

8. Confessional Church Polity

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The assignment to prepare an essay on Confessional church polity covers a wide area. In order to do justice to the topic in the time allotted, I have prepared this essay in the form of short theses with the appropriate citations from the Book of Concord listed under each of the theses. This means that an exhaustive analysis of each individual thesis will not be possible. I urge readers to study carefully the citations given from the Book of Concord.

This material is prepared with the fervent prayer that it may serve in some small measure to resolve some of the problems which plague the Lutheran Church today. It is my hope that it may contribute toward that true Christian unity and concord which we seek for the churches of the Augsburg Confession.

1.

Confessional church polity must begin with a correct doctrine of the church. The church is not a visible organization or community which corresponds to Israel in the Old Testament, but it is all those who have the Holy Spirit and true faith in the heart. These persons are found wherever the Gospel is in use.

“. . . one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the *assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity* and the sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.” (AC VII p. 32)

“If we were to define the church as only an outward organization embracing both the good and the wicked, then men would not understand that the kingdom of Christ is the righteousness of the heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit . . . then too, what difference will there be between the church and the Old Testament people? Yet *Paul distinguishes the church from the Old Testament people* by the fact that the church is a spiritual people, separated from the heathen, not by civil rites, but by *being God’s true people, reborn by the Holy Spirit.*” (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 170:13,14)

“Our opponents also condemn the part of the seventh article in which we said, “for the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments . . . We are talking about *true spiritual unity*, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness before God.” (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 173:30)

2.

The church according to its proper definition is “all believers in Christ—and only believers in Christ.” This “one, holy, Christian, and Apostolic church” transcends denominational boundaries, for it is found wherever the Gospel is in use. There the Holy Spirit gathers a congregation of believers when and where it pleases God. This church is a hidden church, for it is hidden under the visible group that gathers there, and is not accessible to sight, but alone to faith. For we say, “I believe one, holy, Christian and Apostolic church.”

“. . . one holy Christian church will be and remain forever.” (AC VII p. 32)

“We are talking about true spiritual unity, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness in the heart before God.” (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 173:30)

“I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure

saints under one head, Christ. . . . It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism." (Large Catechism, Creed; p. 417:51,52)

3.

The faith which makes persons members of the "Holy Christian and Apostolic church" is true faith in Christ, which is created by the Holy Spirit through the external ministry of the word and sacraments. This ministry is both a gift and command from God, for it is only through this ministry that men are brought to eternal salvation. (John 20:19-23; Matt. 28:18-20)

"In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. . . . *Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit Who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.*" (AC, V p.31)

4.

The public exercise of the church's ministry is carried out through regularly elected and called pastors. (I Tim. 3:2,3,4,6; Tit. 1:9; I Cor. 9:14; Gal. 6:6; Acts 20:28; I Tim. 5:17,18)

"It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." (AC, XIV p. 36)

5a

Government is the regulating of activity that is carried on by prescribed means beyond specific occasions, persons, and factors. Government in the church is the organizing of the activities which are necessary in order that the Gospel be proclaimed and the sacraments administered. The need for government in the church arises from the need of the church to elect and install pastors.

The qualifications for the office demand that the persons called be examined. Who is to perform these acts? Even in the case of election by the whole congregation the need for some regulatory restrictions is obvious. Young children must be excluded. This means that it is necessary to establish the age of majority. Passing judgment upon the doctrine and teaching of the person called can by no means be alone by every adult. The individual congregation is not independent and self-sufficient. (I Cor. 14) The "evangelical doctrine" is not the concern of the individual congregation alone. How is this to be carried out with other congregations who likewise confess the "evangelical doctrine"?

"It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call." (AC, XIV p. 36)

5.b

Preparation for the pastoral office demands study. Therefore there must be teachers of theology. Who is to teach? When there is a conflict between a congregation and a pastor regarding doctrine, shall the congregation's verdict be accepted without further investigation? In that case the very person who has been called to proclaim and teach the "evangelical doctrine" would be eliminated. These and many other questions make church government a necessity. Organization with regulations governing the carrying out of the tasks of the church are needed.

