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# Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences of 1858-1859

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cession for us." [143] His blood cleanses,[144] and keeps on cleansing, us from all sin, thus making it possible for us to continue in fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. By that faith we live and hope to die. By that faith we look with expectant eyes and longing hearts for the consummation of our fellowship with God at the coming of the Lord, when the vision of the seer on Patmos shall have been fulfilled: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. And I, John, saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying: Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." [145] Then Paradise lost will be Paradise regained, and in that Paradise we shall enjoy blissful, unbroken communion with our God forever and ever. Until that day dawns, may the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the redeeming love of the Father, and the sanctifying fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all.

Milwaukee, Wis. C. August Hardt

# Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences of 1856—1859

## I. Incidents Leading to the First Conference

The minutes of the first session of the Fourth Free Conference contain this sentence:

"The meeting expressed its heartfelt sorrow because Professor Walther, who gave the first impetus towards the calling of free conferences and through whom God Himself caused so many blessings to be added to the conferences, was prevented this time by a severe throat illness from participating in the transactions of the conference." [1]

The immediate cause of the conferences was undoubtedly the attempt made within the General Synod to overthrow the Un-

143) Heb. 7:25.

144) Here we have the durative present, καθαρίζει, 1 John 1:7.

145) Rev. 21:1-4.

1) *Lutheraner*, XVI, 10.



 

altered Augsburg Confession by substituting for it an American recension called the *Definite Platform*. This recension was approved by the Wittenberg Synod in September, 1855.[2] Walther

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2) The nature and tendency of the *Definite Platform* may be seen from the following quotations selected from Part I ("Preliminary Principles") of the *Platform:*

"Thus also did the Lutheran Reformers of the sixteenth century, when cited by the Emperor to appear before the Diet at Augsburg, present the Confession, bearing the name of that city, as an exposé of their principal doctrines; in which they also professedly reject only the *greater part* of the errors that had crept into the Romish Church. (See conclusion of the Abuses Corrected.) Subsequently Luther and his coadjutors still further changed their views on some subjects in that Confession, such as the Mass, and seven years later taught purer views in the Smalcald Articles.

"Again a quarter of a century after Luther's death, these and other writings of Luther and Melanchthon, together with another work which neither of them ever saw, the Form of Concord, were made binding on ministers and churches, not by the Church herself, acting of her own free choice, but by the civil authorities of certain kingdoms and principalities. The majority of Lutheran kingdoms, however, rejected one or more of them, and the Augsburg Confession alone has been acknowledged by the entire Lutheran Church (*Hutterus Red.*, § 116, p. 50).

"Whereas the entire Lutheran Church of Germany has rejected the symbolical books as a whole and also abandoned some of the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession, among others the far greater part of them the doctrine of the bodily presence of the Savior in the Eucharist, and our fathers in this country also more than a half century ago ceased to require a pledge to any of these books, whilst they still believed and in various ways avowed the great fundamental doctrines contained in them;

"And whereas the General Synod of the American Lutheran Church, about a quarter of a century ago, again introduced a qualified acknowledgement of the Augsburg Confession, in the Constitution of her Theological Seminary, and in her Constitution for District Synods, at the ordination and licensure of ministers, without specifying the doctrines to be omitted, except by the designation that they are not fundamental doctrines of Scripture; and whereas a general desire has prevailed amongst our ministers and churches, to have this basis expressed in more definite manner; and the General Synod has left the matter optional with each District Synod:

"Therefore we regard it as due to the cause of truth, as well as to ourselves and the public, to specify more minutely what tenets of the Augsburg Confession, and of the former symbolic system, are rejected, some by all, others by the great mass of the ministers and churches of the General Synod in this country.

"Accordingly, the following *American Recension of the Augsburg Confession* has been prepared, by consultation and co-operation of a number of Evangelical Lutheran Ministers of Eastern and Western Synods belonging to the General Synod, at the special request of Western brethren, whose churches particularly need it, being intermingled with German churches, which avow the whole mass of the former symbols. In this revision, not a single sentence has been added to the Augsburg Confession, whilst those several aspects of doctrine have been omitted which have long since been regarded by the great mass of our churches as unscriptural, and as remnants of Romish errors.

"The only errors contained in the Confession (which are all omitted in this Recension) are —

immediately recognized the danger in this attempt to overthrow the Magna Charta of Lutheranism. He had previously warned Lutherans against the tendency to delete certain articles from the Confession or to subscribe to it with reservations.[3] The move-

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1. The Approval of the Ceremonies of the Mass.
2. Private Confession and Absolution.
3. Denial of the Divine Obligation of the Christian Sabbath.
4. Baptismal Regeneration.
5. The Real Presence of the Body and Blood of the Savior in the Eucharist.

". . . whilst we will not admit into our Synod any one who believes in Exorcism, Private Confession and Absolution, or the Ceremonies of the Mass, we grant liberty in regard to the other omitted topics, and are willing, as heretofore, to admit ministers who receive them, provided they regard them as non-essential, and are willing to co-operate in peace with those who reject them, and to subscribe the pledge defined in the following Resolutions:

"I. Therefore, Resolved, That this Synod hereby avows its belief in the following doctrinal Basis, namely, the so-called *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, and the *American Recension of the Augsburg Confession*, as a more definite expression of the doctrinal pledge prescribed by the General Synod's Constitution for District Synods, and as a correct exhibition of the Scripture doctrines discussed in it: and that we regard agreement among brethren on these subjects as a sufficient basis for harmonious co-operation in the same church.

"II. Resolved, That we receive the General Synod's *Formula of Government and Discipline*, contained in her Hymn Book, as our directory, and that any additions or alterations we may desire we will embody in by-laws; so that our beloved Church may possess and exhibit to the world entire harmony in the reception of one Doctrinal and Disciplinarian Platform.

"III. Resolved, That we will not receive into our Synod any minister who will not adopt the Pledge defined in these Resolutions and faithfully labor to maintain its discipline in his charge." (*Definite Platform, Doctrinal and Disciplinarian*, for Evangelical Lutheran District Synods; Constructed in accordance with the Principles of the General Synod, Philadelphia, Miller & Burlock, 1856, pg. 3—6.)

A "Symbolical Disclaimer" in which certain articles in the Confessions were rejected was appended to the *Definite Platform*. The following introductory remarks to the "Disclaimer" are significant:

"The extraordinary length of the other former symbolic books as a whole, is sufficient reason for their rejection as a prescribed creed, even if all their contents were believed to be true; because neither the Scriptures nor the practice of the early centuries, affords any warrant for an uninspired and therefore fallible creed, nearly as large as the entire Old and New Testament together. The exaction of such an extended creed is subversive of all individual liberty of thought and freedom of Scriptural investigation."

"The following extracts from the former symbolical books we reject, not because they do not contain some sentences of truth; but because the particular doctrine taught in each is regarded as erroneous by the great mass of the churches in connection with the General Synod" (*op. cit.*, 20).

3) He criticized the deflections of the General Synod (*Luth.* VI, 35; et al.). He opposed Sprecher of the college in Springfield, Ohio, for maintaining that the Augsburg Confession provided only "historical

ment inaugurated by the Wittenberg Synod caused him grave anxiety for the future of Lutheranism. He wrote in *Lehre und Wehre:*[4]

"When in September of the previous year the Wittenberg Synod of Ohio brought forth its *Definite Platform* for a so-called American Lutheran Church, together with her official repudiation of the constitution, the Magna Charta of our Church, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and exhorted all who shared their opinions to quit traditional Lutheranism, then it seemed as though a destructive storm was gathering and threatening to strike the Lutheran Church of our New Fatherland."

The storm, however, did not strike as devastatingly as Walther had feared. Only three synods subscribed to the *Definite Platform* by January, 1856.[5] Only three leading church periodicals showed interest in the *Definite Platform.*[6] Other publications rejected it.

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information and witnesses of faith" (*Luth.* VI, 57). He received for publication an article which censured the Iowa Synod because said synod subscribed to the Augsburg Confession but qualified its subscription in such a way as to leave room for "doctrinal progress" (*Luth.* XII, 2). On the other hand, Walther praised those who were loyal to the Confession. Thus he spoke of Professor Reynolds of Columbus, Ohio, as one "who is loyal in attitude toward our Church and her Confessions" (*Luth.* VI, 134).

4) II, 3.

5) These synods were the Wittenberg Synod, the Olive-Branch Synod, and the English Synod of Ohio. By the end of the year, however, the Northern Synod of Indiana, the Kentucky Synod, the Miami Synod, and the Synod of Central Pennsylvania had adopted the *Platform,* while the Pittsburgh Synod had shown definite leanings toward it (*L. u. W.*, II, 223; 280). The Alleghany Synod discussed the selection of a committee to alter the Augsburg Confession, but action was postponed (*L. u. W.*, II, 223).

6) The *Lutheran Observer,* the *Lutherische Kirchenbote* of Gettysburg, and the *Evangelical Lutheran* of Springfield, Ohio (*L. u. W.*, II, 3). The *Lutheran Observer* became the chief open exponent of the movement. When the editor of the *Evangelical Lutheran* was urged to champion the *Platform,* he indicated that he would resign (*Evangelical Lutheran,* Feb. 1, 1856). Later the *Evangelical Lutheran* gave its subscription list to the *Lutheran Observer* and ceased to appear (*L. u. W.*, II, 156). The *Lutheran Observer* continued the struggle for the *Platform.* It challenged, for example, the Virginia Synod for calling the Augsburg Confession its confession and maintained that the Augustana was only a relic of the Reformation (*L. u. W.*, II, 28). When confusion and dissension arose because of the *Definite Platform,* the editor of the same paper declared that the Recension contained nothing new, that all members of the General Synod had always dealt according to the principles therein contained (*Lutheran Observer,* Jan. 25, 1856; *L. u. W.*, II, 64). In the Feb. 15 number of the *Observer,* the editor urged a compromise by which the Augsburg Confession would be left unharmed but at the same time the friends of the Recension would be satisfied. He urged the adoption of the following resolutions: 1. That the errors in the Augsburg Confession should not be taught; and that, according to our opinion, a correct interpretation of the Confession excludes such errors entirely; 2. That whatever opinions a person may have regarding the points mentioned,

The *Lutheran Standard* of Ohio strongly opposed the movement;[7] the *Missionary* agreed with the condemnation of the Recension voiced by the East Pennsylvania Synod;[8] the *Lutherische Herold*[9] likewise rejected the shameful attempt to overthrow the constitution of Lutheranism.

