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## Luther's Return to Wittenberg in 1522.

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The cause of the Reformation entered a most critical stage when Luther was temporarily removed from public activity. The new movement had not been subdued at Worms, as the party of the Romanists at the Diet had passionately hoped. Luther's unyielding attitude towards the one claim that was, and ever will be, essential to the Roman position — the claim of papal absolutism — had for months before April 18, 1521, baffled his cunning and powerful adversaries, and his heroic address on that day in the Diet had blasted the last hope of optimists that an amicable understanding between Luther and the papists could be reached. Then Luther, after ten days of fruitless deliberation and palavering at Worms, went into voluntary exile, deferring to the counsel of his friends. Wittenberg was momentarily without its great teacher and the reformatory movement without its guiding spirit.

Soon a state of affairs developed at the metropolis of the new faith that boded the ruin of Luther's cause. The wise and affectionate friends at Worms had succeeded in saving the Reformer's person, but they seemed unable to save the Reformer's principles, from destruction. During Luther's absence at the Wartburg, Wittenberg and the surrounding country became a seething caldron of religious fanaticism. Radicalism was being substituted for an orderly reform of the Church. To remove from simple laymen the snare of idolatry, it was thought proper to remove and smash the images of saints. To abolish the blasphemy of the Roman Mass, the Sacrament was being desecrated. Monastic vows, chiefly the vow of celibacy, were thrown to the rubbish, and men and women left the cloisters to marry. The minds of men were becoming unsettled on fundamental religious matters; unrest pervaded the civic

## Confessionalism of the Missouri Synod.

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### 4. QUALITY AND CHARACTER.

(Continued.)

#### C. Can Doctrines be Established from the Confessions?

Although our Church rejoices in the fact that it is in accord with the cloud of witnesses who are on its side, still it does not believe in Athanasius, or in Luther, or in M. Chemnitz, but it believes, teaches, and confesses, *on the basis of Scripture*, the same things which those teachers have known and confessed to be the pure, divine truth. Herein, too, lies the majesty of our Confession, as Chancellor Brueck of Electoral Saxony declared at the Diet of Augsburg; referring to the Confession which he had submitted, he said: "We know and hold that it is so thoroughly founded upon the Holy Scriptures of God and the holy Gospel, and so fully devoted to the same that the gates of hell shall prevail or maintain themselves against it as little as against the Word of God and the holy Gospel."

Nicht, weil's die Vaeter gedicht't und gemacht,  
Wird solch Bekenntnis so hoch geacht't;  
Sondern weil hier die Bibel alleine  
Ist dargelegt mit hellem Scheine,  
Weil hier das Wort des Heilands schlicht  
Und maechtig auf den Blaettern spricht.  
Hier ist nichts erdichtet und neu erfunden,  
Wie's sonst oft unter Menschen geht;  
Dass die Vaeter allein auf der Bibel stunden,  
Das ist des Bekenntnisses Majestaet.

Rev. Chr. Hochstetter, at Fisherville, Ont.,  
September 12—17, 1894.1)

Notwithstanding the great emphasis which the Missouri Synod placed on the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, its zeal and loyalty to these records of our fathers' faith has never carried it to the extreme of exalting the Confessions above the Scriptures, or even of placing them on a level with the Scriptures. "Every Lutheran admits, as does the Book of Concord itself, that our Evangelical Lutheran Confessions are human writings and, accordingly, must not be placed on a par with, but subordinated to, the Holy Scriptures. With this admission their liability to error is conceded *a priori* and *in abstracto*, and as soon as an error *in concreto* were to be clearly proved in them from Holy Scripture, such

1) *Canada Dist. Rep.*, 1894, p. 69 f.

an error could not be denied.”<sup>2)</sup> “In many ways firm adherence to the Confessions of the Church is ridiculed and scorned in our abominable times. People do not hesitate to call this adherence symbololatry, that is, idolatrous veneration of the Confessions. They say to us: ‘You Lutherans place the Confessions on a level with the Bible, yea, even above it. That is un-Lutheran. It never entered even Luther’s mind to lay down a law to which everybody had to submit.’ However, those who raise this charge against us know very well that we place the Confessions neither on a level with, much less above, the Bible; nor do we assert that the Confessions are a law imposed on Lutherans. They are driven to foist this untruth upon us by their disinclination to accept the Confessions, which hinder them from doing with Scripture as they please and yet maintaining the reputation of good Lutherans.”<sup>3)</sup>