6.

It is necessary to distinguish between the power of the Keys and the power of jurisdiction (church government). The power of the Keys is the power to administer the sacraments, preach the Holy Gospel, absolve from, and retain, sins. The power of the Keys is of divine origin. The authority of church government, jurisdiction, is of human origin.

". . . according to the Gospel the power of Keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments." (AC XXVIII, p. 81:5)

"This power of Keys or of bishops is used and exercised only by teaching and preaching the word of God and by administering the sacraments." (AC XXVIII; p. 82:8)

"The openly wicked and despisers of the sacrament are excommunicated. We do this according to both the Gospel and the ancient canons . . . our pastors do not force those who are not ready to use the sacraments." (Ap. XI, p. 181:4)

". . . Christ bids Peter to pasture the sheep, that is, to preach the word or govern the church with the word . . . Christ gave the apostles only spiritual power, that is, the command to preach the Gospel, proclaim the forgiveness of sins, administer the sacraments, and excommunicate the godless without physical violence." (Tractate, p. 325:30,31)

"The Gospel requires those who preside over the churches that *they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and in addition exercise jurisdiction*, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent." (Tractate, p. 330:10)

7.

Church government belongs to the orders of creation. It is a matter of order in the church, and does not have a divine command, for the church, properly speaking, is not a visible organization, but a spiritual fellowship of faith in the heart and the Holy Spirit.

". . . One holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. (rightly administered) (AC VII p. 32)

"The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, however it is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts." (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 169:5)

"If we were to define the church as only an outward organization embracing both the good and the wicked, then men would not understand that the kingdom of Christ is the righteousness of the heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . . Then, too, what difference will there be between the church and the Old Testament people? Yet Paul distinguished the church from the Old Testament people, separated from the heathen, not by civil rites, but by being God's true people, reborn by the Holy Spirit." (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 170:13,14)

"Our opponents also condemn the part of the seventh article (AC VII) in which we said, "For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. . . . We are talking about the *true spiritual unity*, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness in the heart before God." (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 173:30)

". . . the various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy . . . were created by human authority." (Ap. XIV, p. 214:1)

8.

A distinction must be made between the direct call of the prophets and apostles, and a call extended through men. When the Augsburg Confession teaches that no one is to preach or teach publicly in the church without a "regular call", it refers to a call extended through men, not a direct call as in the case of the prophets and apostles. Inasmuch as the call is extended by God through the election of men it is a divine call. However, since the office has been conferred mediately through the election of men, a person called can also be removed from such office by the action of those who elected him in the first place.

". . . we have given frequent testimony . . . to our deep desire to maintain the church polity and the various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, although they were created by human authority." (Ap. XIV; p. 214:1)

"If the bishops were true bishops and were concerned about the church

and the Gospel, they might be permitted (for the sake of love and unity, but not of necessity) to ordain and confirm us and our preachers . . ." (SA X, p. 314:1)

9.

The right to call and install men into the public office is not limited to the local congregation individually. Congregations of a larger group have the right to delegate to the group the calling or election of men to serve in various capacities such as, superiors to whom is delegated the right of visitation, e.g. bishops, District Presidents, etc. This also includes the right to elect and call men as theological professors. The congregations' right to call men for such positions carries with it the obligation to determine whether the person chosen is qualified to watch over what he teaches and to depose him if he openly contradicts the "true doctrine." (See above citations)

10.

It is the duty of church government to seek to order matters in such a manner that the Gospel is proclaimed and spread, that members of the church live under the discipline of the words of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20), and that the unity of the church be preserved against those demonic forces that threaten to destroy Christian unity. The threats to unity are; a lack of love for one another, pride over against other Christians, self-righteousness, failure to be concerned about the brother and his relationship to God, prejudice against other people, the erosion of the life of the Spirit in the members by following a way of life that is obviously contrary to the will of God, and *false doctrine*.

