consciences may be comforted, and the believers edified." (*Trigl.*, p. 58.) The following concluding sentence of the whole Augsburg Confession points in the same direction: "If there is anything that any one might desire in this Confession, we are ready, God willing, to present ample information (*latiorem informationem*) according to the Scriptures." (*Trigl.*, p. 95.) Also in the introduction to the Thorough Declaration the Evangelical Estates declare that in the Augsburg Confession "they clearly and plainly made their Christian Confession as to what was being held and taught in the Christian evangelical churches concerning the chief articles, especially those in controversy between them and the papists." (*Trigl.*, p. 847.) Therefore Carpzov commented on the words of the Augsburg Confession "This is *about* the sum of our doctrine" as follows: "Those who protested added the word 'about' deliberately. They did not intend to compile a catalog of all articles necessary for salvation, but in this Confession they dealt only with those dogmas which were in dispute and needed conscientious consideration in the light of God's Word. Therefore public decrees have never been attempted, and those who protested have never promised 'that they would teach no article in addition to those found in the Confession.' They did promise 'they would teach nothing contrary to the Confessions.'" (*Isagoge in Libb. Symbol.*, p. 115 sq.) This same thought Carpzov applied to all the other Symbols in the words: "No symbolical book is an adequate expression of all the articles and the fundamental dogmas of faith which must be believed. In each instance when the individual Symbols were being written, only those dogmas were taken into consideration which were in dispute and under fire. Herein lies the great difference between Holy Writ and the Symbolical Books." (*L. c.*, p. 4.)

The Jesuits, strangely, assumed a peculiar position. They insisted that the followers of Luther should not be permitted to teach any other doctrines than those which they had definitely set forth in their Confessions; in case the Lutherans taught additional doctrines, they should be deprived of the privileges which had been guaranteed them in the Religious Peace of Augs-

burg. Therefore, in the well-known *Second Thorough Defense of the Precious Heritage* (the Augsburg Confession) by the theologians of Saxony in the year 1630 the whole eighteenth chapter is devoted to answering the question: "In view of the Religious Peace may the Evangelicals teach only those articles of faith as necessary for salvation which are expressly enumerated in the Augsburg Confession and teach none which are offensive to the Roman Church?" The answer naturally was an emphatic "No!" And the question of the Emperor whether the Evangelical Estates "intended to draw up, and submit, additional articles or whether they were satisfied with those which they had already submitted to His Imperial Majesty" was answered as follows: "His Imperial Majesty has graciously requested that the matters pertaining to religion be examined among us in love and charity and compared with the truth, the Word of God alone. This has been done in a truly Christian spirit in our official writing, the Augsburg Confession. All abuses, however, were not specified nor enumerated in this general Confession because its primary purpose was to set forth in particular all those doctrines which are preached in our churches as necessary for the salvation of souls. If His Imperial Majesty will study this Confession carefully, he will readily see that we have not accepted any unchristian doctrines." At the same time they pointed to the concluding thought of the Confession, in which the Confessors state that they had submitted these articles so that a summary of their doctrine could be derived therefrom, and that they were ready to present ampler information according to the Scriptures if any one should desire it.

These facts, without doubt, answer the question which Prof. G. Fritschel raised in his article "Luther and Open Questions." He had asserted that certain articles were purposely omitted in the Augsburg Confession. True, some articles were omitted. But here is the reason for this omission. They were omitted not because they had not yet been received as dogmas in the Lutheran Church or were still looked upon as open questions by the Lutherans; but because of the discord in the primary fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion it would have been unwise to include such doctrines as cannot be comprehended apart from the primary fundamental doctrines. Therefore, as long as there was no agreement on the primary fundamental doctrines, it was unnecessary, yes, impossible, to try to come to an agreement on those which had been omitted, because, without a more mature understanding of the Gospel, they could only arouse suspicion and hatred in the hearts of all papists, in the fanatical as well as in the more sober-minded. If the Lutheran theologians had included these doctrines in their Confession, the papistical sophists unquestionably would

have directed their barbs against them only and would have created the impression as though these teachings formed the sole issue in the controversy and the Church must be warned against them because by the general public they were considered dangerous and fanatical and subversive of all godliness and order. When, therefore, the Emperor, egged on by the sophists, asked the Lutherans the question "if they considered the Augsburg Confession an adequate statement of their doctrine or if they intended to add some additional articles," the Lutheran theologians, after due deliberation, issued the following declaration: "Almost all necessary articles are presented in the Confession which has been submitted; at the same time all abuses which militate against that doctrine are pointed out and justly condemned. If we now at length should present also those articles which arouse ire, our opponents could malign us and say we had previously submitted only those articles which are acceptable to every one and that Your Imperial Majesty now could see plainly that we were concealing many pernicious errors and that, if Your Imperial Majesty should insist on receiving more information, still more errors would come to light. Since we ourselves ought not to contribute anything toward the frustration of those religious discussions which are now going on, it is inadvisable in our opinion to urge at this time a declaration concerning those offensive and unnecessary articles which are proper subjects for debate in theological faculties."

Among the questions termed either "offensive" or "unnecessary" the Lutheran theologians enumerated the following: "Is free will really free? Are all Christians priests? Are there more or less than seven sacraments? Is auricular confession necessary for salvation? Is it the duty of bishops to wield a worldly sword as well as to be heads of the Church? Does ordination imprint an indelible character on the priests? etc." It is simply absurd to maintain that our theologians omitted these doctrines because they looked upon them as mere open questions. Their expressions on this point lead us to the opposite conclusion. According to their writings there are many dogmas of the Lutheran Church which are not found in our Symbols and are not fixed symbolically, as the saying goes. Prof. G. Fritschel indeed often uses the terms "offensive" and "unnecessary." Our theologians, however, do not call the articles mentioned above "offensive" and "unnecessary" because the Lutherans themselves hated them and considered them unnecessary, but because the papists hated them and because it would have been unnecessary, even entirely useless and dangerous, to advance and try to settle them at that time before the dissent had been removed in those controversial articles "which are especially profitable for the salvation of souls." In Augsburg

the Lutherans earnestly sought peace and unity and insisted on following the Emperor's demand that "present religious questions should be discussed in love and charity." Yet they knew that their unfair opponents, who feared and did not desire a union on the basis of the truth, were striving at every opportunity to lead the controversy in that direction from which they hoped to gain a "gloriola" and to heap the odium for the failure of a union on the Lutherans. (See History of the Augsburg Confession, by D. David Chytraeus, Rostock, 1576, p. 96 f. Cf. Luther, St. Louis, XVI, 891—894.)