Accordingly, the Missouri Synod has rejected the view that the Confessions are inspired. In criticizing the confessional reservation of the Iowa Synod at that time, Walther wrote: “We are being asked: Do you Missourians not lift the Confessions almost to an equality with the Holy Scriptures? We answer simply: No. We are well aware that even a George Mylius<sup>4)</sup> and a Leonhard Hutter<sup>5)</sup> ascribed to the Confessions a ‘mediate inspiration,’ and that later theologians, following in their wake, have called the Confessions ‘divine books.’ But no matter how these statements may be interpreted and limited, we regard them as extremely dangerous, because they lower the majesty of the writings of the apostles and prophets; yea, they are modes of speech that actually lead to symbololatry.”<sup>6)</sup> In his annotated edition of *Baier’s Compend* Walther reproduces the kindly criticism of Hollaz: “In his *Explanation of the Augsburg Confession*, p. 2, G. Mylius says: ‘Inasmuch as the Augsburg Confession rests on the very firm foundation of the Holy Scriptures, we may with very good right, and we ought to, call it divinely inspired.’ Dr. Hutter in his *Explanation of the Book of Concord*, p. 1, writes: We set up as

2) *Mecklenb. Kirch.- u. Zeitbl.*, September 21, 1877; cited in *L. u. W.*, 1877, p. 332.

3) *Northwest. Dist. Rep.*, 1876, p. 28. *Comp. Canada Dist. Rep.*, 1894, p. 67: “There is no doubt that in the true Church Christ alone is Master, and His Word alone may prevail. Nor do we place the Confessions on a level with the Bible,” etc.; also *Canada Dist. Rep.*, 1879, p. 11.

4) Prof. of theol. at Wittenberg; † 1607.

5) *Ditto*; † 1616.

6) *Der Lutheraner*, 1867, p. 5.

the primary author of the Book of Concord, or its producing master (*aitios kyrios*), not any one man, whether theologian or statesman, but God the Holy Ghost Himself, the Fountainhead and Giver of every good gift, so much so that we do not hesitate in the least to call it theopneustic, divinely inspired. Answer: . . . In a wider sense the aforementioned theologians call the confessional books mediately inspired by God . . . 1. by reason of their subject-matter; . . . 2. by reason of their mediate illumination." (*Exam. Proleg.* II, 9. 27, p. 58.) Walther adds: "Schelwig<sup>7)</sup> and J. G. Neumann<sup>8)</sup> contend likewise that the confessional books may be called divinely inspired. Loescher<sup>9)</sup> (see *Unschuld. Nachrr.* 1707, p. 117; 1710), Carpzov,<sup>10)</sup> and others rightly dissent from him."<sup>11)</sup>

A practical consequence of this view of the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church is the refusal of the Missouri Synod to admit these writings as principles of theological knowledge. Walther quotes Carpzov's *Introduction to the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Churches* (pp. 1143—5) to this effect: "The authors of the Book of Concord do not deny that Scripture alone is the one norm by, and according to, which all dogmas must be measured and judged; . . . still they do not deny that in a way and in a certain sense even these writings are a norm. . . . *They ascribe to them more than the mere quality of witnesses.*" How is this statement, which seems dangerously to amplify the dogmatic value and dignity of the Confessions, to be understood? Thus: "When the Symbolical Book is called a *norm* and model (*norma et forma*) of doctrine, this is understood only relatively (*nonnisi secundum quid*), on account of a certain analogy, namely, an external one, which consists in this, that something may be judged and estimated also according to this rule, although it is not the underlying principle of what is being judged and estimated. And this happens when a question is raised, not so much concerning the truth of a certain teaching, as rather regarding its reception, vigorous assertion, and approbation by a certain church; for instance, whether the Flacian dogma regarding original sin was ever received and approved by the Lutheran Church; whether the teaching of Flacius agrees with the teaching that was propagated and approved by the

7) A Lutheran theologian and opponent of Spener at Danzig; † 1715.

8) Prof. of theol. at Wittenberg; † 1709.

9) Lutheran Superintendent at Dresden; † 1749.