" . . . according to the Gospel the power of Keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments." (Ap. XIV; p. 214:1)

"This power of Keys or of bishops is used and exercised only by teaching and preaching the word of God and by administering the sacraments." (AC XXVIII; p. 81:5,8)

" . . . it is the office of the bishop to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine, and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel . . . all this is to be done not by human power but by God's word alone . . . on the other hand if they teach or institute anything that is contrary to the Gospel, we have God's command not to be obedient in such cases, for Christ says in Matt. 7:15: "Beware of false Prophets." (AC XVIII; p. 84:21)

"Christ bids Peter to pasture the sheep, that is, to preach the word or govern the church with the word." " . . . Christ gave the apostles only spiritual power, that is the command to preach the Gospel, *proclaim the forgiveness of sins, administer the sacraments, and excommunicate the godless without physical violence.*" (Tractate: p. 325:30)

11.

False doctrine brings discord and scandalous division into the church and thereby impedes the course of the Gospel. It is therefore the duty of church government to order things in such a manner that Satan is not allowed to imperil the souls of men by the seeds of false doctrine.

" . . . the foe of mankind bestirred himself to scatter his seed of false doctrine and discord and to bring about the destruction and scandalous division in churches and schools so that he might thereby adulterate the pure doctrine of God's word, sever the bond of Christian charity and agreement, and in this way hold back and perceptibly impede the course of the Holy Gospel." (preface to the Book of Concord p. 3)

"The weak in faith . . . will be scandalized; some will doubt if the pure doctrine can coexist among us with such divisions, . . . these controversies . . . are of such a nature that the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God . . ." (FC SD; 8ff, p. 502,503)

12.

It is the responsibility of church government and organization to preserve

the pure doctrine of the Gospel against all false teaching. By such government Christians exercise their God-given right and duty to judge doctrine and teachers.

“. . . it is the office of the bishop to preach the gospel . . . *judge doctrine and condemn doctrine* that is contrary to the Gospel . . . (AC XVIII; p. 84:21)

“Just as the church has the promise that it will always have the Holy Spirit, so it also *has the warning that there will be ungodly teachers and wolves.*” (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 172:22)

“. . . they (the bishops) neglect the state of the churches, and they do not see to it that there is proper preaching and administration of the sacraments in the churches. They admit all kinds of people to the priesthood quite indiscriminately.” (Ap. XXVIII p. 281)

“. . . all Christians ought to beware of becoming participants in the impious doctrines, blasphemies, and unjust cruelties of the pope. “Beware of false prophets.” (Matt. 7:15). (Tractate p. 327:41)

13.

Christians have the right and duty to remove from office those who teach contrary to the word of God. This is true, whether these persons hold positions of church government (jurisdiction) whether they are theological professors, pastors, or other persons who occupy the teaching offices in the church.

“. . . on the other hand, *if they (bishops) teach or institute anything contrary to the Gospel, we have God’s command not to be obedient in such cases*, for Christ says in Matt. 7:15, “Beware of false prophets.” (AC XVIII; p. 84:21)

“St. Augustine also writes in his reply to the letters of Petilian that one should not obey even regularly elected bishops if they err or if they teach or command something contrary to the Divine Holy Scriptures.” (AC XXVIII; p. 85:28)

“We . . . we have not ceased to apply our diligence to the end *that false and misleading doctrines* which were introduced into our lands . . . *might be checked.*” (Pref. p. 4)

“The ninth question of the third canon states, ‘No one shall judge the supreme see, . . . Thus he forbids a judicial examination. The latter does more harm than all punishments, for when proper judicial process has been taken away, the churches are not able to remove impious teachings and impious forms of worship, and countless souls are lost generation after generation.’” (Tractate; p. 329:28)

14.

However, Christians are to avoid creating schism in the church because they are offended by the ungodly conduct of pastors or teachers. This includes the matter or practice, provided that the practice does not involve a denial of the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures.

