

THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

1073A

VOL. XI.

JANUARY, 1907.

No. 1.

THE OLD LUTHERAN DOCTRINE OF FREE-WILL IN THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION.

(Concluded.)

To His Church the Holy One has given the *correct means of being constituted and made one*: "I have given them *Thy Word* and I pray for them, not only for them, but also for all who *by their Word* believe on me, that they may be one," John 17. Thus the Church is made, constituted, and forever kept together by the Word, not by a confession. This Church — and this only — can make a true confession of what constitutes her. That is the psychological order. We presume that Dr. Richard is able to give from memory a correct Lutheran definition of the Church, but not being of it he stumbles when he steps up to her from a different direction — here from the relation of Church and doctrine. We may mark his way of proving the prevalence of free-will by the confessions as unacknowledged rationalism. Let us hang it low, that he who runs may read. We quote Dr. Richard: "It is in part" — what are the remains? — "with the hope of making at least a small contribution to the inculcation of the principles stated above" (that Lutherans must be clocks never striking and ticking alike) "that we now advance to the discussion of the subject placed at the head of this article (The Old Lutheran Doctrine of Free-will), and we begin with the year 1530, for prior to that time there was no Lutheran Church, but only Lutherans, who were united in opposition to the teaching of the Roman Catholic

DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S TREATISE OF CONFESSION,
WHETHER THE POPE HAVE POWER
TO ENJOIN SAME.

PART SECOND.

36. I. Here we ask the pope and all his followers whence they have authority to impose confession on all Christians, and where God has commanded it. Come forth, dear friends, show document and seal of your office and render account, as St. Peter has bidden you when he said [1 Pet. 3, 15]: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." They adduce, first, the saying of Christ, Matt. 8, 4, when He purified the leper and said: "Go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." Here, they say, Christ has commanded us to show ourselves to the priest, that is, we are to confess our sins secretly to the priest. And although this is such a foolish gloss that it ought to be ridiculed rather than refuted, we will serve them and take their error from them. But they must not become angry because the sheep begin to teach the shepherd, the disciples the master, the subjects their superiors. The perverted state of affairs is their fault, for they are totally perverted and wrong. If a blind man regained his eyesight and his leader remained blind, I hope the leader would justly renounce his honor and mastership or be left as a senseless fool. Neither is this inversion a new thing. David (Ps. 119, 98—100) says: "Thou

through Thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Thy precepts."

37. It is no wonder that the foolish who cling to God's Word become wise, and that the wise who cling to human laws become fools; therefore, the reason why we know more than the pope, bishops, cardinals, priests, and monks is this: they pass God's Word, the light of all creatures, by and crawl after the devil into human ordinances, and there is nothing but darkness. For this reason God says Hos. 4, 6 to the same perverse men: "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me." Thus it happens according to Ps. 18, 26: "With the froward" (Vulgate: *per-verso*) "Thou wilt show Thyself froward" (Vulgate: *per-verteris*).

38. II. But is it honest, to say nothing of Christianity, to build up so much misery on such an impious foundation? to impose such a tax, to cause so much terror, to practice such tyranny, such iniquity and violence? O pope, how do thy and thy followers' merits look! In the first place, you refuse to be coerced by a dark passage of Scripture, you demand that everything that is to constrain you be clear and expressed in non-figurative language, and even then you refuse to be bound by it. Why, then, do you urge us to confession with this verse which contains not a word of confession, not a word of sins, but merely says: the one purified is to show himself to the priest? Moreover, that same priest was a priest of Moses according to the old covenant and had no power to forgive sins. This power has been given solely to the new covenant together with the keys; the apostles might more properly have absolved him.