Let the following fact be considered. During the first three centuries of the Christian era there was only the Apostolic Symbol. What a monstrosity, then, for Iowa to assume that a doctrine must be placed in the category of open questions and is no dogma of the Church as long as there are "no symbolical decisions regarding it," as long as certain "questions have received no symbolical definitions, because the Church cannot fix anything symbolically which has not passed through the fire of controversy and thus has become one of the Church's vital questions"! According to this assumption the Church during the first three centuries would have been so poor in articles of faith that one cannot comprehend how it would be possible to speak of a Christian Church in those centuries with such poverty in articles of faith. Kromayer writes: "The Apostolic Symbol does not contain all nor only fundamental articles of the first class. Are not the articles of the vicarious satisfaction of Christ, of sin, of the universal grace of God, of the means of grace, adequately and clearly taught in Scripture? Yet they are not expressly confessed in the Apostolic Symbol. On the other hand, the rather difficult articles concerning the conception of Christ and His descent into hell are a part of the Confession." (*Scrutin. Religionum*, ed. 2, p. 476.) This same fact holds good of all the ecumenical symbols of the first five centuries. When the syncretists of Helmstedt declared all those who accepted the Ecumenical Confessions to be essentially united with us Lutherans, Calov wrote the following words against this "*consensus antiquitatis quinquesecularis*" as a secondary principle of theology and unity among the churches: "In the symbols of the first five centuries several chief doctrines of the Christian faith are not mentioned at all or are not expressly stated, especially those which were not in dispute in the councils, as the vicarious satisfaction and the merits of Christ, the universal grace of God and the redemption wrought by Christ, justification alone by faith, the Lord's Supper, etc. Must we therefore deny that these articles belong to the articles of faith because they are not defined (*definita*) in those Symbols and Confessions? May a Christian on that

account ignore those articles, or can one not be charged with heresy because of disagreement in these and similar essential articles which are not found in the Symbols?" (*Syst. Locc. Th.*, I, 912.) These same facts apply with equal force to the specifically Lutheran Confessions. In the later Lutheran Symbols we find dogmas which are not expressly mentioned in the Augsburg Confession, e. g., the doctrine of the normative authority of Scripture; and in all our Symbols there is no so-called decree on the inspiration of Scripture. Was the first of these doctrines an open question before 1580, and is the second still an open question in our day? Furthermore, was he who denied the first doctrine nevertheless a true Lutheran up to the year 1580, and does he who denies the second still continue to be a consistent Lutheran? These conclusions necessarily must be drawn from the hypothesis which assumes that dogmas are finally fixed by defining them in Symbols. Likewise it is well known that in accord with this hypothesis almost all contemporary "Lutheran" theologians actually deny the doctrine of our Church concerning the inspiration of Scripture, and yet with great earnestness they claim to be exponents of true Lutheran orthodoxy. How a man like Dr. J. H. Kurtz, one of the authors of the opinion rendered by the Dorpat theologians at the request of Iowa, presents the doctrine concerning the angels, a doctrine not mentioned in our Symbols or, in the language of the theologians of the new school, "not yet symbolically fixed," all those men know who have read the writings of this theologian entitled *History of the Old Covenant* and *The Bible and Astronomy*. Dr. Kurtz places the origin of the angels in an indefinable era antedating the creation of man, in which the world prior to this existing world (*Urwelt*), the universe, and its original inhabitants (the angels) were created. (*Bible and Astronomy*, 2. ed., pp. 244, 110.) In his mind the world prior to this existing world (*urweltliche Erde*) was "the dwelling-place and home of those angels who rebelled against God"; it was "without form and void," Gen. 1:2, as "the consequence of the fall of those angels" (p. 96); and since he believes that the angels possessed bodies (p. 80), the giants in Gen. 6:4 must be the offspring of these fallen angels who married daughters of men. (*History of the Old Covenant*, pp. 44-46.) But finally, in yonder world, he "exalts" the faithful of the New Testament "above the angels, just as the human nature of Christ is exalted above the angels." (*Bible and Astronomy*, p. 136.)

According to the hypothesis of the neo-theologians the Lutheran Church must permit her servants to present all doctrines that have not yet been fixed symbolically according to their own caprice, without being able to disown them as teachers who are unfaithful to our Confessions; for in view of "the ever-widening

circle in which the Church must testify, divergent opinions and convictions (according to Dorpat) are not only unavoidable but also justifiable and permissible. Even relative errors that cannot be avoided under these circumstances can be borne by the Church without endangering her unity in doctrine; and she must needs follow this course because in this case she as a Church is not yet in a position to reject the error as error." O poor Lutheran Church! According to this theory the Book of Concord, and wherever only the Augustana has been officially accepted as the Symbol of the Church, only this latter document, is your Bible. Then you are nothing more than a miserable sect, possessing only a brief excerpt of Biblical doctrines. Whatever is not contained in these selections is none of your concern as a Church; at least it is not your doctrine. Your duty is to work out, and add, doctrines as the circumstances of coming eras shall demand. Now, is it not more than remarkable to realize that the very men who espouse this theory which actually makes the Symbols the Bible of the Church constantly accuse those who accept the doctrines of the Symbols without reservation of placing the Confessions on the same level with the Bible?