The strong opposition to the *Definite Platform* filled Walther with joy and caused him to hope that a united Lutheran Church of America would soon come into being. In order to hasten the formation of such a united Lutheran Church, he published the following appeal for free Lutheran conferences in *Lehre und Wehre:*[10]

"This constellation [that is, the united front of those loyal to the U. A. C.] certainly fills all who love the Lutheran Zion of this land with great joy and also with hope for the future. It has

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our preachers and our people have the fullest freedom, and by right must have such freedom, to believe regarding the Confessions what, according to their opinion, the inspired Word of God teaches, and that neither Church nor Synod has the right to disquiet or disturb them in their belief. Walther pointed out that the General Synod might have effected such a compromise before the *Definite Platform* appeared. That document had opened the eyes of many. Furthermore, human right granted to all the privilege to believe as they chose; God, however, required that everyone believe the doctrines of the Bible (*L. u W.*, II, 95). The *Lutheran Observer* continued to attack doctrines taught in the Augsburg Confession, *e. g.*, the Real Presence, rebirth through Baptism, confession and absolution, etc. (*L. u. W.*, II, 140).

7) *L. u. W.*, II, 3

8) The *Missionary* seems later to have disappointed Walther. The Pittsburgh Synod at its meeting at Zelienople declared itself opposed to alterations in the Confession and formally subscribed to the A. C. At the same meeting, however, it rejected the "error" of "the real presence or the Roman Catholic transubstantiation" and also "priestly absolution." Furthermore, it declared, if the Augsburg Confession were properly interpreted, it would not disagree with the convictions held by the Synod on the points mentioned (*Luth.* XII, 181).

9) *L. u. W.* II, 3. Other voices opposing the *Platform* were heard. W. J. Mann, pastor of St. Michael's and Zion Churches, Philadelphia, in a pamphlet entitled "A Plea for the Augsburg Confession in Answer to the Objections of the *Definite Platform*" (Philadelphia, 1856), vigorously attacked the *Platform* and above all the conceit of synods which would ban ministers from Lutheran congregations because they adhered to certain articles of the Augsburg Confession. (This "Plea" was answered by S. S. Schmucker in a pamphlet entitled "American Lutheranism Vindicated: or Examination of the Lutheran Symbols on Certain Disputed Topics," Baltimore, 1856. This pamphlet attacked especially the teaching of the Real Presence and rebirth through Baptism. The pamphlet was endorsed by the *Lutheran Observer*.) Another pamphlet, published by Pastor J. R. Hoffmann, with the title "The Broken Platform" (Philadelphia, 1856), likewise attacked the Recension. Hoffmann belonged to the General Synod and had hoped that this organization would unite American Lutherans. The *Definite Platform* opened his eyes to the dangerous tendencies within that Synod. His attitude is shown in the motto of his pamphlet: "O Teucri, ne credite equo."

10) II, 3—6

become evident that the number of those who do not bow, nor wish in the future to bow, their knee to the Baal of the so-called 'development' and the so-called 'higher enlightenment' of the 19th century, is without a doubt greater than our feeble faith or despair had believed. The more this strengthens the faith and the courage of all true Lutherans here, the more compelling is the challenge therein contained to nurture with supreme faithfulness and greatest diligence the unity which God through His marvelous grace has already wrought among us. We, at least for our little part, feel it a sacred duty to add our little bit.

"Our brothers in Germany, working apart in various state churches, have utilized free conferences, religious assemblies, etc., as a means toward the promotion of their unity in faith and confession. We are convinced that after a time in which the various local churches lapsed into a deep and general decay in matters of doctrine and practice (as occurred in the last century), there is no way more fitting, with the exception of published written testimonials, for awakened individuals within the various church bodies to strengthen and advance the church unity which has become apparent than that which has been chosen within our mother Church. Since we are living under different circumstances, may we not hope that smiliar general conferences would be more productive here, in proportion to the extent that the Church is free from the bonds of the State and mere theories alone militate against church life in this land? We do not doubt it.

"So we venture openly to inquire: Would not meetings, held at intervals, by such members of churches as call themselves Lutheran and acknowledge and confess without reservation that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 is the pure and true statement of the doctrine of sacred Scripture and is also their own belief, promote and advance the efforts toward the final establishment of one single Evangelical Lutheran Church of America? We for our part would be ready with all our heart to take part in such a conference of truly believing Lutherans whenever and wherever such a conference would be held pursuant to the wishes of the majority of the participants; at the same time we can promise in advance the support of numerous theologians and laymen to whom the welfare of our precious Ev. Lutheran Church in this new fatherland is equally a matter of deepest heartfelt yearning and with whom we have discussed the thoughts here expressed.

"Since it is true that many differences of opinion still exist among those Lutherans who hold with all their heart to the fundamental Confession of our Church, the treatment of which in our periodicals can more easily hinder than advance unity among us, the personal and verbal statements and expressions of opinions

would above all else surely bring about this unparalleled blessing, namely, that the contest within our Church (which will always be necessary) will receive and keep the nature of a mutual competition among brethren for the faithful preservation of the precious gem of doctrinal purity and unity. In order, however, not to overreach the brethren, we shall refrain from expressing ourselves further on the proposal made." [11]

Walther invited others to express their opinions, either in personal letters or in periodicals and publications. Such opinions were soon expressed. In *Lehre und Wehre* [12] an article written by a person with the initials A. B. endorsed such a conference. The author felt that the following rules should govern the conference:

1. That the conference be an open one and the minutes thereof published;

2. That only those who expressed adherence to the entire Book of Concord be permitted to participate in the discussions;

3. That the conferences be held annually;

4. That the purpose of the conference should not be to dissolve any Lutheran body in America;

5. That those who attended the conference should bear in mind that the purpose thereof was to unite and not to separate;

6. That the Leipzig Conferences should be taken as models;

7. And that theses for the conference should be drawn up in advance.

Walther opposed the suggestion that theses be drawn up in advance. He was also opposed to limiting the membership of the conference to those who subscribed to the entire *Book of Concord.* After quoting the above-mentioned suggestions, he criticized some of them with the following words:

"There is no doubt that the person who without reservation subscribes to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession cannot reject one single phrase in the other Confessions, inasmuch as these are nothing else than a further development and apology of that which is contained in the Augustana. Nevertheless, as church conditions have been here in the last decades and to some extent still are, there may well be many a genuine Lutheran who is loyal from the heart to the Augsburg Confession yet does not have the clear knowledge rightly to subscribe to the whole *Concordia.* Also such Lutherans are, without a doubt, our brethren. For that reason the free general conference should not adopt a basis

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11) Walther adds that those in attendance at such a conference should not come as representatives of their respective synods but only speak for their own persons.

12) II, 84—85

by which it would give the impression of not being willing or able to extend the hand of brotherhood to all upright, honest, Lutherans who hold that general Confession with us; nor should they, we feel, despair of the blessing which could easily come if their basis would make room for those Lutherans, who, with all firmness (Entschiedenheit) for the teachings of our basic Confession, still have scruples (Bedenken) concerning the capstone of our confessional structure, the *Formula Concordiae*. We believe one of the most important duties of the conference would be just this, to remove the uncertainties from the minds of those brethren who still harbor scruples against the consequent unfolding (Durchfuehrung) of the doctrine confessed at Augsburg and, by the grace of God, to lead them to the blessed, happy conviction that the other symbols of our Church are *implicite* contained in the Augustana, which they accept."

Other opinions on Walther's proposal were soon expressed. The *Lutheran Standard* quoted Dr. Walther's appeal in full (Feb. 18, 1856) and later assured the movement its wholehearted support (April 4, 1856).[13] The editor of *Lehre und Wehre* received many letters from Lutherans throughout the United States which urged and endorsed the conference.[14] The New York pastors, at their conference held in March, 1856, endorsed the free Lutheran conference as proposed by Walther. The *Lutherische Herold* (April 15, 1856) quoted the original proposal in full and suggested topics to be discussed at the conference.[16] The *Missionary* of Pittsburgh (June 1, 1856) agreed with the purpose of the free conference, but held that the time for such a conference had not yet come, since many ministers who could not understand German would not be able to take part in the discussions. It suggested that local free conferences be held for the purpose of discussing doctrine. Walther, however, felt that general conferences should first be held in order that the participants would first of all be

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13) "It seems as though a general interest in the importance of any step of that nature is stirring in all parts of the Church. . . . We can assure the friends of this movement that if such a conference is held . . . the brethren in Columbus, if such be the general wish, will gladly receive them or meet with them at any other place." — *Lutheran Standard* (translated from *Lehre und Wehre*, II, 152).

14) *L. u. W.*, II, 148.

16) These topics included the following problems: In what matters must all Lutherans agree? How far does such unity exist among us? Which synods of our country, by the standards of the A. C., are still truly believing? In which matters may differences be permitted, and what attitude should the synods take toward one another in view of those differences? Would it be advantageous or not to solve those differences at the present time, and if so, what means should be adopted to remove them? What rules are to be followed in establishing new congregations and in those matters pertaining to the ministry, etc. (Cf. *L. u. W.*, II, 150—151.)

assured of their unity and then work for unity in smaller circles.[17] The *Evangelical Lutheran* (Feb. 15, 1856) hailed the proposal of Walther as an indication that the exclusive, "hard-shelled"[18] Missourians were yielding.[19]

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17) *L. u. W.*, II, 185—186. The *Missionary* held to its opinion. Later (Oct. 23, 1856) it proposed that not only those Lutherans meet at free conferences who adhered to the U. A. C. but all who called themselves Lutheran.

18) It is hard to understand how Walther, who for years had championed the doctrine of the invisible Church and its universality, could be called exclusive or how the person who made the following statements could be called "hard-shelled". Walther made many statements similar to the following:

"The Lutheran Church is not limited to those people who from their youth have borne the name 'Lutheran' or have taken that name later on. To every person who honestly submits to the whole written Word of God, bears the true faith in our dear Lord Jesus Christ in his heart and confesses it before the world, we extend our hand, regard him also as a fellow believer, as a brother in Christ, as a member of our Church, no matter in what sect he may lie concealed and captive." *Luth.* I, 5.

"As far as our relation to the Indianapolis Synod is concerned, inasmuch as they stand on the same confessional basis with us and are shaping their church practice more and more in accordance therewith, we have decided to propose closer church fellowship to them. *For it would not be in harmony with the Word of God* and church practice if we, living in the same country and being in church matters essentially one, would exist side by side as two divided church organizations." *Luth.* VIII, 17. (For doctrinal differences betweeen the two synods at this time see *Luth.* VIII, 39.)