39. If you say he meant to signify confession, you must prove the signification. Another man might take it to signify something else. Figures of speech and interpretations prove

nothing, says St. Augustine. I, too, will give an interpretation that shall come nearer the point than yours, namely: There is no doubt that all figures and the entire law of Moses point to Christ, as St. Paul says Rom. 3, 21. 22. 25. Thus the priest signifies Christ, who alone is priest for us all. Now when we are purified by faith in Him, it is our duty to show ourselves to Him, that is, to confess that we in ourselves are altogether sinful, and just only by His grace. Behold, the thanks, praise, honor, and confession are signified by this allegory in which all men without exception are included: for they are all sinners before God and justified only through Christ. This is the true interpretation that emphasizes faith, not good works, Christ and not man.

40. III. So this verse has been done away with. In the second place, they bring forward the saying of Solomon, Prov. 27, 23: "Be thou diligent to know the state" (Vulgate: *vultum* = face) "of thy flocks." This they construe into a searching of the consciences that knows no end or rest; and thus they comment: *vultus* means conscience. Is that not wonderful Latin and German? *Vultus* means the heart and "to know" means to hear confession. But how, if some one would not confess or would not confess all, as it frequently happens, how will you know his *vultus*? You needs must know it if you are to satisfy the law.

41. It must be a queer God who would command things to you that are not in your power, but depend on the hidden will of another. Where has He given more such laws? Would it not be sensible, inasmuch as we have so boldly assumed the power to comment, if we inverted the verse as follows: "O flock, be thou diligent to let thy face be known," in order that the verse may aim no longer at us, but at the laity? Just as above the leper was bound to show himself, while the priest was not commanded to view all lepers, which would have been a difficult matter. Behold, on such flimsy foundations rests confession and all popery, and yet they refuse to let anyone know Scripture except themselves, thinking that their cause rests on

stronger pillars than the heavens. But they do this in order that no one may discover their coarse lies and deception. Falsehood cannot bear the light, therefore it desires to speak alone and brooks no contradiction.

42. IV. Neither are they cautious enough to consider that that confession is, as they themselves teach, a sacrament of the New Testament, that in the Old Testament there was no confession, and that Solomon himself neither did nor could confess, as no keys were given. Therefore let us hear the genuine interpretation of this verse. Solomon teaches here that each one is to take care of his worldly goods and be satisfied with them, taking heed not to have anything belonging to his neighbor, since life is short. Therefore each one is to be content and not to slave and hoard as if he would live here forever. We read as follows (Prov. 27, 23 sqq.): "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds. For riches are not forever: and doth the crown endure to every generation? The hay appeareth and the tender grass showeth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered." (That is, do not worry, do not rob, be content; for grass and hay grows every day, the field is not covered, why should you worry?) "The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field" (that is, sell them and with the money pay your wages, not in order to build great houses, but to till the field). "And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household and for the maintenance for thy maidens" (that is, produce milk, butter, and cheese, eat of it, sell it, and thus procure your maintenance).

43. Behold, thus Solomon warns us against avarice and worry and teaches us how to enjoy in a godly manner temporal goods, and we have made a confession of it! But when he speaks of the *vultus* of the flock, he means its general form and appearance. For every man knows his flock from that of another by the appearance of his flock whether it is red, white, small, large, many, or few. Such external form the Hebrew language calls "*face*," as opposed to the heart, and says that

God sees and judges by the heart and not by outward appearance, as man sees and judges [1 Sam. 16, 7].

44. V. The third passage is that of James the apostle (James 5, 16), and reads as follows: "Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." This brings us to the New Testament. And, indeed, confession and sin is here touched upon, for he says: "Confess your faults." But he assigns us a strange confessor, namely, *alter-utrum*; the pope and his adherents do not like him at all. *Alter-utrum* means one to the other, and means us all. Consequently, the confessors must confess to the laity, and they are not the only priests, bishops, and pope, but every Christian is pope, bishop, and priest, and the pope must confess to him. Before they admit that, they give up this verse and concede that it does not speak of secret confession. And that is the truth, although they at first adduced this passage.