However, let us proceed. The assumption that a doctrine becomes a dogma of the Lutheran Church after it has found a place in our Symbols but is only an open question before this step has been taken, militates finally against the fact that our Church in her Symbols accepts not only those doctrines which she was driven by certain circumstances to mention expressly in those documents but the entire Bible, all the doctrines which God has therein revealed. Whenever, therefore, any controversy arose in our Church regarding any doctrine, the very first question put was always: What does the Bible say? Down to our day it has been absolutely without precedent in our Church in a controversy to appeal to the silence of the Confessions and to say that, if the Church has not yet rendered a decision on that particular point, a Lutheran must have the liberty to believe as he sees fit. For even if every true Biblical doctrine is not clearly defined in the Lutheran Symbols, yet every truly Biblical doctrine belongs to the doctrines of the Lutheran Church. In regard to a heterodox Church that has set up a false principle and does not accept the Word of God as it reads but insists on interpreting the Word either according to reason or according to tradition, the following statement cannot be upheld: "For her every doctrine of the Bible is a doctrine of the Church." But this statement can be made of every truly orthodox Church and hence also of our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church. At any rate, this was the attitude of those faithful men through whose instrumentality our Church drew up her precious Confessions. Thus we read in Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg

Confession: Peter "cites the agreement of all the prophets. This is truly to cite the authority of the Church. For when all the holy prophets bear witness, that is certainly a glorious, great, excellent, powerful decretal and testimony." (*Trigl.*, p. 145.) In Article XX of the same Confession we read again: "Peter says, Acts 10:45: 'To Him give all the prophets witness that through His name, whosoever believeth on Him, shall receive remission of sins.' This strong testimony of all the holy prophets may duly be called a decree of the catholic Christian Church. For even a single prophet is very highly esteemed by God and a treasure worth the whole world. To this Church of the prophets we would rather assent than to these abandoned writers of the *Confutation*." (*Trigl.*, p. 339.) Finally, in Article XII we find these sentences: "I verily think that, if all the holy prophets are unanimously agreed in a declaration, it would also be a decree, a declaration, and a unanimous strong conclusion of the universal, catholic, Christian, holy Church and would be justly regarded as such. We concede neither to the Pope nor to the Church the power to make decrees against this consensus of the prophets." (*Trigl.*, p. 271.)

It ought to be quite clear now that our fathers connected ideas with the "decision" and the "consensus of the Church" which are altogether different from those current today. Wherever Scripture had spoken, they believed the true Church had "spoken." For them the voice of Scripture was at the same time the "voice of the Church." And every unanimous testimony of the prophets and apostles was for them the correct "consensus," a right "decree," and a truly "decisive" "conclusion" of the Church. (This unanimous conclusion of the Church, of course, cannot be seen. Its existence, however, just like that of the Church, must be believed.) We readily see that a doctrine is defined in the Symbols; but this fact does not constitute the unanimous "conclusion" of the Church. The unanimous "conclusion" of the Church we can gather alone through faith in the inspired Word. On all sides our eye sees nothing and our ear hears of nothing but discord and disunion in doctrine. In spite of this fact our faith confidently sings every Sunday: "Who the Christian Church doth even Keep in unity of spirit." Or it confesses with Luther in his Large Catechism: "I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost, in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms." (*Trigl.*, p. 691.) That which truly belongs to the Church is always Biblical, and that which is truly Biblical always belongs to the Church. Our Church does not want to be a "different" Church, with a "different" faith; she does desire to be part of the

Church of the apostles and prophets, a part of the Bible Church. She has indeed written Confessions and defined doctrines, not because they should contain her whole body of doctrine nor because she had reached a decision only on those doctrines found in her Symbols, but because false churches and false teachers forced her to make clear-cut statements on certain doctrines. Up to the present time she has seen no necessity for writing special Symbols on other doctrines. All that she believes therefore is not found in her Symbols, but only in the Bible. Her Symbols are not so much "the landmarks of her spiritual development" as the boundary-line separating her from certain falsehoods. Hence Biblical and Lutheran are identical terms for her. When, therefore, in 1528, Duke George, Luther's bitter and fanatic enemy, demanded that the Lutherans give an account of their Lutheranism, Luther advised them to say: "They intended to remain with the holy Gospel. Luther himself intended to be Lutheran only in so far as he purely taught the Holy Scriptures." (Walch, XXI, 234.)

Perhaps some one will interpose at this point and say: "It may be true that the doctrines of Scripture and of the Lutheran Church are identical. But can one not be a consistent Lutheran if he as pastor or layman believes and confesses everything that the Lutheran Church confesses as her faith in her Symbols? Is not the acceptance of all the doctrines defined in the Symbols sufficient to bind all Lutherans together in one body?" Quite right, without a doubt! But we must always bear in mind that he who accepts the Symbols cannot at the same time believe and confess articles which will contradict and nullify the articles of the Symbols. When, therefore, the syncretists of a previous era raised this same objection against the Apostolic Creed, the venerable Dannhauer gave them this answer: "If no other questions had arisen besides those answered in the Apostolic Creed, if one could assume that schismatics would hold nothing contrary to this Creed nor try to induce others to accept their contrary belief, the Apostolic Creed could indeed serve as the norm for Christian unity and close friendship in the Lord. If that were the case, our forefathers would not have been forced to draw certain bounds for the endless private and public expositions which from time to time led men into controversy and to make those bounds the distinctive marks of the orthodox Church in those doctrines which erring men were undermining. 'I readily admit,' Huelsemann writes, 'that men may be saved who believe nothing further than that which every reader draws out of the words of the Apostolic Creed. Yet I emphatically deny that there is a layman who, in regard to those points in which some think agreement could easily be reached in our day, believes nothing more in respect to divine things which pertain either to

man's salvation or damnation besides that which is found in the Apostolic Creed.'” (*Dissert. Instit. ad Collat. Carthag.*, p. 67.)

