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## The Endeavor after a Philosophical Faith.\*

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Not human reason, but divine revelation is the source of faith. It is the very nature of faith to accept what God has revealed. The object of saving faith is Jesus, the Lord, the Savior.

“Abraham against hope believed in hope that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb; he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus, our Lord, from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.” Rom. 4, 18—25.

Abraham’s faith is set forth in the Scriptures as an example for our faith. The source of Abraham’s faith was *not his own reason*. His reason told him that he and Sarah must remain childless. But God said, “So shall thy seed be.” That was a wonderful revelation to Abraham. Abraham believed what God had *revealed* to him; he “against hope believed in hope.” “He was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform.” God’s promise was that of the Woman’s Seed, the Savior. This promise Abraham believed. The *promised Messiah* was the object of his faith. “This was not written for his sake alone, but for us also.”

\* A Review of *Die Grundwahrheiten der christlichen Religion*, by Reinhold Seeberg. Seventh edition, 1921. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig and Erlangen. 182 pages, 5¾×8½.

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# Confessionalism of the Missouri Synod.

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## 4. QUALITY AND CHARACTER.

### *B. Relation of the Confessions to Scripture.*

It was a leading principle of the Church of the Reformation to establish matters of faith not from the writings of the fathers, but solely from the Holy Scriptures, and, consequently, not to bind consciences by doctrinal decisions of the fathers.

*Dr. Walther, at Milwaukee, Wis., August 14—19, 1884.*<sup>1)</sup>

In Bauer's *Correspondenzblatt*, Nos. 8 and 9 (1859), the statement is made that there are two tendencies in the Lutheran Church of the present time, "one of which regards the development of doctrine as finished in the sixteenth century and under no con-

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1) *Syn. Conf. Report*, 1884, p. 73.

sideration goes beyond the sixteenth century view-point; the other is a friend of progress on the basis of Holy Scripture and history, as required by the needs of the time and the guidance of God. The advocates of this tendency believe in, and strive for, a consummation of the Church, not only as regards its external form and life, but also as regards the doctrine and the manner of formulating doctrine (*Fassung*)." The writer states that the former tendency is most strikingly represented by the Missouri Synod, whose "traditional" Lutheranism is described as follows: "For all arguments from Scripture in matters that seem novel and in no way affect fundamental doctrines these people always have this answer ready: All heretics appeal to Scripture, or, That is what such and such a heretic has said; just as if Holy Scripture really were a dangerous or obscure book that cannot be understood without an authoritative interpretation, or as if *only* our fathers in the sixteenth century had held the key to the Scriptures. At times when controverted points are to be established from Scripture, one can hardly trust his eyes and ears when seeing or hearing from orthodox Lutherans, who, with all other Lutherans, accept as the leading principle the sole authority of Holy Scripture in matters of faith (cf. Formula of Concord, Summary Concept, etc., Introd.), such statements as these: 'You have to understand Scripture in the light of the fathers'; 'The church-principle takes precedence of the Scripture-principle'; 'You must trust Luther and the fathers to have had a better understanding of Scripture than yourself'; 'You can be assured of the Scriptural character of a certain doctrine only when you have the evidence that the particular doctrine is found in the writings of Luther and of the fathers; — something is believed and accepted as the true Word of God *only* when it is found in Luther and the old teachers.'[!] These and similar statements may not be meant in as bad a sense as their language imports, but they are manifestly based on a confounding of the material principle of Scripture (the analogy of faith) with theology or the measure of Scripture-knowledge attained by a certain age, and they can be explained only on this ground."