45. For James means this: A man who has offended God, must accuse himself before Him and confess his sins, and they shall be forgiven him; as David says Ps. 32, 6: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Just so every one ought to humble himself before his neighbor, especially if he has offended him, and to confess his sin and not to excuse himself insolently. For this does not bring peace, but is a hindrance in prayer. This James would prevent by saying: "Pray one for another, that ye may be healed." [James 5, 16.] This you cannot do unless you forgive each other, as the Lord's Prayer teaches: "Forgive us as we forgive," etc. [Matt. 6, 12.] But you cannot forgive, unless one confesses his sins to the other where-with he has offended him. Thus each one must be willing to take the fault upon himself, so that by all means peace may be maintained and prayer not impeded. Thus Christ teaches us (Matt. 5, 23, 24) to reconcile ourselves to our neighbor before bringing the gift to the altar.

46. VI. The fourth and main passage is John 20, 22, 23, where Christ breathed on His disciples and says: "Receive ye

the Holy Ghost: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." The victory is won. Here they say: Why, if we are to remit sins, we must know them. But how can we know them unless they are told us? Here let us see what misery and sweat they bring upon themselves by this verse. If there is a verse in the Bible opposed to secret confession, it is this very one.

47. (First.) This verse says nothing of secret confession; moreover, it says nothing of public confession. And if it obliged us to confess in secret, it would oblige us to confess in public all our sins. For the pope might here just as well argue and say: If I am to remit, you must confess; but now I will not remit secretly, but publicly, and you must confess publicly. Thus our confessing would be tied fast to his remitting; and wherever he went with his remitting, our appended confession must follow. This would give him the power to reveal the secrets of all hearts, as if he were God Himself, who has reserved unto Himself to know the secrets of the hearts. But if this verse does not demand public confession, neither does it demand secret confession. Therefore it is not true that in this verse they are given authority to demand and dogmatize confession, and confession is not tied to their remission, but the contrary is true.

48. Remission is tied to confession, and remission must follow and be guided by confession. If I desire to confess secretly, you are bound to remit secretly. If I desire to confess publicly, you are bound to remit publicly. My confession is not arbitrary with you, but with me. Moreover, absolution is my privilege, not yours. I have the right and the liberty to demand it; you have no right to deny it, but are bound and forced to grant it. Thus Christ has made servants of His officers; while you invert the thing and wish to make me a servant, retaining for yourself the right and authority over my confession and absolution. Behold, this is all wrong.

49. VII. Consider if the following is not the meaning of the text. It does not say: Come and confess and go your

way, as a command to confess their sins, but: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." The words contend for no more than that you are bound to remit sins to all that desire it, and you are a servant set for this purpose. But the confessant is left free and is promised absolution, so that he may use it when and how and where he chooses. If he is not willing, you are not to urge him, for no man can give or ought to give to any one without his thank and willingness. But absolution is a great gift of God. In the same manner we cannot and ought not to force anyone to believe, but can only present the Gospel earnestly and admonish every one to believe it, allowing him to choose freely whether to accept it or not. All sacraments must be free to everyone. Whosoever will not be baptized, let him go without it. Whosoever will not receive the sacrament (communion) is well within his rights. Similarly, whosoever will not confess has the right before God to refuse. Thus, you see they have forced this text to make confession compulsory, when this very text makes it free. On the other hand, they have made remission of sins free and arbitrary to themselves, when this very passage compels them to absolve. What misery must not ensue from such impious perversion of the Scripture of God, when all the world is mocked and deceived with lies and the vain fancies of men.

50. VIII. (Secondly.) But is it not a shame that such a burden has been imposed upon all mankind, although not a single clear passage can be brought forward in support of all this ado? They must make shift with such forced glosses and flimsy pretenses in such a lousy and beggarly manner, although Christ has so often and so clearly explained Baptism and Holy Communion and all things which He requires of us. And this matter of secret confession, almost the greatest thing in Christendom, is not to have a single clear text? And what shall we do for the holy fathers in the desert who do not confess, do not receive the sacrament, and know nothing of the law of the pope?