"We are not fighting for a particular constituted division which calls itself Lutheran. It is not our goal to bring matters to such a pass that all Christians accept a so-called Lutheran Church polity and Lutheran ceremonies, join a Lutheran Synod, or bind themselves by Lutheran symbols. . . . The object of our struggle is nothing else than the true faith, the pure truth, the unfalsified Gospel, the pure foundation of the Apostles and Prophets." *Luth.* I, 100.

"We do not hereby mean to indicate that we are among those who believe that their understanding requires no development or correction. It is rather our constant, serious endeavor to make progress in the recognition of truth and, with the help of God, to free ourselves more and more from the errors which still cling to us." *Luth.* XIII, 1.

"We, only a short time ago, were held captive by many errors, and God had patience with us and with great long-suffering led us unto the way of truth. Remembering that, we also will show patience with our erring neighbors and, by God's grace, will refrain from all sinful judging and condemning. We will not attack erring persons but rather the errors. Nor will we pose as people who alone are true Lutherans and alone possess the truth, but only bear testimony that God has done great things also for us and has brought us to the knowledge of the saving truth." *Luth.* I, 1.

"People thought that after withdrawing from the left there was no possibility of erring in the other direction. Thus it has come to pass that no one has departed farther from true Lutheranism than those who want to be the strictest Lutherans. They did not consider that also the way of truly pure doctrine is everywhere a narrow way, on which

only he remains who with holy earnestness is intent on turning neither to the right nor the left. It was assumed that the praise of being strictly orthodox was easy to obtain; that it required no earnest study, searching deliberation, prayer, struggle, and the conquering of many temptations; every unconverted man had only to attack every apparent heretic and everything which had the appearance of being ecclesiastical laxity with utmost ferocity and to press and urge everything which had the appearance of being churchly, then the deed was accomplished, the prize of orthodoxy won, the Great Inquisitor had established himself, and all now had to fear his citation to judgment. Thus it has come to the stage that no teacher stands more in the way of the so-called 'strict churchly Lutherans' than — Luther." *Luth.* XIII, 58.

19) Was Walther yielding? He is ready to call men brethren with whom he had controversies. Walther always considered error a terrible thing. Time and again he indicated that he felt that "every error, when it becomes active in a man, is a deadly poison to the soul" (*Luth.* I, 14). On the other hand, he also realized that no human being was free from errors or could perfectly understand or explain Scripture. Luther erred (*Luth.* 1, 3); Walther erred (*Luth.* XIII, 1); it is wrong to say that the true preacher cannot err (*Lutheraner* 1, 83). But let it not be overlooked that Walther wrote against unionism even while the free conferences were being held (*Luth.* XII, 193; XIII, 167; XIV, 53, 150; XV, 79, 117, 121, 185; XVI, 46). These articles, however, as were most of Walther's articles against union, were in the early years directed against union with the Reformed. Walther opposed three types of union:

1. Union with heretics. In Walther's estimation a heretic is a person who is not a member of the invisible Church and therefore an unbeliever (*Kirche und Amt*, Part 1, Thesis II). Furthermore, a heretic, according to Walther, is a person who holds a false doctrine against his own better judgment and thus despises the Word of God: "According to the Word of God that person is a heretic who, first of all, against better knowledge and conscience and in spite of repeated admonitions, pursues his erroneous way" ("*Die Ev.-Luth. Kirche, die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden*", ein Referat fuer die Verhandlung der Allg. Ev.-Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. Staaten, Oct. 31, 1866, Thesis V, § 24). The following statements illustrate this opinion still more:

"Finally, there are manifest heretics, who deceive others and in *whose case there is little hope of improvement.* The Corinthians and Galatians belong to the first two classes (i. e., weak, erring Christians), whom he (Paul) calls brothers, because a person did not yet despair of their *conversion;* for that reason he dealt with them, instructed them, and found that they could be taught. But stiffnecked heretics he commands us to avoid. Tit. 3:10. The same thing happens in our churches today, inasmuch as we do not immediately exclude from church fellowship those who have been deceived by Calvinists and other heretics, as long as they are instructible." *Luth.* XII, 205.

"The purity of the Word has, as far as the preaching thereof in the Church is concerned, in different periods had different degrees, and for that reason the Bible compares it to the changing moon (Song of Solomon 6:9). Also members of the true Church often build on the true foundation not only 'gold, silver, and precious stones' of pure doctrine, but also the 'wood, hay, and stubble' of erroneous, human ideas (1 Cor. 3:11–15), so that the Church itself must daily pray: 'Forgive us our trespasses.' These errors, however, are of such a nature that they do not destroy the foundation, nor are they stubbornly held, as we also see in the case of the Apostles, who often erred, but received correction. For where false doctrines are not only preached but also stubbornly held, there the true Church is not present. . . . 'How else could a person distinguish which is the true Church of Christ and which

There were, as could be expected, also objections to the general conferences. The Reformed churches regarded the attempt at union as a premature one undertaken "before the leaven of truth" (undoubtedly their view on the Lord's Supper) "had sufficiently permeated the Lutheran Church of America." Nor could they understand why the Lutherans could not agree on a qualified subscription.[20] The Buffalo Synod felt that Walther was seeking self-aggrandizement through the conferences.[21] Benj. Kurtz of the *Lutheran Observer* (May 23, 1856) saw in the proposed conferences an attempt to unite the "symbolical Lutherans" against the "American Lutherans," *i. e.*, adherents of the *Definite Platform*.[22]

The Southern Conference of the Eastern District of the Synod

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the Church of the devil except by the obedience or disobedience to Christ?' " *Luth.* I, 83.

Walther points out that Luther had patience with the Bohemian brethren and had patience with their errors because "they were unlearned men, who staggered often in knowledge, but nevertheless, had an open heart for the truth and did not cherish a darkened pleasure in their errors." Zwingli, on the other hand, was regarded by Luther as a heretic. *Luth.* II, 102. (Cf. *Luth.* I, 99; I, 83; III, 49; XII, 205.)

2. Union with Reformed and other sects. "We are eager to show the Reformed all love, inasmuch as we love them all from the heart; nor do we condemn them as harshly as Luther once had to condemn Zwingli; nor do we want to act bitterly toward them or appear eager to condemn them . . . but as a Church we cannot join with them." — *Luth.* I, 52 (cf. 1, 11; I, 43—44; VIII, 10; VIII, 38; *et multi*).

3. Union with Lutherans who did not subscribe or adhere to the Augsburg Confession or who subscribed with reservations. The *Lutheraner* vindicated Missouri's early attitude toward the Ohio Synod on the following grounds: a. The latter, by the use of the phrase "Christus sprach" at the Lord's Supper indicated that it made the Real Presence a matter of indifference; b. it served Lutheran and Reformed churches; c. although it endorsed the oath on the Symbolical Books at ordination, it was not in earnest in the oath (*Luth.* IV, 137). He opposed the General Synod because it did not demand unqualified subscription to the symbols and was Reformed, Methodistic, unionistic, and rationalistic in practice (*Luth.* VIII, 10). The Pennsylvania Synod received Reformed and Presbyterian ministers as advisory members (*Luth.* VIII, 138) and had a joint agenda with the General Synod which voiced the faults of that Synod (*Luth.* VIII, 10). The Iowa Synod gave a qualified subscription to the Augsburg Confession (*Luth.* XII, 5).

20) *L. u. W.*, II, 187.

21) *L. u. W.*, II, 188.

22) An interesting objection was voiced by a layman of New York. In an article published in the *Lutheran Observer* (Aug. 22, 1856) he requested those synods who were urging that free conferences be held to desist from endeavors to restore the symbolical writings, inasmuch as he saw in such endeavors the attempt to give the preachers in America the same authority over the laity which was exercised in Germany. He felt that the efforts made toward free conferences were only bringing disunity. Therefore he requested all Lutheran periodicals and especially *Lehre und Wehre* to permit the matter to rest (*L. u. W.*, II, 187).

 

of Ohio at its conference May 20—22, 1856, resolved not to take part at a free conference as proposed by Walther for the following reasons:

1. Because they felt that experience taught that subscription only to the Augsburg Confession with the lips or on paper is easy enough and often made in America, but in practice is so completely ignored that pastors and congregations without the least fear of God establish opposition congregations where there are ministers who are known to be loyal to the Confession.

2. Because the person who does not declare adherence to all the Symbolical Books is not sincere in his subscription to the U. A. C. The conference saw no reason why the other Symbolical Books should not be included.

3. Because the conference felt that the Buffalo Synod was excluded from the free conferences.

Walther replied to these objections as follows:[23]

"Ad 1. That many are loyal to the U. A. C. with lips only and deny it in practice cannot be brought to bear against the principle in accordance with which the general conference is to be composed and held, since that objection would hold in the case of the best formulated confession.

"Ad 2. That the person who knowingly rejects a doctrine taught in one of the other Lutheran confessions cannot be in earnest with his professed loyalty to the U. A. C. is also my conviction, inasmuch as the other symbols contain nothing more than a development, proof, and apology of the doctrines of the U. A. C. That, on the other hand, the person who declares the Augsburg Confession his confession, but not, for example, the Formula of Concord, is a genuine Lutheran is just as certain. There are whole Lutheran state churches, like the Swedish and the Danish, which have never officially acknowledged the Formula of Concord and have not required their candidates to subscribe to it, which, nevertheless, were for that reason never suspected by other Lutheran churches nor denied church fellowship by those churches which subscribed to the whole Formula of Concord. In America it is also the case that, with the exception of U. A. C., the symbols are still somewhat unknown to many Lutheran preachers and for many, because of the nature of their training, it would be no small task to examine quickly the whole *Concordia* and orientate themselves in it. We therefore deem it right and proper not to look with suspicion on those who for the time being declare their adherence to the U. A. C. without reservation, but to extend the

23) *Luth.* XII, 181—182

hand of brotherhood to them and confer with them, with the conviction that such are *implicite* subscribers to the teachings contained in the other symbols, although perhaps they do not yet know these and for that reason are held by a certain hesitancy. We remind ourselves of the words of Luther. He writes in his *Urteil ueber den Reichsabschied* as follows: 'In addition we must acknowledge that the doctrine preached and submitted at Augsburg is the true and pure Word of God and that all who believe and hold it are children of God and will be saved, whether they believe now already or will be enlightened later on; which confession will endure until the end of the world and the Last Day. For it is written: "He that believes and calls upon God will be saved." And one must pay loving attention (wahrnehmen) not only to all those who will still join us, but also to the Christian Church which preaches the Word and our people who are its members. For it is written Gal. 6:16: "As many as walk according to this rule, etc.;" which excludes no one. In accordance therewith, all who believe and live according to the teachings of the Confession and its Apology are by such faith and teaching our brothers, and their danger concerns us as much as our own. Also we dare not forsake them as members of the true Church; whether they unite with us whenever they will; whether they do this quietly or openly; whether they live among us or at a distance. That we say and hold. If Jesus, John 17, prays for all those who were to believe the teachings of the Apostles, why should we, then, forsake and not regard those for whom Jesus prayed? In the fifth place, a person cannot deny that this doctrine which was preached and presented at so many diets has at all times converted a number of people to God, and, if a person were to repulse and separate from this doctrine, he would be fighting against the Holy Spirit inasmuch as they were illumined by the Holy Spirit, who so openly declared that such deeds and works please Him' (Luther, XVI:1857, 58).