“Christ has also warned us in His parables on the church that we should not be offended by the personal conduct of priests or people, *we should not incite schism* as the *Donatists* wickedly did. We regard as utterly seditious those who have incited schisms because they denied to priests the right to hold property or other possessions.” (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 178:49,50)

15.

Proper judicial process is to be provided within the church for the removal of error and those who teach error. Christians are to work within the framework of that judicial procedure. Only when it fails or no longer functions may they act apart from it.

“The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and in addition *exercise jurisdiction*, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent.” . . . when the regular bishops become enemies of the Gospel and are unwilling to administer ordination,

the churches retain the right to ordain for themselves." (Tractate: p. 330,331: 60,66,67)

"The ninth question of the third canon states, 'No one shall judge the supreme see, . . . thus . . . he forbids a judicial examination. *The latter does more harm than all punishments, for when proper judicial process has been taken away, the churches are not able to remove impious teachings and impious forms of worship, and countless souls are lost generation after generation.*' (Tractate; p. 329: 28)

". . . Paul commands that bishops who teach and defend impious doctrines and forms of worship should be regarded as anathema." (Tractate; p. 332: 72)

16.

The standard by which all teaching and teachers in the church are to be judged are the plain and clear words of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Symbols contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1580. (The chief Symbol is the Augsburg Confession. The other symbols are an explanation of how the Augsburg Confession is to be understood.)

The laity are to judge teachers and doctrine. This is obvious from the command of Christ to flee from false teachers. Such a command would be senseless if it were impossible to judge doctrine without a seminary training.

This does not mean that every layman is qualified to act as a judge in matters of interpretation of every individual passage of Scripture, particularly those which are difficult.

". . . a short confession was compiled out of the *Divine, prophetic, and Apostolic Scriptures* . . .

". . . the doctrine that is contained in it is based solidly on the Divine Scriptures. (Preface to the Book of Concord, p. 3)

". . . we are certain of our Christian confession and faith on the basis of the Divine, Prophetic, and Apostolic Scriptures . . ." (Pref. Book of Concord p. 12,13)

"Since these matters also concern the laity and the salvation of their souls, we subscribe *Dr. Martin Luther's Small and Large Catechism* as both of them are contained in his printed works. They are the "*layman's Bible*" and contain everything which Holy Scripture discusses at greater length and which a Christian must know for his salvation." (Epitome FC, p. 465: 6)

"*All doctrine should conform to the standards set forth above.* (Ecumenical creeds, Augsburg Confession, Apology, Large and Small Catechism of Dr. Luther) whatever is contrary to them should be rejected and condemned as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith." (FC Epitome, p. 465: 6)

17.

For the learned and scholars to insist that they may not be judged by simple laymen — or that the Scriptures are such a difficult book that they can be understood only by men like themselves — is to deny the words of Jesus, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him."

". . . when *proper judicial process* has been taken away, the churches are not able to remove impious teachings and impious forms of worship, and countless souls are lost generation after generation. (Tractate, p. 329: 50)

". . . Paul commands that *bishops who teach and defend impious doctrines and forms of worship should be regarded as anathema.*" (Tractate, p. 323: 72)

". . . we want to set forth and explain our faith and confession unequivocally, clearly, and distinctly in theses and antitheses, opposing the true doctrine to the false doctrine, so that the foundation of divine truth might be made apparent in every article and that every incorrect, dubious, suspicious, and condemned doctrine might be exposed, no matter where or in what book it might be found or *who may have said it or supported it.* We

did this so that we might thereby faithfully forewarn everyone against the errors contained here and there in the writings of certain theologians, lest anyone be misled by the high regard in which these theologians were held." (FC, SD, p. 507:19)

18.

The church has the right to require of those that teach in it that they speak in clear and plain language, and in a time of controversy and dissent that they also reject in unequivocal terms and words the false doctrine which is contrary to the word of God. In times of controversy it is not sufficient merely to affirm the positive true doctrine.