51. Moreover, in Ambrosius, Augustine, Jerome, and their compeers among the fathers nothing is found written on

this subject; which would be a strange thing considering that they have written so abundantly on all other topics of Christian religion. Someone has written a book under the name of St. Augustine *De Vera et Falsa Poenitentia*, which is confidently adduced in canonical law and sentences, though it belongs less to St. Augustine than to me and you. In one place he even introduced Augustine by name, and he was such a grossly ignorant fellow that he does not hesitate to propose the saying of Christ [Matt. 10, 32]: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" as a reason for secret confession, and much more of the same kind. Well, it is a book for the pope and the papists, who are worth nothing better. An ass must not eat figs, but thistles. But it has done much harm and greatly strengthened confession, so that I fear its author lies in the lowest depth of hell, unless he repented earnestly.

52. IX. (Thirdly.) Moreover, they contradict each other. They say: If I am to remit or retain sins, I must know them. Those that I do not know I can neither remit nor retain, therefore we must have confession. Here I ask, What does the pope mean when he proclaims in his bulls by his apostles that he remits all sins, pain, and guilt by name, forgotten and unconscious sins, and leads the soul instantaneously¹⁾ to heaven out of hell, out of purgatory and out of all misfortune; and he cannot err as he says. One of you must lie and deceive; the pope or you. If unconscious and forgotten sins can be remitted, then there is no urgent proof in what you say: I cannot remit sins, unless I know them, and you have lost this text and confession.

53. But if your theory holds good, then the pope mocks and deceives the whole world with his remission and his leading to heaven. What will you say now? Behold, this is the result of making a dogma of human trash, and then trying to

1) *von Mund auf*, that is, as soon as he opens his mouth. See Grimm, *Woerterbuch*, art. *Mund*, sub 12.

strengthen it by divine Scripture. You cannot braid a beard of straw for Scripture. It quickly puts to shame all those who attempt to defile and pollute it, as the wise man says. Therefore I conclude in regard to both of you: You lie and the pope deceives, and neither of you is a safe guide. You enforce confession with false glosses, and the pope cannot remit unconscious and forgotten sins, and the truth remains and passes between you both, namely: you need know and remit only those sins that are confessed to you. Those that are not confessed to you, you need neither know nor remit.

54. X. (Fourthly.) Therefore it is not only wrong, but also a very foolish assertion when they say: Sins cannot be remitted unless they are made known to them. For this would be driving us to do an impossible thing, inasmuch as no man can know all his sins. The larger portion is reserved for God, and only of the smaller number do we become conscious, as the 19th Psalm, v. 13, says: "Who can understand his errors?" And Ps. 40, 13: "For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me."

55. But if you say: We must confess those that we know after diligent introspection, I ask: How will you prove that? And where will you place the limit in order that so many simple men may know how far they must search themselves, and what sins they must confess or not confess? Who shall tell to everyone what is a venial and what a mortal sin when no doctor, no father, no saint has ever found or known or taught it? And you undertake to drive the whole multitude of the world into such uncertain labor that they never know how they stand. Do you think that Christ's Word teaches the hearts thus to sway like reeds and veer like the winds? Christ claims to be, and is called, a firm rock [Matt. 16, 18; 1 Cor. 10, 4], so that in His Word everyone may know how he stands, not swaying hither and thither as the billows on the sea that know no rest.

56. XI. But some one might say: Granted that remitting sins is not arbitrary with the priest, but that he is bound to remit whenever he is requested: what have you to say in regard to the retaining of sins? That, surely, does not rest with the sinner; he may consent or not, the priest may retain his sins and excommunicate him. I answer: I have said before that all words of retention and remission of sins in the Gospel apply no farther than to public excommunication and absolution, now called the ban. As Christ Himself, Matt. 18, 15—18, applies excommunication and absolution to such sinners as were first admonished privately, then rebuked in the presence of witnesses, and lastly accused and convicted before the multitude and congregation. This wholesome custom has been entirely lost through the fault of our tyrants and deceivers, pope and bishops with their scourgers and executioners, the officials. In these public sins it is true that the congregation or the minister, as representative of the congregation, has authority to bind the sinner even against his will, and must absolve him when he desires it. But from this it does not follow that they may search out the sin, as they wish to do. On the contrary, it follows that here also the public sin must first be exposed and known to all.