The superficial thinker may look upon this whole presentation as hair-splitting micrology. But he who looks beneath the surface will soon convince himself that there is a principle involved here which means either life or death for the Church. If we uphold this principle, we shall preserve the treasure of our Church; should we sacrifice it, we would throw our treasure away. If our Church insists only on symbolical and not at the same time upon canonical unity, as Gerhard calls it, *i. e.*, on Biblical unity, then our Church is, we repeat it, not an orthodox Church, but a miserable sect, which does not bind itself to accept the whole Word of God but only certain doctrines thereof. No matter how dear and valuable the incomparable Confessions of his Church are to every Lutheran, he does not permit them to become the Lutheran Bible, in which the whole faith of his Church is posited, while all other Biblical doctrines are more or less irrelevant, mere subjects “concerning which every sincere Christian may hold his own private and individual convictions.” It is indeed strange that men who constantly speak against placing the Confessions above the Bible declare themselves bound as Lutherans only by those doctrines which are fixed symbolically. This fact makes it quite evident who those men are that actually stand on Scripture and believe in its supreme authority as well as in its clarity, and those who do not.

We hope we have incontrovertibly proved to every attentive reader that also the hypothesis of a successive development of dogmas whereby some men try to bolster up the modern theory of open questions is a false argument.

Oak Glen, Ill.

ALEX. WM. GUEBERT

(To be continued)

The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Article Entitled "Die falschen
Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,"

Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)

(Continued)

A fourth false argument for the modern theory of open questions is the appeal to certain points of doctrine in which former teachers recognized for their orthodoxy have erred. Those who advance this argument justify it in the following manner: In previous eras certain teachers of our Church entertained divergent opinions without being accused of heresy or denied church-fellowship by their fellow-Christians. Ought not a present-day teacher,

they argue, enjoy the same freedom of deviating from the Word of God in the same point? Should he because of such deviation be charged with heresy, deprived of fellowship, and denied the rights and privileges of a minister in the orthodox Church? Would it not be unanswerable to subject any teacher within the Lutheran Church to disciplinary action because he holds and defends a doctrine which men like Andreae, Selnecker, and J. Gerhard of a previous period espoused with impunity? Would it not be ultra-Lutheranism to insist on more strictness in doctrine now than men did in the golden age of Lutheran orthodoxy?

At the present time (1868) the leaders of the Iowa Synod in particular are advancing also this argument in their endeavor to bolster up their theory of open questions. When their attention was called to a deviation from the pure doctrine on the part of some of their men, they almost invariably sought to justify themselves without much reference to the Bible; they appealed mainly to the authority of some former teacher of our Church whose orthodoxy otherwise is undisputed and claimed that the point in question, therefore, necessarily belonged to the category of open questions. When, for instance, their doctrine on the millennium and a twofold resurrection of the flesh, *i. e.*, the resurrection of the saints at the dawn of the millennium and a general resurrection at its close, was attacked, they referred to Selnecker and Dannhauer. Or when we denied that the doctrine of Sunday as it is taught in Scripture and in our Symbols is an open question, they appealed to J. Gerhard. And in regard to this last point they went so far as to admit that the doctrine of Sunday in our Symbols is beyond all doubt the doctrine of Holy Writ, but since such an eminent teacher as Gerhard deviated therein from Scripture, every other teacher should also have the privilege of deviating therein, it being an open question.

It is a most disagreeable task to prove to Protestants, to Lutherans, and in general to men who claim to be theologians and Bible students *par excellence* how utterly groundless and untenable this argument for the modern theory of open questions is. The argument "This is the position of the Church Fathers, and who will dare to declare them heretics?" was a formidable weapon with which the Papists formerly lashed at Luther and the principles of the Reformation. But Luther and the whole Lutheran Church have always appealed to Scripture as the final authority and have consistently refused to recognize the Fathers as an authority curtailing or abrogating the supremacy of the Bible. What else is necessary to prove that this argument is nothing more than a brittle reed? Or was it not permissible, perhaps, for the Papists to appeal to the errors of the Church Fathers who are recognized in all

Christendom as orthodox teachers, yea, as lights and pillars of the Church, but is quite permissible for Lutherans to appeal to the errors of their orthodox fathers?

Some men indeed raise this objection: "Is it right to condemn an error in a contemporary fellow-Lutheran and thereby condemn as heretics also such great theologians as J. Gerhard, Selnecker, and others, who are now standing before the throne of God in glory and perfect bliss?" This objection, however, is met, in the first place, with the same answer that our fathers gave the papists in the Reformation era: "*Patres fuerunt lumina, non numina, indices, non iudices, ministri, non magistri*" (the fathers were lights and not gods, teachers and not judges, servants and not masters). In refusing to make the deviations of our Lutheran fathers either a rule for our faith or a license for further aberrations from the Word of God, we are following their own example and teaching. We are not only treating them as they treated the Church Fathers, but we are conscientiously abiding by their express direction never to set them and their writings above Christ and the Word of God, but always to prove all things and hold fast that which is good. If we, their pupils, should be unwilling to follow this direction, we should prove ourselves unfaithful to the trust committed to our care, and instead of being an honor to our fathers, we should disgrace them in their graves. Our fathers did not declare the Church Fathers to be heretics when they rejected the errors which the papists had drawn from that source and were doggedly defending. And today, in rejecting errors espoused by contemporary men, we do not with the same breath condemn as heretics those old faithful witnesses and teachers of the truth because they entertained the same errors. They were not admonished, and hence, owing to human weakness and not to hardness of heart, they did not see their errors.

Augustine recognized this point and wrote: "Whatever agrees with the authority of Holy Writ in the writings of Cyprian I accept with his praise; whatever does not agree I reject with his permission." (*Ad Crescon. Grammat.*) Kromayer expressed a similar thought in these words: "The libraries of the fathers must be examined with consideration and charity, when either through the fault of their era they were swept along as in a mighty stream and so fell in aberrations, or spoke unguardedly now and then in the heat of controversies, or advanced in understanding while writing or wrote while advancing. For it would be quite difficult to find a father whose writings are entirely free from error. Therefore the nakedness of the fathers must be covered up, so far as this can be done with a good conscience." (*Theol. Positivopolem.*, Part. II., p. 37.) We apply these same words to the old