In reporting this stricture upon the confessionalism of the Missouri Synod, Walther remarks: "It is shocking indeed that an attempt can be made in Germany to impute to our Synod such principles, and that this imputation is presented not even as an inference drawn by our opponents, but as a doctrine that has been expressed in so many words by our Synod; for that is the meaning

which the author's use of quotation-marks is to convey. However, God be praised that men can get at us in no other way than by shamefully misrepresenting our teaching and by imputing to us principles which we abominate ourselves." 2)

Fifteen years later Walther reviewed the charge that the Missouri Synod had inverted the relation of faith to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions from another angle, when he wrote:—

"The assertion is made that we are in a state of theological stagnation; that our theology is nothing but a mechanical absorption by our intellect and memory of the theology of our fathers, a lifeless repristination of the same, a servile submission to the doctrinal decisions of the dogmaticians of the seventeenth century, or at any rate to those of Luther and of our Church in her confessional and other writings of a public character; and that with us *Autos epha* 3) takes the place of Scripture-proof. To those who raise this charge against us we can only say this: Come and see! Pass from parish to parish, from church to church within our organization and see whether the dominant feature in them is not a live knowledge gained by experience and matured amidst inward conflicts rather than a dead orthodoxism so-called. Attend the conferences which our pastors hold regularly in the interval between our annual synodical conventions, and see whether there is manifested at these meetings the commercial spirit which regards the pastoral office as one of the crafts for making a living—a spirit, alas! which we had occasion to observe all too frequently in the land of science; 4) or whether there is not rather seen at these meetings an active theological life and a concern to know how a servant of Christ 'ought to behave himself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God.' 5) Take part in our synodical conventions and see whether there is a tendency of *jurare in verba magistri*, 6) or whether there is not rather the spirit of Luther manifested, who said: 'Except I am overcome with testimonies from Holy Scripture or defeated by manifest, plain, and clear reasons and arguments, I cannot and will not recant anything.' Did not Krummacher, of the unionistic Reformed Church, *e. g.*, after a slight inspection of our Missouri Synod raise the charge

2) *Lehre und Wehre*, 1860, p. 61 f.

3) An appeal to the statement of some great teacher; "Ipse dixit!"

4) Germany.

5) 1 Tim. 3, 15.

6) See Note 2.

of inconsistency against us, saying that 'as regards doctrine, our Synod represents a conception of the formal principle which has quite frequently been termed the Biblicism<sup>7)</sup> of the Reformed'?<sup>8)</sup> We think a member of the unionistic Reformed Church could hardly have accorded us a greater encomium than this. For if faithful adherence to the Scripture-principle, which the Reformed Church falsely claims for itself, is a fact and reality with us, we are true Protestants, true Lutherans.

"Now it is indeed a fact that our publications hitherto have been characterized by continuous citations from the older orthodox teachers of our Church in support of our own theses. This has indeed created the impression that our theology lacks independence and is dogmatical traditionalism and lifeless repristination. But it is simply owing to the conditions which confronted us at the beginning, and which still confront us, that we had to make our [theological] *début* in this manner. We regret that we were denied the inestimable advantage which our fathers had, of battling against the enemies of our Church surrounded by a cloud of Lutheran witnesses. On the contrary, the very men who lay claim to the Lutheran name with us were our fiercest opponents, and bent on denying our claim that our doctrine is that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. When we Lutherans of America once more unfurled the good old banner of our Church and rallied around it in close formation, while all around us Zwinglianism, Schwaermerism,<sup>9)</sup> and Rationalism were sailing under a Lutheran flag, the cry went up at once: Another sect! Some cried: You are headed towards Rome! others declared: You are unionists! still others: You are independentists! You are pietists, fanatics, Donatists, Calvinists, — who could repeat the names of all the sects that were said to have risen again in us? To be brief, we were said to be anything and everything except what we ourselves declared that we wished to be: champions of the doctrine of the Reformation, *Lutherans*. Under these circumstances, what could we do, what

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7) "Scripturarismus."

8) *Deutsches Leben in Nordamerika*. Reiseeindrücke von H. Krummacher. Neusalz a. O. 1874, p. 103 f.