57. XII. But on the score of secret sins no one can be admonished or rebuked privately, let alone being accused and convicted publicly. Therefore there is no authority in the church to remit or retain them, but each one is free to choose whether he will admonish, rebuke, and accuse himself and confess. There is a great difference between confessing sins, and retaining or remitting sins. Christ's words deal neither with denying nor confessing, but with the retention and remission of sins that are publicly denied or confessed. Now, in order to create trouble for themselves, they would interpret confession as meaning retention. In this fashion they might urge us and reason us into committing sins, in order that they have something to retain and remit. For the reasoning is just as valid, if I argue thus: If I am to retain and remit, there

must be sin; how else can I remit or retain? Just as they regard it as good reasoning to say: If I am to retain or remit, the sin must be confessed. Consequently, as we cannot reason thus: You must retain or remit; therefore men ought to commit sin, so we cannot reason thus: You must retain or remit; therefore men ought to confess. But, contrariwise, this is valid reasoning: If anyone has committed a sin, you may retain or remit it unto him. Similarly: If anyone has confessed and revealed his sin, you may retain or remit it unto him. This is the purport of Christ's words, and nothing more.

58. XIII. My only contention is this, that confession is not to be demanded, but to be accepted. The keys must deal with sins and not with the heart and conscience; they are not to lock or unlock hearts and consciences, but heaven. They are not called keys of hearts or keys of consciences, but keys of heaven.

59. Christ did not say to Peter: I will give thee the keys of the hearts or consciences; those keys He has retained for Himself till the day of judgment as St. Paul says, Rom. 2, 16 and 1 Cor. 4, 5. But thus He says: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven," etc. And John 20 He says not: Whosoever heart ye unlock shall be unlocked; whosoever heart ye lock shall be locked, but: "Whosoever sins ye retain, they shall be retained," etc. Let sins come before you, bind or loose; you are not called upon to seek them or wrest them from men. A secular judge is also in duty bound to punish the wicked and to free the just; but that does not oblige him to know or search out all secret misdoings, but only that which comes to his notice.

60. XIV. And what need is there of so many words? If loosening and binding is so completely in their power that no sin can be forgiven without their absolution, what becomes of those they bind unjustly, who before God are surely loosed?

61. On the other hand, what does it avail those whose sins they do not and will not bind, or if they publicly remit sins which before God are retained? Therefore, does this text of

John necessarily prove that everything is loosed that they loose, and bound what they bind, as the pope and the bishops have so often presumptuously affirmed? They drivel, that whatsoever they bind is bound; and whatsoever they loose is loosed, though admitting that they often loose that which is not loose, and bind what is not bound. Hence we will rest content with this, that there are two ways of making sins known: one, by a public conviction through witnesses before the congregation, which Christ teaches Matt. 18, 15—18; this is necessary and sufficient for the keys and for ecclesiastical authority; the second comes about voluntarily and freely, without accusation and compulsion; this is the best and entirely salutary. Therefore, without being urged or compelled, it must be left to each man's free choice, and cannot be confined by human laws.

62. XV. Consequently, one must not condemn those that confess their secret sins to God alone, or to His saints, or to whomsoever they wish, and not to the priest, provided they do this in true repentance, honesty, and faith. Neither ought we to be disturbed by the terrible examples which some preachers of dreams have concocted concerning the damnation of those who had not confessed. Their purpose is to frighten the people and to drive them into their money-net. St. Paul has foretold all this, that the Antichrist would deceive the world with false signs and miracles with the help of the devil, so that now it is highly necessary to judge not according to signs, but according to the clear Scriptures of God. Abraham, Luke 16, would not grant the rich man that Lazarus, or one from the dead, be sent to his brethren, but referred them to Scripture and said [Luke 16, 29]: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." And in all Scripture not much is said about revelations made by the dead, as these examples pretend. You may be convinced that if they had to give as much in confession as they take from it, they would, so far from urging you, drive you away by force.