"Ad 3. We cannot understand why the proposed plan is held to involve exclusion of the Buffalo Synod. Perhaps the conference means to say that if the free conference tolerates the 'Missourians' in its midst and does not *cum infamia* ban them as unworthy of the name Lutheran, the Buffalo Synod will not participate. The latter has really said this herself. The Synod writes in the *Informatorium:* 'How would it be possible for our ministers to confer with such preachers as absolve our excommunicated people and receive them to Communion?' After the Buffalo Synod, like every other one which subscribes to the U. A. C. without reservation, has been invited to take part in the free conference, it is ridiculous to speak of exclusions. . . . Surely, if a person fails to answer direct invitations to a discussion aimed at peace and

rejects them without shame, then it is not to be wondered at if indirect suggestions for the establishing of peace in Israel are rejected. He who because of alleged sins in life will not hold discussions concerning doctrine or want to hear of church fellowship thereby shows that he is given to Donatistic falsehoods and separatistic inclinations. . . . It is true, the Buffalo Synod accused our men of saying: 'The Buffalo Synod must be annihilated.' We, however, have declared again and again that the person who invented this fable was a liar and challenged the Buffalo Synod to produce its witnesses.

"We finally herewith declare with a sincere heart that if the purpose of unifying the Lutherans in America could sooner be attained if we did not take part in the same, we, as far as our person is concerned, would be willing to stay away and would also then praise God from the bottom of our heart if all true Lutherans of America would rally around the *Augustana invariata*, and we would have to bear the shame of being excluded from the work of establishing the brotherhood (Ps. 122:3-9). God in his own time would undoubtedly espouse our cause and remove the undeserved shame."

The *Lutheran Standard* (1856, 6) suggested that the following invitation be published in church papers and that pastors who desired to take part in the conference send their names to their respective periodical together with their vote for the place where the conference was to be held:

"The undersigned ministers of the Ev. Luth. Church in the United States, with the conviction that the unity and the well-being of our Lutheran Zion will be greatly advanced through the free expression of opinions regarding the various interests of our Church in this land by brethren who are united in faith, herewith extend an invitation to all members of the Ev. Lutheran Church in the United States who hold the U. A. C. to be a true presentation of the teachings of the Word of God to meet with them in the city of _____, Wednesday, Oct. 1, in a free and brotherly conference concerning the status and needs of the Church in America" (translated from the German of *L. u. W.*).

*Lehre und Wehre* (II, 186—187) reprinted the invitation together with the following signatures: F. Wyneken, G. Schaller, F. Buenger, C. F. W. Walther, A. Biewend. All these men voted for Columbus, Ohio. The notice was repeatedly published, and the list of names increased (II, 216—217: 245—283). The majority of Missouri Synod ministers and ministers of other Synods voted for Columbus, Ohio. The official invitation was then published in the *Lutheran Standard* (Sept. 9, 1856. Cf. *Luth.* XIII, 21).

## II. The First Free Conference [24]

**Columbus, Ohio**
**Oct. 1—7, 1856**

Fifty-four pastors and nineteen laymen (a total of seventy-three) attended the First Free Conference. These men came from four synods: Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Missouri. Letters from pastors in these synods as well as from ministers of the Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Iowa Synods [25] indicated that others who were unable to be present were in accord with the purpose of the conference and wished the men assembled at Columbus the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The following men were present from the Missouri Synod: Pres. F. Wyneken; Vice-Pres. H. C. Schwan; Profs. C. F. W. Walther, W. Sihler, and A. Craemer; Pastors O. Fuerbringer, E. A. Brauer, F. W. Foehlinger, H. Kuehn, J. A. F. Mueller, A. Saupert, G. Schaller, A. Volkert, E. O. Wolff, A. Wavel, and A. Selle. Laymen of the Missouri Synod were also present.

Pastors present from other synods: Pastors F. L. Daib, G. Doepken, C. Ebert, A. Ernst, H. Fick, F. Groth, P. Heid, R. Herbst, J. P. Kalb, A. Kleinegees, K. Koeberlin, E. Kornbaum, Prof. W. F. Lehmann, Prof. M. Loy; Pastors D. M. Martens, K. Mees, J. G. H. Nuetzel, D. Rothacker, A. Rueter, J. A. Schulze, J. C. Schulze, J. Seidel, C. Spilmann, F. W. Steimle, C. F. Stohlmann, C. H. Weisel, C. Wernle, Prof. D. Worley; Pastors P. Gast, J. J. Fast.

The conference met in Trinity Church, Columbus, Ohio, and was opened with a hymn, prayer, and the recitation of the Apostles' Creed by the pastor of the church, Prof. W. F. Lehmann of the Ohio Synod. Professor Lehmann was elected as chairman, Pastor C. F. Stohlmann as vice-chairman, Pastor H. C. Schwan and Prof. M. Loy as secretaries.

After the greetings and communications had been read, the chairman called for motions relative to matters to be discussed. Motions were made to discuss 1) doctrine; 2) church worship; 3) church polity. It was also proposed to discuss the various needs of the Lutheran Church in America. It was pointed out, however, that recent attacks on the Augsburg Confession had motivated

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24) The minutes of the free conferences were written in German and English and submitted to various Lutheran periodicals for publication (*e.g., Lutheran Standard, Lutherische Herold, Lutheraner,* et al.). The minutes were also printed in pamphlet form ("Auszug aus den Verhandlungen der Freien Ev.-Lutherischen Konferenz, zu etc.", H. Ludwig, New York, 1858. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations and material in this description of the conference are translated from the *Lutheraner.* The minutes of the first conference are in *Lutheraner* XIII, 49 ff.

25) *Luth.* XIII, 33

the calling of the conference. For that reason it was of the greatest importance that the delegates at the conference assure each other of their loyalty to the U. A. C. not only in substance, but in all its parts.[26] After some discussion, the following resolution was

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26) In a *Referat* (read at the synodical meeting held at St. Louis in 1858. *Luth.* XIV, 201 ff.) Walther defines the meaning of an unqualified subscription to the U. A. C.: "Since the Symbols are confessions of the faith or doctrine of the Church (and can be or aim at being nothing else), an unqualified subscription can be understood as nothing else than a solemn oathlike promise to the Church by the person who is entering its service that he considers the doctrinal content itself of the Confessions (but this without exception) as differing in no single instance (either in a primary or secondary point) from the Scripture and as being in harmony with it in every point, and for that reason believes in it as in God's Word itself and thus intends to preach that doctrine without falsification. Therefore whatever position a teaching occupies in the doctrinal structure of the Symbols and in whatever form it is presented, be it that of a matter specifically (*ex professo*) treated or that of an incidental statement, the unqualified subscription applies to all of them. . . . Clinging to the principle that the Symbols are confessions of faith and doctrine, the Church, on the other hand, must necessarily exclude all that which does not pertain to doctrine from the material by which the subscriber is bound." Walther considered the following of the latter nature:

1. Matters of style and language.
2. Everything belonging to the field of human sciences (menschliche Wissenschaften) and the field of criticism.
3. Historical matters.
4. Exegesis. ("In einem aehnlichen Verhaeltnisz steht auch die Auslegung welche im Symbol von einzelnen Schriftstellen gegeben wird. Der heilige Apostel Paulus selbst stellt als das einzige unbedingt nothwendige Erfordernisz einer unverwerflichen Weissagung oder Auslegung der Schrift auf: 'Hat jemand Weissagung, so sei sie dem Glauben aehnlich,' Rom. 12:7. Hieraus zieht Johann Gerhard den Auslegungskanon: 'Moegen wir auch immerhin den eigentlichen und besondern Sinn aller Stellen nicht erreichen, so genuegt es doch, in der Auslegung derselben nichts wider die Aehnlichkeit des Glaubens vorzubringen. Gesetzt also, dass ein Ausleger den besondern Sinn irgend einer Bibelstelle nicht traefe, legte er dieselbe aber so aus, dass seine Auslegung ihren Grund in andern Schriftstellen haette, so irrte er sich wohl in der Meinung, dass eine gewisse Lehre in einer bestimmten Stelle enthalten sei, er irrte aber nicht in der Lehre. Auch wer die symbolischen Buecher unbedingt unterschreibet, erklaert daher damit nur, dasz alle in denselben enthaltenen Auslegungen 'dem Glauben aehnlich' seien.")
5. "Since, moreover, the proof for a doctrine can be incomplete, although the doctrine to be proved or the conclusion itself rests on an unshakable divine basis and also the doctrines selected to aid in the proof of the preceding or following clauses are correct, hence also an unqualified subscription does not include . . . the form, method, and process of argumentation . . . and thus bind every loyal servant of the Church to use the method of the Symbols and no other."
6. While the doctrine of Christian freedom is subscribed to and binding, matters pertaining to church constitution (Kirchenverfassung), church laws (Kirchenordnung), and church ceremonies (Kirchenceremonien) touched on in the Confessions naturally are adiaphora and may be adopted or rejected.

adopted:[27] "Surely all who love our Lutheran Zion deplore with grief the sad divided state from which our Church suffers here in the United States of North America, and all earnestly desire to see the growth of this evil checked and all sincere Lutherans united on the basis of truth. We Lutherans, too, who are at present assembled here in Columbus perceive with great sorrow the lamentable divided condition afflicting our dear Lutheran Church in this country. We recognize also the sacred duty which devolves upon us children and members of this Church to do whatever we can through God's grace that the breaches in the walls of Zion be closed, that which is separated be united and, God willing, be formed into one Evangelical Lutheran Church of North America. For this reason we have convened here to humble ourselves before the Lord, aware of the remissness of which we as members of the Church have all become guilty. We wish jointly to ask for forgiveness and in His fear fraternally to take counsel as to the means by which the desired help for our Church might be accomplished. Now, since, according to the Word of God, the true unity of the Church consists above everything else in the unity of faith and of confession (Eph. 4 and 1 Cor. 1) and only on this foundation true, permanent, external unity can be established, we regard the return of our Church in this country to its Confession as that which is chiefly necessary if true unity is to be achieved. Hence we consider it our duty in a humble spirit to address all Lutherans in the United States of North America, individuals as well as synods, and to ask them that they together with us gather again about the good confession of our faithful, pious fathers and with us, before everything else, state freely, publicly, and without reservation that the fundamental Confession of our Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, presented 1530 publicly to Emperor Charles V, is their own confession and that the faith set forth in it is in all respects the faith of their own heart. The more frequently, alas! it happens in our days that people who accept the Confession of our Church and acknowledge it as the foundation are not thoroughly convinced of the full agreement of this Lutheran symbol with the Word of God and willing to use it as their doctrinal guide, the more necessary and salutary it appears to us that we should in this our meeting consider above everything else this fundamental Confession of our Church and through frank, brotherly exchange of views assure one the other that we all agree in the proper understanding of this document and thereby confirm each other in the unity of the faith."