teachers of our Church who are held in honor for their orthodoxy and fidelity. Those men, however, who make a formal business of ferreting out all possible weaknesses in the writings of the old orthodox teachers in order to find seeming support for their theory of open questions are doing whatever lies in their power to undermine the reputation of these faithful witnesses and destroy the blessing of their writings. Although the writings of the fathers are of inestimable value in the study of true Biblical theology, yet for the champions of open questions they exist for only one purpose,—to show how far one may depart from the doctrine of Scripture without sacrificing one's reputation for orthodoxy and faithfulness to the Confessions. Without hesitation we declare that our esteemed Lutheran teachers were indeed men who could err and actually did err in some points. On the one hand, those errors which were due to their weakness, and hence have been forgiven, must not be viewed with an air of superiority, nor be uncovered in a belittling, derogatory spirit, nor be accepted with the ulterior and therefore reprehensible motive of fostering indifference in doctrine. On the other hand, those errors must be considered in a spirit of love, be covered up in order to preserve the blessing emanating from the fathers, be avoided and used as a warning that we become more circumspect, more free from idolatrous confidence in men in spite of their great fame, wisdom, and piety, and more conscious of the fact that Scripture alone is the perfect, pure fountain of truth, "the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas, together with all teachers, should be estimated and judged. . . . Other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers (*sive patrum sive neotericorum scripta*), whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures." (Epitome, *Trigl.*, p. 777.) Although the old faithful teachers of our Church still are our teachers and examples in many respects, yet in the errors they made they are a warning to us according to the well-known proverb "*Lapsus maiorum sit tremor minorum,*" i. e., "May the fall of the great deter the smaller spirits."

Error and sin are similar. Just as all Christians still have sin because of their natural human weakness, so all of them also have their individual errors. And both, their sins as well as their errors, are forgiven. But not only does every wilful sin against the Law of God frustrate grace and condemn; also every wilful error against revealed truth frustrates grace and condemns. Just as one and the same sin is forgiven to one man and not to another, so one and the same error is forgiven to one man and not to another. Likewise, just as he sins against grace who wilfully imitates the sins of the saints which they committed in moments of weakness and tries to justify himself by appealing to the saints,

so he also sins against grace who wilfully imitates the errors of the orthodox teachers which they committed in moments of weakness and tries to justify himself by appealing to those teachers.

Luther held this fact before the eyes of the papists on many occasions. In his essay on "The Abuse of the Mass," written in the year 1521, he says: "In the second place, they [the papists] refer us to the holy Fathers, to Gregory, Bernard, Bonaventura, and others, who used this canon (the canon of the Mass) and considered the Mass a sacrifice. To appeal to the work and life of the saints which is not founded in Scripture is a most dangerous thing, because it is evident that a just man falls seven times and that the saints sin in many ways, Prov. 24:16. Who will convince us that it is not sin to practise and perform an act which cannot be justified from Scripture? In this connection I praise St. Anthony, who gave the sound advice that no one should entertain and carry out an act without authority from Scripture. Yes, it is better to look upon the acts of the saints which they did without Scriptural authority as sin than to adduce them as good examples. Furthermore, you do not rouse any saints to anger when you regard their unscriptural acts as sin. They acknowledge themselves to be sinners. But you do anger God and the saints if you fall through the example of the saints and break your neck. . . . There are two reasons why sins cause no injury to the saints but do destroy the godless. The first is this: The saints have faith in Christ. And since they are buried in such faith (although they do many things in ignorance which are damnable for the ungodly), they always rise again and are preserved. . . . The second reason is this: Through faith in Christ the saints are so wise that they cling only to God's mercy, repudiating their own works and confessing from the bottom of their hearts that their works are unprofitable and sinful. So Bernard said on his death-bed: "I have wasted my time, for I have lived an unholy life."—In Augustine we see many errors, but he recanted them. Would they not have damned him if he had not been preserved in the true faith? For the most part those errors are contrary to faith. But as he confessed faith in Christ and feared God, they could not harm him. Whoever should try to follow those same errors now would be destroyed. This is the case with many who follow the words of the fathers without discriminating between fallible human opinion and the infallible divine truth. It is quite apparent that the saints do err now and then, even in faith, *i. e.*, they are not yet perfect, but they do not perish because of the faith which God has begun in them. Those, however, do perish who accept the errors of the saints as truth and follow them as examples. There is no prospect of salvation for any one who has followed the saints instead of Scripture. . . .

“Such also is the case with the sacrifice of the Mass. Without a doubt many pious Christians still cling to the Mass in simple faith and regard it as a sacrifice. But since they do not depend on this sacrifice, look upon everything they themselves do as sin, and cling to the pure mercy of God, they are saved from perishing in spite of this error. However, when the priests who celebrate Mass follow this error without such faith, elevate their sacrifice, and sell it for genuine goods, they deserve to have this error charged against them and perish eternally because they followed the saints. For God considers, tries, and judges the hearts and reins, Ps. 7:9, *i. e.*, the inner disposition of the heart. Therefore God relents and forgives an error in one man and condemns the same error in another, because one man believes in humble, child-like faith, and the other does not. . . . Since we have finally recognized the error, it is no longer proper to continue therein and consider the Mass as a sacrifice. That would be a sin against faith and against our own conscience, — a sin which no faith, no confession, could excuse. You cannot say: I will err after the manner of a Christian. A Christian errs in ignorance, and St. Paul commands us in Rom. 14:1 that we should bear with an erring Christian (seeing he lives by the grace of God), because it is not right for us to despise and condemn him who does not yet recognize his error as error. It is our duty, however, to point out error to everybody and no longer consider it truth, so that the sins of the godless do not increase and no offense be given to weak consciences. . . . Gregory, Bernard, Bonaventura, Francis, Dominic, and their followers, failing to recognize the true nature of the Papacy, held the Pope and his dominion in high esteem and believed that all his ways and acts were divine, Christian, and ordained of God; yet the Papacy with all its ecclesiastical courts, ordinances, and decrees is manifestly contrary to the Gospel. They have misinterpreted the Gospel, building up and fortifying the Pope and his realm through some glaring errors. Is it not unchristian to believe that the Pope is the ‘rock,’ Matt. 16:18? Is it not unchristian to interpret the ‘sea,’ Matt. 14:29, as human beings, on whom St. Peter and the Pope are to walk, *i. e.*, over whom they are to rule? Is it not unchristian to suppose that the word ‘feed’ should imply the honor, power, and authority of the Pope? There are many similar errors of the saints. Yet, failing to recognize them as errors, they adhered to them in simple, Christian faith; therefore, God forgave them. But those who know and acknowledge them to be errors and still adhere to them as though they were not erroneous do indeed follow the Fathers; nevertheless, they will not be in sweet communion with them in heaven. The Fathers finally renounced their errors and were received in grace. Certain men of our day, how-

ever, consider those errors as articles of faith and promulgate and defend them as such unto their end." (Walch, XIX: 1378—1385.)