63. XVI. But now we come to the most serious point. Before Christ gave command to remit and retain sins, He

breathed upon them and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them," John 20, 22. 23. Here the truth is established, that no one can forgive sins except he have the Holy Ghost. For the words lie plainly before us and yield not. It avails nothing to babble that this is an article of John Huss or Wycliffe and was condemned at Constance. It is not enough to condemn; we must have an answer. And it is not sufficient to point out to us that Matt. 23, 3 we read: "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works." For that is said of preaching, an office for which Christ sent His apostles. He did not breathe upon them and did not yet give them the Holy Ghost, as He does here.

64. Now what has become of the keys of the pope? I think they must slip from his hands without his consent, and it must be seen that he most impiously wears them alone in his escutcheon; for here we clearly read that no one has the keys, except he have the Holy Ghost. Hence one ought to paint upon the pope's escutcheon—I know what—and expunge the keys. That escutcheon belongs to some one else than the pope. But on the other hand: If I am not to have remission of my sins, except the confessor have the Holy Ghost,—and no one can know this assuredly of another whether he have the Holy Ghost,—when would I become assured of my absolution and gain a quiet conscience? Things would remain as before.

65. XVII. My answer is this: I have brought up this point in order that people may see the real foundation of this thing. There is no doubt that sins are not retained or remitted except by him alone that has the Holy Ghost so surely that you and I may know it, as the words of Christ here prove. But this is no one else than the Christian Church, that is, the communion of all believers in Christ; it alone has these keys; of that there can be no doubt. And whosoever appropriates these keys for himself is a genuine unscrupulous *sacrilegus*, despoiler of churches, whether it be the pope or someone else. Of this church all men are sure that it have the Holy Ghost,

as St. Paul, following Christ, and all Scriptures abundantly prove, and as it is very briefly expressed in the Creed, where we say: I believe in the existence of a holy Christian Church. It is holy on account of the Holy Ghost, whom it surely has. Hence no man ought to accept the absolution of the pope or bishop, as if *they* were the ones who absolve. God defend us from the absolution of the pope and bishops of which the world is now full! It is the absolution of the devil.

66. But you must do as Christ says Matt. 10, 41: "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." Hence if a stone or a piece of wood could absolve me in the name of the Christian Church, I would accept it. On the other hand, if the pope were to place me into the highest choir of angels in the name of his authority, I would stop up both my ears and regard him as the greatest blasphemer. He is a servant of the keys as all other priests, and the keys belong to the Church alone. A master can allow his servant to have his coat of arms, as long as he does not claim the coat of arms to be his before the other servants and other people. Thus the Church gives the keys to the pope, and commands him to have and to use them in its name; but it does not concede them to be his property.

67. XVIII. Therefore our Creed observes this order: the article forgiveness of sins must follow the article "a holy Christian Church," and this in its turn must be preceded by: "I believe in the Holy Ghost." So that it may be known that without the Holy Ghost there is no Christian Church, and without the holy Church no forgiveness of sins. Hence it is not true that the pope have the keys. The Church alone has them, and not he; the Church alone retains and remits, and he and all priests are servants in this. From this it follows that the pope in his office is to be a servant of all servants, as he boastfully styles himself without acting up to it, so that a child in its cradle and all that have the Holy Ghost have a

better claim to the keys than he. Let this be sufficient in regard to this text.

68. Thus we have found that the pope has no authority at all to make a dogma of secret confession and to require it, and his reasons have been found false and dishonest, as St. Peter has said of him and his followers, 2 Pet. 2, 1. 3: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you who with feigned words shall make merchandise of you" (LUTHER: "shall deprive you of your money"). What are "feigned words" other than such unsound, worthless reasons of popish tyranny, wherewith he harms all men, deprives the world of its money, and leads all souls that follow him to the devil? It remains for us to explain (and you shall now hear) what *we* think of this text and of secret confession.

Fort Wayne, Ind.

W. H. KRUSE.

(*To be concluded.*)