"All doctrine should conform to the standards set forth above. (Ecumenical creeds, Augsburg Confession, Apology, Large and Small Catechisms of Luther). *Whatever is contrary to them should be rejected and condemned as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith.*" (FC, Epitome, p. 465:6)

"The weak in faith will be scandalized; some will doubt if the pure doctrine can coexist among us with such divisions, while others will not know which of the contending parties they should support. After all, these controversies are not, as some may think, mere misunderstandings or contentions about words, with one party talking past the other, so that the strife reflects a mere semantic problem of little or no consequence. On the contrary, *these controversies deal with weighty and important matters*, and they are of such a nature that the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church, much less be excused and defended." (FC, SD, p. 502,503:8)

"In order to preserve the pure doctrine and to maintain a thorough, lasting, and God-pleasing concord within the church, *it is essential not only to present the true and wholesome doctrine correctly, but also to accuse the adversaries who teach otherwise.*" (I Tim. 3:9; Tit. 1:9; II Tim. 2:24; 3:16) (FC, SD; p. 506:14)

". . . we wanted to set forth and *explain our faith and confession unequivocally, clearly, and distinctly in theses and antitheses*, opposing the true doctrine to the false doctrine, so that the foundation of divine truth might be made apparent in every article and that every incorrect, dubious, suspicious, and condemned doctrine might be exposed . . ." (FC, SD; p. 507:19)

19.

Those who are either incapable of doing so, or unwilling to do so because of a secret or hidden disposition to accept such doctrine and permit its teaching, should not be permitted to continue or to hold positions of influence and authority, for people must be able to place trust and confidence in their pastors and teachers, and in their church leaders.

". . . *under the name of the frequently mentioned Augsburg Confession, the contrary doctrine about the holy Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ and other erroneous opinions were now and again introduced in our churches and schools.*" (Preface to the Book of Concord p. 6)

Because there were persons who tried to appeal to the agreement at Frankfurt-on-Main and at Naumbert to confirm their erroneous doctrines, it was necessary that false and erroneous doctrines be rejected and condemned. (cf. Preface to the Book of Concord p. 8-11)

". . . in the presence of so many intrusive errors, aggravated scandals, dissensions, and long-standing schisms a Christian explanation of all the disputes which have arisen should come into being. Such an explanation must be thoroughly grounded in God's Word so that pure doctrine can be recognized and distinguished from adulterated doctrine and so that the way may not be left free and open to restless, contentious individuals, who do not want to be bound to any certain formula of pure doctrine, to start scandalous controversies at will and to introduce and defend monstrous errors, the only consequence of which is that finally correct doctrine will be entirely obscured and lost and nothing beyond uncertain opinions and dubious, dis-

putable imaginations and views will be transmitted to subsequent generations." (Preface to the Book of Concord p. 13)

"... Paul commands that bishops who teach and defend impious doctrines and forms of worship should be regarded as anathema." (Tractate; p. 332:72)

"... the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended." (FC, SD; 8ff p. 502-503 see above theses 8)

"... we wanted to set forth and explain our faith and confession *unequivocally, clearly, and distinctly* in theses and intitheses . . . that every incorrect, dubious, suspicious, and condemned doctrine might be exposed . . . thereby faithfully (to) forewarn everyone against the errors contained here and there in the writings of certain theologians lest anyone be misled by the high regard in which these theologians were held." (FC, SD; p. 507:19. See theses 18 above)

20.

No one who is unwilling to state his doctrine and confessional position clearly in time of controversy has the right to demand that the church tolerate his holding office, or to insist that he holds such office by divine right.

"... Paul commanded that bishops who teach and defend impious doctrines and forms of worship should be regarded as anathema." (Tractate; p. 332:72)

"The weak in faith . . . will be scandalized, some will doubt if the pure doctrine can exist among us with such divisions, . . . *these controversies* are not, . . . mere misunderstandings about words . . . so that the strife reflects a mere semantic problem of little or no consequence . . . and they are of such a nature that the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended." (FC, SD; p. 502,503 8ff. See Theses 8,9 above.)