In another connection Luther declares that it is permissible, and at times obligatory, to condemn the error of an orthodox person which he entertained in weakness, without at the same time condemning that orthodox teacher. He illustrates this instance in the case of Cyprian as follows: "St. Augustine condemns St. Cyprian's doctrine of anabaptism" (concerning those baptized by heretics); "and ever since, that doctrine has been justly condemned. But we could easily be satisfied with Cyprian, for in him Christ comforts us poor sinners wonderfully by showing us that His great saints also were human just as we are." (*Of Councils and Churches*, XVI: 2657.) Luther does not want to deprive even St. Thomas of his holiness, great as his errors were. He wrote: "Yet I do not doubt that his doctrine (that of St. Thomas), dull and without spirit though it is, is one of the vessels full of the wrath of God which He has sent down upon this earth, Rev. 15: 7, 16, 17. Mainly because of this doctrine he became a (papistic) saint and received his canonization from such a man as he deserved. I do not wish to say that he is not holy, although he did teach doctrines that are truly heretical and undermine the teaching of Christ. He may have done this in ignorance. I am sorry, however, that his influence deceived so many noble Christians and induced them to accept arid wastes instead of beautiful flowers. (Cf. Lam. 4:5.)" — (*Revelation of the Antichrist*, A. D., 1521, XVIII: 1760.)

It is no doubt necessary at this point to call attention to the following facts: 1. In the writings of otherwise orthodox teachers more than just a few important points of doctrine can be found which are erroneous. But an appeal to the deviations of the otherwise orthodox teachers as a justification for the theory of open questions necessarily leads to complete destruction of all purity and unity in doctrine. 2. "*Quum duo dicunt idem, non est idem,*" i. e., when two men seem to say the same thing, the meaning is not always the same. 3. When influential, esteemed orthodox teachers of a past generation deviated in some point, there was no one, as a rule, who noticed this deviation or, if he did, he did not possess the courage to contradict the influential teacher. 4. Because of increasing wide-spread indifference and vigorous attacks on Christian doctrine, times arise when it is more important and necessary than otherwise to attack even the smallest deviation in a certain point of doctrine.

The foregoing argument may suffice to prove how futile it is to seek support for the theory of open questions in the writings of recognized orthodox teachers because they erred in certain

points. In this entire question much is at stake. We must always defend and preserve the chief principle of Protestantism, the fact that the norm of all doctrine is not posited in human writings, but alone in the Word of God. Let men continue to flaunt a *naevus* from our old, highly honored orthodox teachers whenever their unionistic theory of open questions is attacked. Let them maintain they want the Lutheran doctrine of Sunday which they admit is Scriptural to be considered as an open question because Gerhard erred therein. As good Protestants we shall always meet them with the words "*Amicus Plato, amicus Socrates, amicus Lutherus, amicus Gerhardus, sed magis amica veritas, magis amica Scriptura Sacra.*" And with St. Paul and all the apostles we say: "But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed," Gal. 1:8.

Oak Glen, Ill.

ALEX. WM. A. GUEBERT, translator

(To be concluded)



The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Article Entitled "Die falschen
Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,"
Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)

(Conclusion)

Finally, the proponents of the modern theory of open questions advance the argument that there are doctrines of faith in the Bible which God did not reveal in clear-cut, unmistakable terms. . . .

Every one, with the exception of the papist perhaps, will admit the Biblical attributes of perspicuity and clarity (*perspicuitas et claritas*). Holy Writ lays claim to these attributes in almost countless passages. Since the Bible is the revelation of God to men who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path on the way to life everlasting, it must be clear; and every one who believes in Holy Writ gladly confesses the reality of this clearness. Who of us will deny that God, the Creator of human speech, is able to speak clearly? Who will

deny that God, the eternal Truth, Wisdom, and Love, intended to speak clearly? Who will deny that God actually did speak clearly, yea, was obligated to speak clearly, in that Scripture which He inspired for just one purpose—to tell man what he must know in order to be saved? These denials can be made only by one who either does not believe in God or at least not in the divine origin and purpose of the Bible.

It is indeed true that some passages in Holy Writ are more or less obscure, *e. g.*, passages with historical, archeological, geographical, chronological, ethnological, genealogical, and onomastic difficulties or prophecies whose correct solution will be necessary and possible only when they have been fulfilled. Linguistic difficulties in certain chapters also prevent us from fully comprehending the sense intended by the sacred writers. On these points the readers and exegetes of the Bible cannot arrive at an apodictic interpretation but can reach only a probable one. In the first place, this lack of absolute certainty cannot be attributed to the fact that the Bible itself is obscure in this or that passage; it merely seems to be obscure because the teacher or exegete is not able to verify all the recorded historical data, is puzzled by grammatical or lexical questions, etc. The obscurity is not objective, but subjective. In the second place, this whole question of subjective obscurity is irrelevant to the point which we are considering in this series of articles, namely, Does the Bible actually contain articles of faith—the doctrine of Sunday, for instance—which are not clear and therefore can easily be misunderstood? Even though a person has no knowledge of, or only an imperfect knowledge of, historical data and related facts, yet he is able to find and walk the way of salvation under all circumstances without any hindrance. But in order to be saved, he must know and believe the articles of faith. Without the clear divine revelation and the knowledge of these articles it is impossible not only for the “man of God,” the theologian, to use the Scripture for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, in order to be made perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16, 17), but also for the layman to walk the way of salvation under all circumstances without any hindrance. Scripture is the complete revelation of the way of salvation; therefore it must be clear, exact, and unambiguous in all articles of faith. Whoever denies this fact denies the fundamental doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. Therefore, Aug. Pfeiffer began his book on Hermeneutics with the following words: “The papists and we have been earnestly debating the question whether Holy Scripture, especially in matters of faith and morals, is sufficiently clear or possibly obscure. The papists claim it is obscure; we maintain that it is clear, although we do