10) Prof. of theol. at Leipzig; † 1699.

11) *Baieri Comp. theol. pos.; Proleg.*, 140 f.

Lutheran Church from the beginning of the Reformation. Thus, then, the Symbolical Book is called a norm, not of faith itself, but of the profession of faith; not of the entire faith, but only as regards certain controverted articles; and that, only in as far as the controversy still endures in certain churches. . . . And so our theologians have not detracted aught from the norm of our doctrine so called in the absolute sense, nor have they placed the Symbolical Book on a level with it. But they have attributed also to their Symbolical Book only such properties as are required by the very nature and reason for having a symbolical writing, and have not gone to either extreme in this matter. For, of course, 1. they did not only wish to lay down their testimony regarding their manner of apprehending the doctrine and faith, and how they were publicly teaching the same as drawn from the Word of God, but over and above this they wanted 2. to fix bounds and limits in our churches for speaking and professing these matters, within which chiefly those who teach must abide; and 3. they also wished to *supply and set up a norm according to which judgment could be passed on the writings of others, not whether they were true or false (for on that point the decision must be rendered from Scripture alone), but whether they were in harmony with the doctrine which had been received from the beginning and had been handed down in the Lutheran Church.* By this means 4. simple believers were to be kept from spurious writings of others that disturb the purity of the doctrine once received, and 5. the sacred deposit of Luther's teaching was to be handed on in this way to their distant posterity. *Comp.*, p. 638." <sup>12)</sup> Furthermore, Walther appropriates this distinction from G. Walch's *Introduction to the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church*, pp. 934—6: "A *primary* norm is anything that by itself, that is, by its own and proper quality, possesses the force of a norm; however, a *secondary* norm is anything that is endowed with the quality of a norm, not by itself, but by the authority of Holy Scripture and by its agreement with the same, and hence depends on a primary norm. . . . Others who do not like the distinctions so far enumerated by our theologians distinguish between a norm for rendering a *decision* and a norm for *differentiation (normam decisionis et discretionis)*. The former is to be the self-authenticating and quite infallible principle in the decision of which either party to a controversy must acquiesce;

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12) *Baieri Comp.*, l. c., 139 f.

however, *the latter*, or the norm for differentiation, while it does not decide a controverted matter, still it sets off the orthodox from the heterodox, and shows which holds to the pure doctrine. . . . Wernsdorf thinks that the symbolical writings might be called *norma cognitionis*, a norm for knowledge, so that they would be a kind of principle by the operation of which we are to attain to the knowledge of certain truths, but it seems that this distinction must be accorded solely to Scripture as the norm. . . . If any one reflects on these matters, he will easily understand that the symbolical writings are to be called *norma cognitionis*, a norm for knowledge, whenever reference is made, not to knowledge of the truth itself and of its foundation, but to knowledge of how to profess the truth. Symbols are a *norma cognitionis* in as far as it can be seen from them which teachings are peculiar to a certain church. Accordingly, when the question is whether this or that doctrine is *Lutheran*, this must be ascertained from the symbolical writings, and for such knowledge these writings are the norm. However, when the question is whether this or that doctrine is *true* or *false*, that certainly must not be ascertained from the symbolical writings as the norm, but from Holy Scripture." 13)

Walther clinches his argument on this point with Theses 5—8 from Luther's *Disputation on the Authority of the Church* in July, 1530: "The Christian Church has not the authority of a judge or sovereign, to ratify articles of faith or good works, or the Gospels and Holy Writ; it has never yet done this, nor will it ever do so. However, the Christian Church, on the contrary, is ratified by the Gospel and the Holy Scriptures as by its judge and sovereign. The Christian Church ratifies the Gospel and the Holy Scripture like a liege, just as a servant displays his lord's colors and coat of arms. For this is certain: No one has authority to set up articles of faith—who has not the authority to promise and bestow the life to come and the life that now is." 14)

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13) *Baieri Comp., l. c.*

14) St. L. Ed. XIX, 958 f. The translation in the St. Louis edition is more literal, but the translation in Walch is smoother and more vigorous. —These theses, which Luther proposed to "maintain against the whole school of Satan," were sent to Augsburg during the Diet, together with Luther's missive to Cardinal Albert of Mayence.

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