27) Translation by Wm. Arndt (*Concordia Theological Monthly*, XI, pp. 6 and 7).



 

At its third session the Conference decided to make it a rule to discuss all questions pertaining to faith and conscience, but to rule out all those matters which were consequences (Consequenzen) and pertained to the field of practical problems and were not matters of conscience in the true sense of the word. After the discussion of an article had been completed, unity in the understanding and acceptance of it was to be attested by a rising vote.

The Conference then proceeded to the discussion of the Augsburg Confession. The Introduction, it was pointed out, described the Confession as containing, not only the relatively purest doctrine, but the only correct doctrine which all true Christians have *implicite*, even if they have not come to a full understanding of all the teachings. For that reason no one could be regarded as a member of the Lutheran Church who rejected or changed the U. A. C.

The question arose out of this discussion how a person should regard those who for themselves accepted the U. A. C., but belonged to a church organization which did not recognize the symbolic authority of the Confession. This question was answered as follows: "That we regard such persons as brothers as long as they zealously contend against prevailing false doctrines and for the truth, and that we regard it as their duty to remain in the church organization in which they are established as long as there are still reasonable hopes for improvement." [28]

After this discussion, the Conference declared that it considered the Foreword an integral part of the Confession and that this Foreword described the relation of the Confession to our Church in the words: "that in this matter of religion the opinions and judgments of the parties might be heard and weighed among ourselves in mutual charity, leniency, and kindness, in order that

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28) This resolution indicates that the Conference did not wish to dissolve any synod or to endanger its existence, but rather to lead the erring bodies to the truth. This was not a new principle for Walther. It is embodied in his teaching on the invisible Church. In 1841, when Walther defended the right to existence of the churches of the Saxon fathers although these churches had erred at the time of their departure from Germany and also in America (*Luth.* XIV, 1 ff.), he successfully defended the thesis: "Erring groups should not be dissolved, but reformed (Auch irrglaeubige Haufen sind nicht aufzuloesen, sondern zu reformieren)" (Thesis 3 of the Altenburg Debate, Guenther, *C. F. W. Walther*, St. Louis, 1890, p. 45). We have already noted how earnestly Walther defended himself against the charge of attempting to dissolve the Buffalo Synod. In 1860 Pastor Grosz of the Eastern District requested Synod to give an opinion as to whether a teacher who had accepted a call to a school which belonged to an erring synod could be received into the Missouri Synod. The opinion of Synod held that inasmuch as the teacher (Knoche) had accepted the call with the understanding that he be permitted to teach Luther's Catechism and heard the Word and took the Sacrament in a Missouri Church, he was in reality serving the Missouri Synod and could be received as a member. (*Allgemeine Synodalberichte*, 1860, p. 78.)

after the removal and correction of such things as have been treated and understood in a different manner in the writings on either side, these matters may be settled and brought back to one simple truth and Christian concord, that for the future one pure and true religion may be embraced and maintained by us, that as we all are under one Christ and battle under Him, so we may be able also to live in unity and concord in the one Christian Church," and "we offer in this matter of religion the Confession of our preachers and of ourselves showing what manner of doctrine 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." [29]

After a brief discussion the first article of the Confession was approved. In the discussion of the second article the conference emphasized that all men sinned in Adam because all were in Adam. Original sin is not only a disease or the inability to do good, but is really and truly sin. The Conference expressed its belief that the words "true God and true man" in the third article are to be connected with all the predicates following: born, suffered, died, etc. Thus the Communion of Attributes is already taught in the Augsburg Confession and only expanded in the Formula of Concord. We pray to Jesus also according to His human nature (Deshalb beten wir auch Christum nicht blosz nach seiner Gottheit, sondern auch nach seiner Menschheit an). In the discussion of the fourth article the Conference emphasized that faith justifies not because it is an inner condition (Beschaffenheit) and the source of good works, but because faith lays hold on the merits of Christ and appropriates them. Thus sins are forgiven for Christ's sake and not for faith's sake.

Differences of opinion became evident in the discussion of the fifth article. On the one hand, it was held that "Predigtamt" had the same meaning as "Pfarramt." It was, however, pointed out that the two did not have the same meaning in this article, inasmuch as the fifth article explained the means through which the saving faith described in the fourth article is attained, namely, through the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as could clearly be seen from the Latin (*institutum est ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta*). After three sessions had been given to the topic, it was moved to postpone the discussion of the relationship between "Predigtamt" and "Pfarramt" until the fourteenth article had been read. It was then stated in a general

29) All English quotations of the Symbols are taken from the *Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis, 1921.

way that the Conference interpreted the term "Predigtamt" to mean services within the Church, or the administration of the means of grace, and thereupon the Conference expressed its agreement with article five in the usual manner.

The discussion of the sixth article centered around the phrase "It is necessary to do good works." The question whether good works are necessary because they are marks of faith was answered to the effect that good works are indeed signs of faith as long as the Christian is not in a state of temptation, but when he is in such a condition, faith alone can destroy the fiery darts of the Evil One. The Conference finally agreed to the following sentences:

"We must do good works, partly because of the divine command, from which also believers are not excluded, and partly because good works necessarily flow out of faith. Therefore believers need the preaching of the Law not inasmuch as they are new creatures, but inasmuch as they still have the Old Adam in them."

After this explanation the Conference proceeded to the discussion of the seventh article. It was first of all observed that the "Church" therein described is one which has always existed. For that reason the Lutheran Church in its historical appearance is not identical with the concept "Christian Church" of which the seventh article speaks. On the other hand, a Church which in the full sense of the word is "the true Church" must show the marks of the true Church, *i. e.*, the pure Word and the Sacraments.[30] Since the Lutheran Church has these marks, it is called the "true Church," yet not the Church in the real sense of the term.[31] Thus a person could regard the Lutheran Church from two points of view. On the one hand, a person might regard it in the light of its historical development. Then a person could not identify it with the one,[32] holy,[33] Christian Church, since it was not always in

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30) "To the extent that an erring group still has the truth, it belongs to the Christian Church; to the extent, however, that it corrupts the truth, it is a sect and not an institution of salvation." Walther in *Luth.* I, 98.

31) "The Lutheran Church is not the visible group of people who call themselves Lutheran, but the great changeless Church to which those who properly call themselves Lutheran pledge themselves with their teaching, and to which millions have belonged before Luther's name was mentioned in the world. . . . We therefore gladly admit that the sum total of those who heretofore called themselves Lutherans are only a particular church body and not the catholic Christian Church, but only a part of it". — Walther in *Luth.* I, 99.

32) The Conference held that the Church was one because 1) there are no *species* of the one *genus;* 2) it has one faith; 3) because it has always been one in Christ.

33) The Conference agreed that the Church is not "holy" in the Old Testament sense, *i. e.*, as the children of Israel were outwardly

existence, nor did it ever embrace all believers.[34] On the other hand, inasmuch as the Lutheran Church declares by that name its allegiance to the same belief which the one, holy, Christian Church has always confessed, a person could speak of the Lutheran Church as the one holy Christian Church.[35]

The opinion was expressed that the phrase "in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered" can only refer to a visible organization, inasmuch as the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments is a visible act. The view prevailed, however, that the marks of the Church can be visible without the thing itself being visible. The presence of the marks of the Church indicates that the Church is present but does not indicate who the members of the Church are. It is easier to recognize the presence of the Church where the Word and Sacrament are present in their purity than where they are not thus present. It would be a mistake, however, to deny that the Church is also present there, where, in addition to destructive errors, fragments of the truth are taught. For also these fragments are the *pure* Word and hence marks of the Church. Yet this fact does not warrant the conclusion that one is free to join any visible church. Every Christian is bound upon pain of losing his salvation to flee all false prophets.

As far as ceremonies are concerned, the Conference agreed that no ceremonies are essential for the unity of the Church. It was pointed out, however, that the Lutheran Church has certain ceremonies which are types (Sinnbilder) of Christian truth and contribute to the growth in Christian virtue. The Conference felt that a return to the old Lutheran customs was desirable.[36]

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selected by God, but in the true inner New Testament sense, being the congregation of all believers. This Church is holy 1) because of the administration of the Word and the Sacraments; 2) because of the imputed righteousness of Christ; 3) because its members lead holy lives.

34) The Conference held that the term "believers" does not include those who have "an historical faith" (den historischen Glauben), but only the *vere credentes, i. e.*, those who through a living faith are united with Christ.

35) For a fuller discussion of Walther's views on the Church see the forewords to the first editions of the *Lutheraner*. Cf. *Luth. XIII*, 57 ff.; 73 ff.; etc.

36) "Although the return to the doctrines of our fathers will more and more tend to instill a pleasure in the beautiful forms of church service which they had and a person may have it as a goal to lead our Lutheran people to them again, still the matter is and always will remain a matter of Christian freedom, and the preacher deals contrary to this freedom and (if against better knowledge and conscience) godlessly who upholds any ceremony as necessary for his congregation." Minutes of the Conference, *Luth.* XIII, 52.

The Conference also expressed the opinion that the outward form (Verfassungsform) did not belong to those things on which true unity depended.

On Oct. 6 the Conference heard the report of the correspondence committee. It expressed its joy over the many letters received and expressed regrets that the writers could not be present. It also decided to conduct the next conference in October, 1857. The selection of the place was left to the executive committee. At the next session the Conference resolved that only those should have a voice at the conference who were members of a Lutheran synod or could present satisfactory credentials.