9) There is no adequate standard English term for the German "Schwaermeri." The attempted transliteration is a suggestion. The English language has adopted many terms from other languages by giving them an English termination. Why cannot this custom be followed in the present instance?

were we compelled to do, if we did not wish to be branded as a sect? As long as we were denied the character of true Lutherans, we had to appeal again and again to the previous Confessions and to the unquestionably faithful old teachers of our Church to become witnesses in our behalf. And this we did in such a manner that, unless one refused to see, he was compelled to see that we did not follow those faithful teachers of our Church blindly, but from a vital conviction, not as insipid parrots and imitators, but as their sons who were always able to say: 'I believe; therefore have I spoken.'

"True, the Confessions and their champions were our guides; but it was the Scriptures to which we suffered ourselves to be guided by them. At all times and at every point we were ultimately in a position to be able to say: 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying'; for we have read ourselves, and recognized that your teaching is the truth of God. Although the pure Confessions of our Church especially have seemed of priceless value to us, we have never submitted even to these writings as to a dogmatical law that has been imposed on us, but we have received them as an unspeakable gift of grace with glad thanksgiving toward God, because we found our own confession in them. Our American Lutheran Church has had to engage in many a severe conflict with the haughty sects of our country whom we could not meet, self-evidently, with the testimony of our fathers; and those who were witnesses of our conflicts know that the written Word of God proved a weapon to conquer with even in our feeble hands.

"By the way, those who call our theology the theology of the seventeenth century do not know us. While esteeming highly the immense labor of the great Lutheran dogmaticians of that period, still it is not really these dogmaticians to whom we have returned, but, above all, our dear Concordia and Luther, in whom we behold the man whom God has chosen to be the Moses of His Church of the New Covenant to lead His Church forth from its bondage under Antichrist in which it had become merged, by means of the cloudy and fiery pillar of the pure and unadulterated Word of God. Although rich treasures of knowledge and experience are stored in the doctrinal theologies of that period, and although we find joy and delight in studying them day and night, still they are neither our Bible nor our Confessions. On the contrary, even in these dogmaticians we observe occasionally a muddying of that

stream which burst forth in crystal purity in the sixteenth century." 10)

The same view has been consistently held by other spokesmen of the Missouri Synod. We can cite only a few striking utterances.

"It was through the ministry of the fathers in the age of the Reformation that our fathers were brought to the knowledge of the light. They recognized the old Gospel which Luther had proclaimed as the light. Their watchword was: Back to Luther; for whoever is led back to him is led back to Holy Scripture. They returned to the Scriptures and the Confessions, and inscribed on their banner these two principles: 1. Holy Scripture alone can establish articles of faith, and determine whether any teaching is true or false, light or darkness; 2. in the symbolical or confessional writings of the Lutheran Church we find the true interpretation of Scripture.—In placing the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church in the foreground they did not put them on a level with Holy Scripture. Nor did they assert two sources from which the knowledge of the light must be drawn: Holy Scripture and the Confessions. The standpoint which our fathers occupied was identical with that which the fathers in the age of the Reformation occupied." 11).

"By accepting the Confessions *because* they agree with Holy Scripture we show that we regard the Scriptures as the exclusive source of knowledge of the truth. True, we declare that the Confessions are a norm; however, we regard them only as *norma normata*, that is, as a norm which is itself regulated; while we view the Word of God as *norma normans*, the rule which dominates, defines, and regulates everything. There is no court higher than the Holy Scriptures to which an appeal could be taken from the Scriptures. We accept the Confessions of our Church solely for the reason that there is contained in these confessional writings no other doctrine than that which we have before us in the clear revelation of God's Word, or for the reason that our Symbolical Writings repeat what God Himself says in His Word." 12)

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10) *Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. 21 (1875), p. 65 ff.

11) Prof. F. Lindemann, at the Jubilee Convention at Chicago, July 10—15, 1897. *Ill. Dist. Report*, Mo. Syn., 1897, p. 30.

12) *Central Distr. Report*, Mo. Syn., 1892, p. 48 f.

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