"... we wanted to set forth and explain our faith and confession unequivocally, clearly, and distinctly . . . so that *the foundation of divine truth might be made apparent in every article, and that every incorrect, dubious, suspicious, and condemned doctrine might be exposed* . . . no matter who may have said it or supported it." (FC, SD; p. 507:19)

21.

In removing from office those who are unable or unwilling to make a clear declaration of their confession and doctrine the church is not exercising the office of the keys, since it does not excommunicate, but merely deprives them of the office which it has entrusted to them.

The anathemas pronounced in the Lutheran Symbols are not intended to be applied indiscriminately against those of a different confession, but only against those who stubbornly and obstinately teach doctrines which overthrow the foundations.

"St. Augustine also writes in his reply to the letters of Petilian that one should not obey even regularly elected bishops if they err or if they teach or command something contrary to the divine Holy Scriptures." (AC XVIII; p. 85:28)

"... the responsibility devolves upon the theologians and ministers duly to remind even those *souls who err ingenuously and ignorantly* of the danger to their souls and to warn them against it, lest one blind person be misled by another." (Preface to the Book of Concord p. 12)

"The marks of the church . . . , the pure teaching of the Gospel and the sacraments. This church . . . retains the pure Gospel and what Paul calls the "foundation" (I Cor. 3:12) . . . there are also *many weak people in it who build upon this foundation perishing structures of stubble*, that is, unprofitable opinions. *But because they do not overthrow the foundation, these are forgiven them and even corrected.* (E.g., the writings of the holy Fathers) (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 172:20)

The Church of the Augsburg Confession has no right or authority to demand of its pastors and teachers more than the word of God demands, or less than the Sacred Scriptures demand. The Lutheran Symbols are creedal confessions intended to demonstrate that the doctrine of the Lutheran church is the catholic doctrine of the church as defined in the Ecumenical Creeds. Pastors and teachers of the Church of the Augsburg Confession are pledged to teach in accordance with these creedal confessions because (not in so far as) they are the true and correct exposition of the Holy Scriptures.

"Christ has also warned us in His parable on the church that *we should not be offended by the personal conduct of priests or people, we should not incite schisms* as the Donatists wickedly did. We regard as utterly seditious those who have incited schisms because they denied to priests the right to hold property or other possessions." (Ap. VII, VIII; p. 178:49,50)

"All doctrine should conform to the standards set forth above. (Ecumenical Creeds, Augsburg Confession, Apology, Large and Small Catechisms of Luther) whatever is contrary to them should be condemned as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith." (FC, Epitome; p. 465:6)

"As soon as this article is weakened and *human commandments are forcibly imposed on the church* as necessary and as though their omission were wrong and sinful, *the door has been opened to idolatry, and ultimately the commandments of men will be increased and put as divine worship, not only on a par with God's commandments, but even above them.*" (FC, SD, X; p. 613:15)

"We believe, teach, and confess that the Prophetic and Apostolic writings of the Old and New Testament are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged . . ." (FC, Epitome; p. 464:1)

23.

The church of the Augsburg Confession has no right to demand of its pastors and teachers that they subscribe to a doctrinal statement adopted by a convention of Synod, or that such a statement be made a test of orthodoxy. No one is required to take ordination vows that bind him to future doctrinal decisions of the synod, neither would it be right to require such ordination vows, since the future is uncertain, and such a vow would amount to an oath in uncertain matters.

". . . we are certain of our Christian confession and faith on the basis of the divine, prophetic, and apostolic Scriptures." (Pref. p. 12,13)

"We believe, teach and confess that the *Prophetic and Apostolic writings of the Old and New Testament are the only rule and norm* according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged . . ." (FC, Epitome; p. 464:1)

"All doctrine should conform to the standards set forth above. Whatever is contrary to them should be rejected and condemned as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith." (FC, Epitome; p. 465:6)

"The primary requirement for basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, *unanimously* approved, in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God." (FC, SD; p. 503:1)

". . . *we have from our hearts and with our mouths declared in mutual agreement that we shall neither prepare nor accept a different or a new confession of our faith.*" (FC, SD; p. 503:2)

24.