make several, especially two, restrictions. In the first place, we distinguish between a total and a partial obscurity. We admit that there is a partial obscurity, *i. e.*, we take into account those passages of Holy Scripture that are obscure and present difficulties which we cannot satisfactorily solve. Onomastic (questions pertaining to proper names) and chronological difficulties and gaps in the genealogy of Christ cast a shadow over some portions of Scripture so that no Bible student is able to remove all those difficulties. 'For the Holy Ghost (as Augustine says in the twelfth book of his *De Doctrina Christiana*) has organized the books of the Bible in such a wonderful, salutary way that He wanted to satisfy the hunger of the soul through the passages which are clearer than others and to ward off satiety through those which are obscure.' (Ita magnifice et salubriter Spiritus Sanctus Scripturas Sanctas modificavit, ut locis apertioribus fami occurreret, obscurioribus autem fastidia detergeret.) At the same time we deny that the Holy Scriptures are totally obscure and maintain especially that every dogma pertaining to faith and morals is set forth somewhere in Holy Writ in language so clear and unequivocal that any one who searches the Bible conscientiously can know and believe it. In the second place, we distinguish between subjective and objective obscurity and say that Holy Writ is not obscure *eo ipso* nor with respect to the object that must be known if faith in the true God is to be engendered. It is obscure only through certain circumstances (*per accidens*) in the subject who does not fully comprehend its meaning because of improper training or equipment, being handicapped either by lack of necessary knowledge or because of an evil disposition of soul." (*Thesaur. Hermeneut.*, p. 1 sq.)

Luther testifies repeatedly that the seeming obscurity of Scripture is due primarily to an imperfect knowledge of the language, and is subjective, not objective. To Erasmus he wrote: "If there is any obscurity in Scripture, it is due here and there to the words and idiomatic phrases of the language, or to use a Greek term, due to grammar. It is, in general, such an obscurity as does not prevent any one from grasping the sum and substance of Scripture—the dogmas." (Walch XVIII, 2068.) In another connection he wrote: "The Sophists have said that Scripture is obscure; they have supposed that it is a characteristic of the Word of God to use obscure, odd terms. But they fail to see that the difficulty lies in the languages themselves. If it were possible for us to understand the languages perfectly, nothing would be so easy to grasp as the Word of God. The Turkish language is jargon to me because I do not understand it; yet a Turkish child of seven years readily comprehends his own tongue." (*Letter to the Mayors and Alder-*

men of All Cities of Germany in Behalf of Christian Schools, St. L., X, 473.)

It is also true that there are passages in Holy Writ which contain no references to historical data, etc., but which speak of doctrines of faith and yet are not free from obscurity. Some indeed are so obscure that they seem to contradict other passages which are clear. But this fact does not furnish any ground for supposing that Scripture contains doctrines of faith which are not clearly and unmistakably revealed. The clarity and perspicuity of Scripture are vindicated by this particular point: all doctrines of faith, although some of them are referred to in a few obscure Scripture passages, are without exception expressed in clear, unambiguous words, which enable the conscientious Bible student to understand the obscure passages. A denial of this is a denial of the clarity of Scripture, a denial that we really have a sure prophetic apostolic Word, a light that shines in a dark place, a sun that comes out of his chamber like a bridegroom and rejoices like a strong man to run his course; a sure testimony of the Lord, making wise the simple; the commandments of the Lord, rejoicing the heart and enlightening the eyes. (2 Pet. 1; Ps. 19.) Sad to say, there is hardly a Christian doctrine in our day which has sunk into greater oblivion than this doctrine or has been so decisively eliminated as a piece of former narrow-mindedness. The whole present theological intelligentsia is searching the Scriptures eagerly, holding not only that there are many passages which need further clarification (a fact which we do not deny), but also that much material for important new dogmas will be discovered.

Luther, who wrote many a precious word against this kind of Bible-study, expressed himself in the following manner in his exposition of Psalm 37: "But if any one of them attacks you and says, 'You must have the exegesis of the fathers; the Bible is obscure,' you must answer, 'This is not true.' No book on earth is so clear as the Holy Scriptures. It excels every other book just as the sun excels every other light. They employ the foregoing language because they wish to lead us away from Scripture and set themselves over us as our masters, so that we may believe their fantastic dreams. It is a shocking disgrace, blasphemy against the Holy Scriptures and all Christendom, to say that Holy Scripture is obscure and not clear enough to enable every one to understand it and then teach and prove what he believes. Take careful note of this fact: Would it not be a great shame for you or me to be called a Christian and at the same time not know what we believe? But if I know what I believe, I know what is in Scripture; for it contains nothing else than Christ and the Christian faith. Therefore, when the Christian hears Scripture, it is so

clear and plain to him that he says without any help from the commentaries of all the fathers and teachers: "That is right; that is what I also believe." . . . It is indeed true that some passages of Scripture are obscure, but in them the same truth must be sought which is found in clear, unmistakable passages. And then heretics arise who interpret obscure passages according to their own bias and on the basis of their interpretation contend against the clear passages and foundation of faith. So the fathers strove against them with the clear passages, shed light on those that are obscure, and proved that the obscure said nothing more than that which is expressed in the clear. This is the correct method of Bible-study. . . . Be assured, without doubt there is nothing brighter than the sun, which is Scripture; but if a cloud passes in front of the sun, the very same sun is behind it. Likewise, if there is an obscure passage in Scripture, do not doubt but that the same truth lies hidden in it that is very clear in another passage. Whoever, therefore, cannot understand the obscure ought to abide by the clear." (St. L., V, 334 ff.)