The conference adjourned with prayer and benediction.[37]

### III. Walther's Evaluation of the First Free Conference

Walther was filled with joy over the results of the First Free Conference. We shall quote at length from his evaluation of the Conference as given in the *Lutheraner*. After acquainting his readers with the purpose of the Conference and saying a few words about the synods represented, he adds:[38]

"The Conference received proofs that many dear brethren who were absent in body were present in spirit, since these men who wrote showed their sympathy with the purpose of the Conference, extended words of encouragement and advice, and wished the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the richest blessings on the deliberations.

"The spirit which permeated the Conference was the spirit of truth, of love, and of peace. Naturally it was too much to expect that among the members of the Conference, who in most instances saw each other face to face for the first time, differences in doctrine should not at first become evident. At the same time, however, it became apparent in the clearest possible way that no one present would not have been ready to conform to recognized truth. Every voice heard testified that in all hearts there lived an upright and yearning desire for unity in spirit through the bonds of love and peace. No free utterance which followed on a frank assertion produced a lasting false note. One surpassed the other in showing deference according to God's Word; no one appeared to be seeking his own; the speakers showed that Christian spirit which regards the next person as higher than himself, and each was ready to learn from his neighbor. The result of this was that the longer they dealt with one another and the more thoroughly they ex-

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37) On Oct. 26 Pastor A. Kleinegees wrote a letter to the secretary at Columbus, Ohio, in which he stated that it was known that he did not agree with the interpretation of the fifth and seventh articles as adopted by the Conference. He also pointed out that he had stated his reasons for differing from the views finally accepted at the Conference but had been persuaded not to enter his objections in the minutes. At this pastor's request, the letter was published in the official minutes.

38) *Luth.* XIII, 33, 34.

pressed themselves on the situations which arose, the more firmly the members of the Conference were united in the ever-growing consciousness of standing in one faith and in true brotherly love.

"The Conference finally decided to read the Unaltered Augsburg Confession together, to examine each word carefully and to voice opinions freely and without reserve, not only in order first of all to become conscious together of its doctrinal content in its definiteness and completeness, but also thoroughly to convince itself that all its members were truly loyal to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and that each one present accepted it without reservation in its simple verbal meaning.

"It is true that the Conference, by this method of free expression of opinions, reached only the seventh article in thus reading and discussing the basic Confession of our Church, since most of the members had to leave in order to attend the sessions of their own respective synods. Nevertheless, each conference member joyfully went his way, convinced that our meeting had, by the grace of God, attained the desired goal, namely, that a good foundation had been laid on which we could now continue to build. They had seen each other face to face; they had learned to know each other; many premature judgments had been laid aside; much misunderstanding had been removed; they had found themselves going the same way toward the same goal; many a wall which formerly separated them had crumbled; the consciousness of fellow membership in one Church had been awakened and nourished; under the banner of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession in its literal meaning they extended each other the hand of brotherly love; in joint confession of mutual guilt they bowed themselves together before God and pleaded for His grace and forgiveness;[39] they had agreed that each one would now raise his voice in his own circle and occupation and call, with heartfelt humility, urging all true sons of our Church to rally around the basic Confession of our Church and to fight with us the good fight of faith and confession. Thus all finally parted with the joyful hope

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39) Walther did not hesitate to set an example of Christian humility. He wrote in the foreword of the *Lutheraner* of that year (1856): "As we look back over the years during which we edited the *Lutheraner*, we find just as many reasons for humbling ourselves before God on account of the great weaknesses which are therein brought to light as to praise God's eternal mercy, which aided us in the growth of the knowledge of the truth." Nor was this statement a "nod" to other Lutherans. He apologized in the columns of the *Lutheraner* (1, 79) for the harsh judgments passed on people in Germany by the Saxons ("wir haben lieblos gerichtet ueber viele in Deutschland"), and although he commends the zeal with which he and the Saxons left Germany, a zeal proved by the sacrifices made, he nevertheless states: "They, without knowing it, were far from being true members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church" (*Luth.* XIV, 1).

that the first, even if only a small, step had been taken in order that the state of disunity in which the Lutheran Zion finds itself in our land would, with the help of God, finally be removed, and the different synods of our land, without harming their own peculiar characteristics, would finally take on the form of a united Lutheran Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

"To many who were not present the accomplishments of the Conference may appear so insignificant as to be unworthy of mention. We, however, who were privileged to take part received an altogether different impression, so that surely all of us could join wholeheartedly in the words of the song which were selected from the hymn 'Dir, dir, Jehovah, will ich singen' by the moderator of the Conference as the closing theme:

'Du thust ueberschwenglich mehr,
Als ich verstehe, bitte und begehr.'

"Just consider the relationship which existed before in this land between the synods which called themselves Lutheran. Each one followed, according to the measure of its knowledge and according to its opinions and local environments, its own peculiar direction. Instead of emphasizing their common relationship and serving one another with the special gifts which each possessed, they separated, step by step, farther and farther from each other, and thus fell into a divided state of jealousy. It appeared entirely as though in the end as many divisions, yes, and in part sects, would arise in the Church as there were synods. It is without doubt true that the so-called General Synod of the Ev. Lutheran Church in the United States likewise arose through the apprehension that unless its various synods united, they would finally become opposing camps. But that union is built on a foundation on which no true, unified Lutheran Church of North America having the correct belief can be built. It drew an external band around itself and at the same time received into its midst the seed for continuous inner differences, inasmuch as it yielded the confession of truth through which the Lutheran Church reached unity and which it is her God-given duty to preserve. For acceptance of the Augsburg Confession with reservations is no acceptance of the Confession, but a repudiation of it. For that reason we cannot expect salvation for our Church from the General Synod. An outward union, as outlined by a constitution, is not at all the thing we need. If one single Evangelical Lutheran Church, strong in unity, is to arise here, it can arise only through the unity of faith, through the awakening of the consciousness of the presence of such unity and through rallying around one Confession, as around a treasure which must be mutually defended and preserved.

"The General Conference was to serve this purpose, and the

result of that Conference is that the first step in that direction has been taken. With joy and thanks to God the participants experienced that through the individual expression of opinion relative to the content of the basic Confession of our Church the consciousness of unity in faith and their mutual relationship was in part aroused and in part enlivened and strengthened. When we finally had to part from one another, it was the wish of all that God would grant a speedy reunion, in order that we might continue on the way of the blessed work, and the hope dwelt in each one that finally a bond of spirit and heart would unite all true Lutherans of North America, a bond which would bind them to a closer and more blessed union in endeavor than an external organization, no matter how well elaborated, could do."

## IV. The Second Free Conference

**Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**
**Oct. 29—Nov. 4, 1857**

Present at the Conference:

Missouri Synod: F. J. Bilz, E. A. Brauer, J. H. Doermann, E. J. Fritze, O. Fuerbringer, C. Grosz, H. Habermehl, W. Holls, A. Hoppe, J. A. Huegli, C. G. W. Keyl, W. Nordmann, H. C. Schwan, A. Selle, G. Seyffarth, W. Sihler, R. Voigt (*c. r. m.*), R. Volkert, C. F. W. Walther, A. Wevel, H. Wunder.

Ohio Synod: J. O. Becker, P. J. Buehl, P. Eirich, F. Groth, J. G. Kranz, H. S. Lasar, W. F. Lehmann, M. Loy, F. Schiedt, J. G. Theisz, C. Wernle.

New York Synod: H. Ludwig, W. Steimle, C. W. Weisel.

Pittsburgh Synod: W. Berkemeier, C. W. Brecht, M. F. Dethlefs, H. Gilbert, F. Zimmermann.

Tennessee Synod: Socr. Henkel.

Norwegian Synod: V. Koren, J. A. Ottesen.

The Conference was opened with song and prayer in the First German Evangelical Lutheran Church by the chairman of the previous year, Prof. W. F. Lehmann. Professor Lehmann was reelected chairman, the Rev. Steimle, vice-chairman, and Pastors Schwan and Loy, secretaries.

The minutes of the meeting held in 1856 were read, and all present signified their agreement with them through a rising vote. At the second session the eighth article of the Confession was discussed. It was agreed that four points were emphasized in this article:

1. That the Church consists of all believers.

2. As it appears on earth this Church is never totally free of

hypocrites. These, however, are never members of the Church, but only mingled with it (ihr beigemischt).

3. The means of grace are potent and efficacious even when administered by hypocrites and godless persons within the Church.

4. Hence it is permissible (*uti licet*) to receive the Word and the Sacraments from such persons.

After the Conference had reached agreement on these points, the ninth article was read and discussed. First of all, it was pointed out that the phrase "Baptism is necessary" does not refer to an absolute necessity, but only to that necessity which flows from the divine command and the divinely ordained means. Some of the brethren felt that the second article of the Confession teaches the absolute necessity of Baptism inasmuch as it teaches that original sin condemns all under the eternal wrath of God who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit. It was pointed out, however, that the emphasis in this phrase of the second article does not rest on Baptism but on the words "born again" (cf. John 3:5). Attention was also drawn to the fact that papists who teach *ex opere operato* could teach the absolute necessity of Baptism, but not Lutherans, who teach that faith generated in Baptism justifies.

The latter explanation at first seemed unsatisfactory. The point was made that this same article condemned the Anabaptists because they taught that children are saved without Baptism. After it was pointed out that the Anabaptists were condemned not because they rejected the absolute necessity of Baptism, but the necessity which resulted from the divine command, the Conference agreed that Baptism was necessary because of the divine command and its being the divinely ordained means.

The members of the Conference considered the words "through Baptism is offered the Grace of God" as being so plain that the person who considered them inadequate for expressing that grace is offered through Baptism lacked the proper understanding of the words.

At this point the Conference was interrupted by a person who asked for permission to speak although he was not a member of the Conference. When this permission was granted, he pointed out that the Conference was not proceeding in accordance with its original purpose, namely, that of discussing doctrine, but was condemning persons. Furthermore, he maintained, the Conference had no right to condemn persons inasmuch as it was not a synod or a church organization, but a free gathering. As soon as a group condemns persons, it becomes a "power which oppresses consciences." Thirdly, the Conference would not be dealing prudently, inasmuch as it would arouse animosity through such action.

Fourthly, the Conference would deal unjustly since it had not dealt similarly with other antagonists. Finally, the criticism did not reach those for whom it was intended. To these accusations the Conference replied:

Ad 1: The Conference by its action condemned no one, but merely denied the right to bear the name Lutheran to those who were not of the Lutheran faith. Furthermore, the Conference had declared from the very beginning that it was not to be a gathering of all kinds of people who called themselves Lutheran, but only of those who were loyal to the U. A. C.