To permit everyone in the church to interpret the Lutheran Symbols in his own way would create chaos and confusion in the church, cause further schism, and promote the work of Satan (who is the author of chaos); create uncertainty in the minds of the people, and ultimately destroy what St. Paul calls "the foundation." *Since even those who subscribe to the Lutheran sym-*

bols may under such a subscription understand them differently, it is necessary that the church set forth clearly in what way they are understood, and in the case of controversy arrive at a unanimous agreement.

"Some, while boasting of and benefitting from their adherence to the Augsburg Confession, even dared to give a false interpretation to these articles. This caused serious and dangerous schisms in the true Evangelical churches . . ." (FC, SD; p. 502:6)

"The weak in faith, . . . will be scandalized; some will doubt if the pure doctrine can coexist among us with such divisions . . ." (FC, SD; p. 502:8)

"The primary requirement for basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved, in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God." (FC, SD; p. 503:1)

"We therefore declare our adherence to the first, unaltered Augsburg Confession . . . as our symbol in this epoch . . ." (FC, SD; p. 504:3)

"This, of course, does not mean that other good, useful, and pure books, such as interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and expositions of doctrinal articles, should be rejected. If they are in accord with the aforementioned pattern of doctrine they are to be accepted and used as helpful expositions and explanations." (FC, SD; p. 506:10)

"Our intention was only to have a single, universally accepted, certain, and common form of doctrine . . ." (FC, SD; p. 506:10)

"All doctrine should conform to the standards set forth above. Whatever is contrary to them should be rejected and condemned as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith." (FC, Epitome; p. 464:6)

25.

Since a Synod is a voluntary organization and form of church government, it may ask its members to teach in accordance with its *unanimously approved* understanding of the Lutheran Confessions or request them to withdraw, provided that such understanding does not conflict with the clear and plain words of the Lutheran Symbols.

"Some while boasting of and benefitting from their adherence to the Augsburg Confession, even dared to give a false interpretation to these articles. This caused serious and dangerous schisms in the true Evangelical churches . . ." (FC, SD; p. 502:6)

"We wholeheartedly subscribe this Christian and thoroughly scriptural Augsburg Confession, and we abide by the plain, clear, and pure meaning of its words." (FC, SD; p. 502:4)

"We consider this Confession (Augsburg Confession) a genuinely Christian Symbol which all true Christians ought to accept next to the Word of God . . ." (FC, SD; p. 502:4)

"The primary requirement for basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved . . ." (FC, SD; p. 503:1)

26.

Those who create needless controversy in the church are guilty of creating schism, and must likewise be required to desist from such activity, or to withdraw.

" . . . we should at all times make a sharp distinction between needless and unprofitable contentions (which, since they destroy rather than edify, should never be allowed to disturb the church and necessary controversy (dissention concerning articles of the Creed or the chief parts of Christian doctrine when contrary error must be refuted to preserve the truth.)" (FC, SD; p. 506:15)

27.

Church practice, which might otherwise not be divisive, becomes a matter of confession, when doctrinal controversy is involved.

"Hence, yielding or conforming in external things, where Christian agreement in doctrine has not been previously achieved, will support the idolaters in their idolatry, and on the other hand it will sadden and scandalize the true believers and weaken them in their faith." (FC, SD; p. 613:16)

"As soon as this article is weakened and human commandments are forcibly imposed on the church as necessary and as though their omission were wrong and sinful, the door has been opened to idolatry, and ultimately the commandments of men will be increased and not only be put on a par with God's commandments, but even above them." (FC, SD, X; p. 613:15)

". . . at a time of confession, as when enemies of the Word of God desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the Holy Gospel, the entire community of God, yes, every individual Christian, and especially the ministers of the Word . . . are obligated to confess openly, not only by words but also through their deeds and actions, the true doctrine and all that pertains to it . . ." (FC, SD, X; p. 612:10)

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