Finally, it is also true that doctrines of faith are not always so clear and evident in Scripture in this sense that every one may at once see and find them, even though he reads Scripture half asleep, with his eyes half closed, or his mind preoccupied with prejudices. In order to see and find all doctrines of faith in Scripture, it is necessary not only to read the sacred pages, but also to seek and search them, keeping the mind free from all prejudices and open to every ray of light emanating from them. Therefore Christ Himself does not only say: "Read the Scriptures," but: "Search the Scriptures" (ἐρευνᾶτε τὰς γραφάς), "for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me," John 5:39. This fact does not give any one any support for assuming that Scripture contains articles of faith which are not clearly and unmistakably revealed. The clarity and perspicuity of Scripture make it possible for any one to understand any book of the Bible; nevertheless, the Bible student must read carefully, search earnestly, be free from prejudice, be open-minded and receptive to the truth. Therefore the apostle wrote: "But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should shine unto them," 2 Cor. 4:3, 4. Is it not shocking when people ascribe to the alleged obscurity and ambiguity of the Scriptures what is merely the result of human blindness and malice or at any rate of human weakness?

Whatever is not "clearly and unmistakably" revealed in Scripture is not revealed at all. To maintain that certain doctrines of

faith are indeed revealed in Scripture but not in clear, understandable words is nothing else than a denial of God's wisdom and goodness and blasphemy against God or a denial of the divine origin of Holy Writ. *Tertium non datur.*

When our opponents set up as an argument for the support of their theory of open questions the principle that some doctrines of faith, that of Sunday, for instance, are not clearly and unmistakably revealed in Scripture, they give evidence of an irreconcilable difference in their theology and that of our Evangelical Lutheran Church. For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in her whole theology stands upon the principle that Scripture is clear and plain in all doctrines of faith. Therefore she lets Scripture speak for itself and judges doctrines by the clear Word of God. Our opponents, however, proceed from the principle that Scripture is obscure and easily misunderstood also in doctrines of faith and, consequently, let their own judgment decide one way or the other.

This is an error of far-reaching, ruinous consequences. We know with what detrimental effect the Papacy has insisted on the principle that Scripture is obscure and difficult to understand. We also know how the Reformed Church has applied this principle to the clear words of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The Reformed attitude demonstrates that our opponents gain nothing by maintaining that they do not count the doctrine of Baptism and the Lord's Supper among the open questions because they are clearly and unmistakably revealed in God's Word. For if we accept as true that Scripture contains doctrines of faith, *e. g.*, the doctrine of Sunday, which are not clearly and unmistakably revealed, we have destroyed a pillar of revelation, whose ruin will eventually involve the collapse of the whole structure. If men do not want to bring about this ruin, — and certainly some of our opponents do not desire it, — there is only one course for them to pursue, *i. e.*, to admit that Scripture is plain and clear in all doctrines of faith and to agree that everything which is clearly and unmistakably revealed in Scripture can be proved from its chapters either in a brief statement or in a more or less elaborate essay or after solving some existing difficulties. The Arminians are a further example of the ruin caused by this false principle. This is what Calvoer says of them: "They claim that no one is bound to believe anything outside of that which is plainly written in so many words in Scripture or that can be deduced and proved from the words of the Bible according to the laws of logic and so be grasped with the hands, as it were, as, for example, the sequence 'It runs; therefore it moves.' Consequently, according to their opinion, no one is bound to believe in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, in the

personal union in Christ, in the essential presence of Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion, etc., especially not, if he has scruples in regard to any of these doctrines. The following must also be added to the things which one is not obligated to believe, namely, that the Holy Ghost must be worshiped; that Christ was born of the substance of Mary; that the fathers of the Old Testament died in the hope of eternal life; that faith in Christ is one; that men are justified through the merits of Christ; that Christ was not bound to be obedient; that faith is received through the merits of Christ; that children can be regenerated; that there is original sin; that sins flowing out of original sin are essentially sin; that the death which God pronounced upon Adam was at the same time eternal death; that God is omnipresent, omniscient; that concupiscence belongs to the sins for whose forgiveness we ask in the Lord's Prayer; that man cannot free himself from sin; that the government may shed blood; that the Decalog demands everything that is to be done, even self-denial, taking up one's cross, etc.; that it is necessary to believe in infant baptism; that Baptism is a seal of the forgiveness of sins; that the same bodies will rise from the dead. For, they believe, it is impossible to prove from Scripture that any one of these points is undeniably true and must necessarily be accepted." (*Fissuræ Zionis*. Lips. 1700. 4. p. 541 sq.)

What a long list of doctrines which they allege are not clearly and unmistakably revealed in Scripture! But the principle that Scripture contains doctrines of faith which are not clearly and unmistakably revealed and must therefore be counted as open questions inevitably leads not only to unionism and syncretism, but also to thoroughgoing skepticism and indifference in doctrine, even to the most shocking unbelief, and finally ends in the principle of the well-known scoffer who said: "Ein jeder kann nach seiner Façon selig werden." What is the language of the unionists, all the way down the line to the most rabid unbelievers, when they are confronted with the letter of God's Word? "Yes," they say, "those words are indeed written, but who will incontrovertibly prove to me that your or my exposition of this passage is the correct one? Does not all strife in Christendom arise out of human interpretation?"

The words that Luther wrote concerning the alloiosis with which Zwingli tried to support his doctrine of Holy Communion: "Beware, beware, I say, of the alloiosis; it is the devil's specter; for it finally gives us a Christ after whom I would not like to be called a Christian" must be applied to the principle that doctrines of faith are not clearly and unmistakably revealed in Scrip-

ture, for it takes the very heart out of the Bible and prevents us from believing its divine message.

We close with this prayer on our lips: May the Lord guard and defend the Church, the dearly bought communion of saints, in this new fatherland of ours against the inane theory which at the present time is a cancerous sore in the theology and the Church of our former fatherland and which, if it gained ground here, would gnaw at the root of the freshly budding tree of our American Church and cause it to wither away again! A general acceptance of this principle would indeed establish peace in the Church, but a syncretistic peace, of which the sainted Dannhauer said: *Foris εἰρήνη, intus ἐρίωνυς* (externally peace, internally discord).

Oak Glen, Ill.

ALEX WM. C. GUEBERT