Ad 2: Every individual Christian as well as every Christian group has the right to condemn false doctrine and mark those who disseminate false doctrine as being in error. The Conference demanded only that persons adhere to the verbal meaning of the Augsburg Confession. That was not difficult for Lutherans.

Ad 3: The question here was not one of expediency, but one that pertained to the glory of God and the truth. It was not a useless task to correct false brethren.

Ad 4: The Conference would have dealt unjustly if it had condemned those who, while openly confessing adherence to the Lutheran symbols, in reality rejected doctrines taught there without first showing that they were not honest in their pledged loyalty.

Ad 5: The motion, if adopted, would certainly not be directed against those to whom it did not pertain.

After this explanation the Conference adopted the following resolution:

"We hold that those are not Lutherans who declare this article (IX) to be in error and thus deny that Baptism offers grace to all and gives and seals it to those who believe; and we reject all who hold that the baptismal water is not a means through which God works regeneration and seals sonship."

The Conference also rejected the error of the Anabaptists and others who hold that children of Christians are, according to God's will and order, saved without Baptism (ordentlicherweise ohne Taufe selig werden).

It was pointed out, in the discussion of the tenth article, that there were some who held that Jesus did not give His disciples His body and blood on the night of the institution of the Lord's Supper, but that this occurred only after the glorification. This false view was rejected. The conference endorsed the threefold manner of Christ's presence and also went on record as maintaining that the words "in, with, and under" were still the best to describe the Sacramental Presence. After lengthy discussion the following paragraph was adopted:

"That the true body and blood of Christ, *i. e.*, the one which now indeed is glorified, but nevertheless the same one which was in the womb of the Virgin Mary, hung on the cross, etc., is truly and essentially (yet in a way which cannot be understood) present in, with, and under the visible elements, and is distributed by the administrant in, with, and under the same to all communicants, worthy and unworthy, believers and unbelievers, and is eaten by them with their mouth, yet not in a Capernaitic or physical manner. . . ."

The Conference declared that it did not recognize the Altered Augsburg Confession, which was the brain child of a private individual and never was authorized in the Church.[40]

At its last session the Conference heard the report of the correspondence committee, acknowledged the greetings of the New York Pastoral Conference, and urged all teachers of colleges to take advantage of these conferences. It also resolved that a person did not join the Conference as a permanent church organization by participating in the discussions.

The Conference closed with a hymn, prayer, and benediction.[41]

## V. Third Free Conference

**Cleveland, Ohio**
**Aug. 5—11, 1858**

**Present at the Conference:**

Missouri Synod: F. Auch, E. A. Brauer, Cantor Brauer, J. F. Buenger, A. Craemer, H. Gils, W. Engelbart, Hugo Hanser, H.

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40) Walther held that the writings of a private person should never be made binding on the Church and that the rule and norm for determining who is a Lutheran and who is not should always be the Confession. Thus he wrote in 1841: "The true Church is to be judged chiefly by the general, true, public confession by which its members acknowledge and hold themselves bound (Die rechtglaeubige Kirche ist hauptsaechlich nach dem gemeinsamen rechtglaeubigen oeffentlichen Bekenntnisse zu beurtheilen, wozu sich die Glieder derselben verbunden erkennen und bekennen)." — Guenther, *C. F. W. Walther*, Thesis Eight of the Altenburg Debate, p. 46. Approximately forty years later Walther expressed the same thought still more forcefully. He wrote: "The principal means by which our opponents endeavor to support their doctrine consists in continually quoting passages from the private writings of our Church, published subsequently to the Formula of Concord. But whenever a controversy arises concerning the question whether a doctrine is *Lutheran*, we must not ask: 'What does this or that "father" of the Lutheran Church teach in his private writings?' for he also may have fallen into error; on the contrary, we must ask: 'What does the *public* CONFESSION of the *Lutheran Church* teach concerning the controverted point?' For in her confession our Church has recorded for all times what she believes, teaches, and confesses, for the very reason that no controversy may arise concerning the question what our Lutheran Church believes." Walther (translation by Aug. Crull): *The Controversy concerning Predestination*, St. Louis, C. P. H., 1881, p. 5.

41) The minutes of the Second Conference are in *Lutheraner*, XIV, 81—85.

Juengel, H. Kuehn, August Lehmann, W. Lindemann, J. F. G. Nuetzel, Christian Piepenbrink, J. Rupprecht, E. Roeder, H. C. Schwan, G. Seyffarth, W. Sihler, H. Schoenewald, J. Strieter, H. Both, C. F. W. Walther, P. H. Wambsganss, F. Wyneken.

Ohio Synod: S. Baechler, P. J. Buehl, P. Eirich, R. Herbst, A. Kleinegees, J. G. Kranz, Lazar, W. F. Lehmann, M. Loy, D. Martens, J. F. Nouffer, D. Rothacker, J. C. Schulze, J. Schladermund, E. Schmid, C. Wernle.

New York Synod: H. Ludwig, W. Steimle, C. H. Weisel.

Tennessee Synod: H. Wetzel.

The Conference was opened in Zion's Lutheran Church by the chairman of the previous year, Professor Lehmann, with a hymn and a prayer.

A member of the Conference reported that some were absent from the sessions of the Conference because they did not know the purpose and goal of the Conference. This question was answered by pointing to the resolution adopted at the first meeting, which stated that the purpose of the Conference was to discuss the Augsburg Confession.

On the afternoon of the first day the Conference discussed the eleventh article of the Augsburg Confession. "Confession" was defined as "that church institution, according to which communicants, before participating of the Sacrament come to private confession (Beichtstuhl), acknowledge their sins, and receive absolution."

In accordance with the eleventh article's admonition to preserve *privatam absolutionem*, the Conference urged those ministers who had permitted private absolution to lapse, to reinstate it again, not, however, to make it a matter of conscience. Since the twenty-fifth article also deals with Confession, the Conference discussed that article next. It was noted that four points were discussed in that article:

1. An acknowledgment that the Church at the time of the Reformation retained the Confessional;[42]

2. Why it was so highly regarded;[43]

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42) The Conference regarded it as an indication of laxity that the private confessions had been discontinued in so many Lutheran churches in America. Such private confessions, however, the Conference agreed, are not determinative of a Church's true Lutheran character. It opposed all those who considered private confession a remnant of popery, inasmuch as Lutherans did not: 1) make the validity of the Absolution dependent on the authority of the person who spoke the Absolution; 2) to make the validity dependent on a full confession of sins; 3) make its efficacy dependent on the good works of saints.

43) In the estimation of the Conference, the phrase "our people are taught that they should highly prize the Absolution as being the voice

 

3. That the enumeration of sins is not necessary, and no one should be urged to enumerate them;

4. That Confession is a church institution.

Animated discussion was aroused by the words of the twelfth article: "Now, repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which is born of the Gospel, or of absolution, and believes that, for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience, and delivers from terrors." 44)

The following points, relative to the thirteenth article, were agreed upon:

1. The Sacraments do not only symbolize spiritual gifts, *i. e.*, indicate God's grace, but they are signs of grace which communicate, are real means of grace, and through them God offers, gives, and seals grace to those who use them, inasmuch as God gives those who use them a witness that also they are participants of the universal grace of Christ. Inasmuch as the Confession calls

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of God and pronounced by God's command" does not indicate only that the words of Absolution are taken from the Bible, but also that as often as a person receives the Absolution, he does not only receive the judgment of a man but that of the mighty God. The person who denies this denies the collative power of the Gospel.

The Conference also denied the accusation that our Church held Absolution to be a peculiar power in addition to the Gospel by which sins are forgiven, a power held by the regularly called minister of the Church and which such minister received at the time of his ordination.

It felt that the difference between the Lutheran Church and false churches becomes apparent in the teaching on Absolution. A Church which believes the universal validity and power of Christ's atonement will prize highly the Absolution which applies the grace of Christ to the individual.

44) In the discussion of these words the following points were emphasized:

1. Contrition and faith could indeed be separated in theory, but in practice the two must always be together. Therefore it is wrong to do as some sectarians do, to preach Law first and to expect a certain amount of repentance and love for God, and then to comfort with the Gospel. The preaching of Law and Gospel should always go hand in hand, in order that the wounds might be bound up as soon as they are made. Nor is it the purpose of the Law to show a person how he is to repent and be converted.

2) True contrition should continue throughout life, because the Old Adam is always present with a person.

3) The Conference bemoaned the pietistic mingling of Law and Gospel so prevalent at the time. It was the conviction of the Conference, that more people were lost because they had too little Gospel preached to them than were lost because they did not hear enough Law.

4) The question of repeated regenerations was answered by referring to Gal. 4:19, and to Nicodemus.

5) The words "comforts the conscience and delivers from terrors" do not mean that there will be no more sorrow or temptations, but that God strengthens the heart when such temptations come.

the Sacraments "witnesses," it thereby indicates that the chief part in the Sacrament is the Word.

2. Just as the Word is preached to awaken and to strengthen the faith in the grace of God through Christ Jesus which is given through it and at the same time requires faith and is only then heard unto salvation when it is heard in faith, thus also faith is related to the Sacraments. They, too, awaken and strengthen faith, nourish it, and are efficacious only when they are used in faith.

3. As the Word enters the ears, so the external signs are for the eyes, in order that they might inwardly move the heart. For the Word and the external signs work the same thing in the heart.

It was moved and carried to publish the proceedings of the first three Free Conferences in pamphlet form. The next Conference was to meet in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in July of the following year. The meeting closed with hymn, prayer, and benediction.[45]

## VI. Conclusions

This completes our study of Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences. The Fourth Free Conference was held at Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1859. We have already observed that Walther, because of illness, was unable to be present at this Conference.[46]

Walther was not the only leading Lutheran unable to attend the conference. The president of the previous conferences, Professor Lehmann, was also absent.

Rector G. Schick was elected chairman, Pastor J. A. Ottesen, vice-chairman, and Pastors H. C. Schwan and C. W. Lindemann, secretaries. After expressing its sorrow over the absence of Dr. Walther, the Conference took up the discussion of the fourteenth article. The discussion was divided into four parts:

1. Title and heading;
2. The necessity of the ministry;
3. The functions of the ministry;
4. The persons who hold the office of the ministry.

The Conference agreed that the fifth article spoke of the ministry *in abstracto* and the fourteenth *in concreto*[47] and thereupon unanimously adopted the following paragraph:

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45) The minutes of the Third Free Conference are found in *Luth.* XV, 19—21, 27—29.

