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The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

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Reformed and to practise intercommunion.²¹⁾ We cannot do it. We cannot countenance or extenuate what the Reformed are doing to the Church. We are bound to preserve to the Church these priceless treasures. We owe this to our people and our children. And we owe it to the Reformed Church. We would have all Christians on earth rejoice with Luther: "I surely love it with all my heart, the dear blessed Supper of my Lord Jesus Christ, in which He gives me His body and blood, to eat and drink it also bodily, with my bodily mouth, with these most sweet and gracious words: 'Given for you, shed for you.'"

TH. ENGELDER

The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

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

(Continued)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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account ignore those articles, or can one not be charged with heresy because of disagreement in these and similar essential articles which are not found in the Symbols?" (*Syst. Locc. Th.*, I, 812.) These same facts apply with equal force to the specifically Lutheran Confessions. In the later Lutheran Symbols we find dogmas which are not expressly mentioned in the Augsburg Confession, e. g., the doctrine of the normative authority of Scripture; and in all our Symbols there is no so-called decree on the inspiration of Scripture. Was the first of these doctrines an open question before 1580, and is the second still an open question in our day? Furthermore, was he who denied the first doctrine nevertheless a true Lutheran up to the year 1580, and does he who denies the second still continue to be a consistent Lutheran? These conclusions necessarily must be drawn from the hypothesis which assumes that dogmas are finally fixed by defining them in Symbols. Likewise it is well known that in accord with this hypothesis almost all contemporary "Lutheran" theologians actually deny the doctrine of our Church concerning the inspiration of Scripture, and yet with great earnestness they claim to be exponents of true Lutheran orthodoxy. How a man like Dr. J. H. Kurtz, one of the authors of the opinion rendered by the Dorpat theologians at the request of Iowa, presents the doctrine concerning the angels, a doctrine not mentioned in our Symbols or, in the language of the theologians of the new school, "not yet symbolically fixed," all those men know who have read the writings of this theologian entitled *History of the Old Covenant* and *The Bible and Astronomy*. Dr. Kurtz places the origin of the angels in an indefinable era antedating the creation of man, in which the world prior to this existing world (*Urwelt*), the universe, and its original inhabitants (the angels) were created. (*Bible and Astronomy*, 2. ed., pp. 244, 110.) In his mind the world prior to this existing world (*urweltliche Erde*) was "the dwelling-place and home of those angels who rebelled against God"; it was "without form and void," Gen. 1:2, as "the consequence of the fall of those angels" (p. 96); and since he believes that the angels possessed bodies (p. 80), the giants in Gen. 6:4 must be the offspring of these fallen angels who married daughters of men. (*History of the Old Covenant*, pp. 44-46.) But finally, in yonder world, he "exalts" the faithful of the New Testament "above the angels, just as the human nature of Christ is exalted above the angels." (*Bible and Astronomy*, p. 136.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oak Glen, Ill.

ALEX. WM. GUEBERT

(To be continued)

Die Gottesidee in heidnischen Religionen

Gleich zu Anfang dieser Abhandlung muß betont werden, daß es sich hier nur um eine kurze Zusammenfassung handeln kann. Unser Thema ist eins, über das schon große Bücher, umfassende Werke, geschrieben worden sind, und eine eingehendere Behandlung aller einschlägigen Fragen, mit Quellennachweis, würde nicht nur über den hier verfügbaren Raum hinausgehen, sondern wahrscheinlich auch die Geduld der meisten Leser erschöpfen. Und doch möchte mancher Pastor, besonders bei der Behandlung der Abgötterei und der falschen Religionen im ersten Gebot, von den allzu breiten Allgemeinheiten loskommen und, besonders bei Erwachsenen, etwas bestimmter und genauer über die Abgötter ber-