46) *Luth.* XVI, 10. His name is not given in the list of those present.

47) The Conference adopted the view that the heading of the fifth article as well as its stated purpose of opposing the Anabaptists, who denied that God gave the Holy Spirit through the external word, already indicated that the article treated of the preaching of the Word. Furthermore, the respective Schwabach article (written by Luther in 1529) identifies the ministry with the Gospel: "Solchen Glauben zu erlangen

The Conference acknowledges through the comparison of the heading of the fourteenth article with that of the fifth (both in the German and in the Latin text) that the fifth article treats of the ministry of the means of grace in general (through the institution of the Gospel as the oral Word — Predigtamt — the ministry in the narrower sense — Pfarramt — was naturally included); the fourteenth article, on the other hand, treats of the ministry in the narrower sense (Pfarramt). Relative to the functions of the ministry the Conference ruled: When the fourteenth article states that "no one should publicly teach in the Church, etc.," it means that no one should practice the rights of the spiritual priesthood in a public office in behalf of the congregation without a regular call.[48]

The objection was raised that doctrine and practice contradicted each other if a person taught, on the one hand, that all rights belonged to the congregation and, on the other hand, maintained that only ministers could preach, administer the Sacraments, examine, etc. This objection was answered as follows:

"There is a difference between possessing a certain right and using that right wisely and in the proper way. There are divine and human arrangements. It is a divine arrangement that the public ministrations of the Word and Sacraments should be done by specially called persons. The same God, in this instance, gave the right and prescribed the way in which this right should be practiced. For that reason there is no contradiction in this case. All human arrangements have their roots in the command to do all things decently and in order. This includes, by the very nature of the thing, that the examination and ordination of ministers in the Church is delegated by the Church to those who have the ability and are the public organs of the Church. Here also belongs the manner and the order in which churches outwardly maintain the divinely commanded unity, *e. g.*, by joining a synod, State Church, etc. Where such a synod exists to which the individual churches freely delegated certain rights, there the exercise of such delegated authority by the synod is not contradictory to congregational rights but a proper use of the authority granted to it.

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oder uns Menschen zu geben, hat Gott eingesetzt das Predigtamt oder muendlich Wort, naemlich das Evangelium, durch welches er solchen Glauben und seine Macht, Nutz, und Frucht verkuendigen laesst". The fourteenth article, on the other hand, indicates by its title, "De ordine ecclesiastico," that it treats of persons and hence of the ministry *in concreto*.

48) "Nach laengerer Besprechung erkannte die Conferenz, dasz nicht etwa allein dann oeffentlich gelehrt u. s. w. werde, wenn dieses in einer oeffentlichen, d. i., zuvor angesagten und jedermann zugaenglichen Versammlung geschehe, sondern allemal dann, wenn jemand die Gnadenmittel kraft uebertragener Gewalt der Kirche gegenueber verwalte, wie es dann z. B. auch eine oeffentliche Ausrichtung des Amts sei, wenn der Prediger in Privathaeusern taufe, Kranke communicire, u. dgl.

The Conference thereupon took up the problem of the functions of the public ministry. Among the functions were included: 1) preaching; 2) administration of the Sacraments; 3) public prayer; 4) public admonition; 5) the exercise of the divine Word in regulating congregational meetings. Not included in the functions were: 1) private use of the Word; 2) discussion and consolation among Christian brethren from the Word of God; 3) emergencies or necessities; 4) disseminating the Word among those who are not Christians.[49]

Thereupon the need, author, and essence of the regular call were discussed. The need for the call, it was agreed, flows out of God's command and ordinance. God, who gave the world the Gospel, also commanded that the Gospel be disseminated. Persons are necessary to effect such dissemination. God's Word makes it clear that no person should assume this duty through his own will (Jer. 23; Heb. 5). As God Himself established the office, so He also is the real sender of the call. He calls mediately and immediately. When He calls mediately, the agency through which He calls is the church, that is, the local congregation.

The term *rite vocatus* next occupied the attention of the Conference. Here the view adopted was that a call was *rite* not only when it was extended by those who had the power to do so, but also when the act of calling had been done in accordance with the order customary in the congregation which extends the call. The question arose whether the call is valid if this or that part of the proper procedure were lacking. Here the distinction between *recte* (*rite*) and *rate* was shown. A call can be issued *rate* without being issued *recte*.[50]

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49) The Conference agreed that rules could not be made hard and fast: "Man koenne zwar . . . nicht in allen einzelnen Beziehungen schon von vorn herein die Graenzen so genau feststellen, dasz dadurch jede Ausweichung nach beiden Seiten hin unmoeglich gemacht werde, vielmehr mueszte Vieles dahin gehoerende der Casuistik zugewiesen werden. Das aber muesse nach Art. 14 vor allem festgehalten werden, dasz Zusammenkuenfte fuer diesen Zweck nicht oeffentlich seien (in vorher angegebenem Sinne) und dasz die Erbauung nach den Schmalk. Artikeln wirklich eine *mutua*, d. i., gegenseitige sei, dasz also nicht etwa eine Person sich als Lehrer aufwerfe, oder von den andern eine jeweilige Aufforderung annehme, welche doch nicht ein ordentlicher Beruf zu einem Huelfsamt des oeffentlichen Predigtamts waere, sondern dasz es doch wesentlich eine gegenseitige freie Unterredung sei und bleibe, die sich ferner auch der Aufsicht des Pfarrers nicht entziehe, geschweige denn sich an die Stelle, oder gar in Opposition gegen den oeffentlichen Gottesdienst und die amtliche Seelsorge setze".

50) The Conference decided that the following points belonged to the essence of the call: 1) that those call who have the right to call; 2) that the call is really to the office, *i. e.*, to the ministry of the means of grace. The Conference adopted this resolution: "When it is stated in the fourteenth article: 'No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called,' the Con-

The Conference approved the following paragraph relative to ordination:

"Since the office is conferred through the vote and call of the congregation, ordination can be nothing else than an open and festive confirmation . . . ordination . . . is not absolutely necessary. . . . Since ordination is only a confirmation of the call, missionaries and traveling preachers who do not have a call to a specific congregation should not be ordained." [51]

In the discussion of the twenty-eighth article, which on account of similarity of contents was briefly considered, the Conference noted the double danger which existed, namely, that of the State extending its authority to the Church or the Church to the State. It also agreed that the church as a whole always has the sole right of excommunication, but that the pastor has the right and the duty to keep the impenitent from partaking of Holy Communion.

After hearing the report of the communications committee, the Conference adjourned with prayer.[52]

Before its adjournment the Fourth Free Conference decided that the next Conference should be held in June, 1860, at Cleveland Ohio. At the beginning of that year Walther was urged by friends to take a trip to Europe to recover from his illness. Thus he was in Europe at the time when the Fifth Free Conference was to be held. The notice for the Conference appeared in the May 15 (1860) issue of the *Lutheraner* and also in other Lutheran publications. The editors of the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* of Columbus, Ohio, published a reply to the invitation to the Conference in which they openly and formally declared that their constituents

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ference understands by the 'regularly' that the call shall not only have the essential parts (that the person called is selectable, that the persons calling have the authority to call, that they call to the proper office, and that both sides are agreed, those who call, that they want the person called for their minister and the person called to serve as minister), but also that the process of calling be carried out in the customary manner of the church which calls. . . . If, however, much disorder attends the process of calling, the call is still valid as long as the essentials are not missing altogether."

51) Inasmuch as ordination is only a human ordinance, the opinion has been generally held of late that ordination should not be refused to chaplains and missionaries who do not have calls from local congregations.

The Conference opposed the distinction between ordination and installation which made ordination a public pronouncement of fitness for the office and installation a public assumption of office. Temporary calls were opposed as being anti-Scriptural and not in harmony with the seriousness, importance, and responsibility of the pastoral office.

52) The minutes of the Fourth Free Conference are found in *Luth.* XVI, 10—12; 19—20; 27—28; 35—37.

withdrew from the Conference and under present conditions did not desire to take part in the same.[53]

Thus a great attempt to unite Lutherans in America came to an end. That the Conferences produced results, however, cannot be doubted. The formation of the Synodical Conference of 1872 may safely be listed among the fruits of these endeavors.

Richmond Heights, Mo. E. L. Lueker

## Outlines on the Standard Gospels

### Tenth Sunday after Trinity

**Luke 19:41-48**

Three times the Scriptures speak of Jesus' weeping or shedding tears: in our text, in John 11:35, and in Heb. 5:7. — How strange that the Son of God, great God Himself, should weep, as if He were a weak being like ourselves. The subject takes us to the mystery of His divine-human person, which we shall praise and adore throughout eternity. Today let us inquire about

**The Significance of the Tears of Jesus**

which He wept over the city of Jerusalem.

*1. The tears remind us that sin will be punished.* As the omniscient God, Jesus, with His mental eye, saw the scenes of bloodshed and destruction which were to take place in and about Jerusalem in 70 A. D. They are briefly sketched in His words. Josephus

53) "Die Redaction der 'Lutherischen Kirchenzeitung' von Columbus erklaert mit Bezugnahme auf die an sie eingesandte Anzeige der naechsten Sitzung der genannten Conferenz, dasz sie oeffentlich und foermlich von ihr Abschied nehme, da sie unter bestehenden Verhaeltnissen keine Lust mehr habe beizuwohnen." — *L. u.* W. VI, 153.

Strained relations had arisen between the Ohio and the Missouri Synod because of the difference of opinion that had arisen as to the course to be taken toward Pastor H. Koenig of Wapaukonetta, Ohio. The Missouri Synod charged him with unionistic practices inasmuch as he received Reformed people to Communion. It also felt that Koenig had unjustly withdrawn from the Missouri Synod. The Ohio Synod justified Koenig. This action evoked the following statement from the *Lutheraner:* "Als die Missouri-Synode vor einigen Jahren der Ohio-Synode die Bruder- und Friedens-Hand reichte, der Herzenskuendiger weisz es, in der lautersten Gesinnung, ohne irgend welche selbstsuechtige Nebenabsichten, da haetten wir nicht gemeint, dasz der hoffnungsvolle Bund so bald ein Ende und zwar ein so klaegliches nehmen werde. Dasz allein die Ohio-Synode daran Schuld traegt, wird, wo noethig, bei anderer Gelegenheit gezeigt werden. Moechte sie von der betretenen Bahn umlenken und dadurch unsre nothgedrungene Abwehr unnoethig machen!" This notice was published shortly after the Fourth Free Conference in 1859 (*Luth.* XV, 204, footnote).