

Forward to Volume 25 of *Lehre und Wehre* (January, 1879, pp.1-11)

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This issue begins the twenty-fifth volume of this periodical. We consider ourselves obliged to open it with these few words.¹

Indeed, from the beginning until now we so-called “Missourians” have had to go our way very much alone. But now we have had to render ever stauncher testimony against fellowship with our German fatherland’s so-called “Lutheran” state church. And now in Germany our testimony has moved those who share our faith and confession to take action.² Since these things, even the few friends that we had up until now have, almost without exception, turned away from us. Yes, in some cases, they have turned against us.

That must not surprise us. When in the past people have hated the representatives of pure doctrine, what has awakened that hatred? Was it ever really anything besides the pure doctrine all by itself? Then least of all, in our age of indifference, would there be something else to awaken hatred? Rather, throughout history this is how a church gets enemies: getting serious about pure doctrine, adhering to it exclusively, rejecting and condemning contrary doctrines, and, above all, carrying out this doctrinal position in practice. Even a Herod Antipas “enjoyed” listening to the Baptizer (Mk 6:20). But then John set his doctrine to work against Herod. That is when the friendship transformed itself into murderous enmity. In the same way also that cardinal at Salzburg said “he would gladly tolerate” Luther’s doctrine, “but to let it out of its corner so that it might reform him, that may not be put up with.”³

It is the same way to this day. In our day, people are prepared to tolerate any doctrine so long as it will stand peacefully alongside its alternatives! And exactly those people who want to be orthodox, through this kind of tolerance do the most incredible things. Just look at the harmonious relationships in the academic faculties, the way they sit together so peacefully at pastoral conferences, the tone of voice of the revisionists!

But our experience is as very painful for us as it is, in this respect, unsurprising. We are no “*Deutschen*.” Everyone knows how a German is never happier than when he’s quarreling with someone. We aren’t that way. We testify that we find our joy in being busily preoccupied with using Scripture to build up ourselves and others. In comparison, polemics holds no joy at all for us. Yes, the fact that polemics is necessary is something we bear as a cross.

We are seen as an Ishmael, whose “hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him,” Gen.16:12. We see one precious friend after another change himself into our enemy, so that we stand alone. This is truly no joke to us. Rather it is bitter and difficult.

We are far from wanting to compare ourselves with Luther. But as Luther said in opposition to the Sacramentarians, so we must say in opposition to those who, at best, credit us with chasing after our own martyrdom, “As much as we feel our Old Adam, we are unfortunately inclined to make peace with all people, despite any doctrinal differences. And that is especially with every person we lovingly regard as a believer. But we are imprisoned. We cannot escape. There the text is too powerful. It won’t let itself be torn away from its meaning by mere wordplay.”

¹ *Lehre und Wehre*, a theological journal founded in 1855, was in some respects the prototype for the *Quarterly*. As the 150th anniversary of the founding of *Lehre und Wehre* approaches, as part of the *Quarterly*’s 100th anniversary we remember with gratitude *Lehre und Wehre*’s great contributions to confessional Lutheranism.

² Walther is apparently referring to the formation of the Synod of the Ev. Luth. Free Church in Saxony in 1876 and the joining of congregations in other states in 1877.

³ Lutherans in Salzburg, Austria suffered persecution and banishment in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Many went to Germany, a few to America.

Indeed, even the believing pastors now consider this an exceedingly difficult question to answer: Can one have fellowship with a state church that calls itself “Lutheran” if that church only as a formality pledges itself to the Lutheran symbols? Or must one rather separate oneself from such a church? Indeed, if Holy Scripture is really God’s truthful and clear word – and that it is! – then even a good catechism student can doubtless answer no question more easily or with more certainty than this one.

It would be downright laughable to maintain that in our age even just one of the so-called “Lutheran” state churches enjoys unity of faith and confession. That’s even if you look past the people who are trained in rationalism or who are completely ignorant. Indeed, at the lecterns and in the pulpits of nearly all so-called “Lutheran” state churches stand openly false prophets, open teachers of error, Arians, Pelagians, sacramentarians, and so on, even open rationalists and such as are blasphemers of Christ, yes, pantheistic atheists.

Through their affiliation with the state church and their membership in it, the believing preachers stand in church-, altar-, and pulpit-fellowship with these people. In part, they recognize these people as their inspectors. And so, because of this the same people must be allowed on occasion to teach, that is, to lead astray the souls who have been entrusted to the believing preachers. Don’t start to think that in these churches even those who want to be orthodox use “one kind of speech” and, when it comes to this or that point, use that orthodox speech “in the same sense and with only one meaning.” And don’t think that even one of the preachers dares to say this: that in all points the confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is also his confession, and from it he is “not at all to deviate, neither *in rebus* nor *in phrasibus*. But rather, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, he is to persist in it and always prefer it.”

To belong to such a state church, whether as a member or a minister, would be against God’s Word. That is lucid and clear. It’s a riddle to us how a discriminating human being could dispute this or at all doubt it. Regarding false teachers, God’s word often commands, “Keep away from them,” Ro. 16:17; “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers,” 2 Co. 6:14; “Come out from them and be separate,” 2 Co. 6:17; “Stay away from such people,” 1 Ti. 6:5;⁴ “Have nothing to do with him,” Ti. 3:10; and, “Do not take him into your house or welcome him,” 2 Jn. 10. God’s Word often gives these commands. In this way it often clearly and specifically calls people nowadays to detach themselves from fellowships like the so-called “Lutheran” state church.

Therefore, anyone who stays in the state church despite all this is disobedient to God’s clear Word. Everything one brings up to the contrary is sophistry, whether intentional or unintentional. When compared to God’s Word, their arguments dissolve like mist before the sun. They burn up like straw in the flame of contradictions.

Fellowship with the state churches, which have fallen away from the truth, is contrary to God’s Word. In the same way, it is also contrary to the clear confession of the orthodox church. Our basic confession, the Augsburg Confession, begins with the words, “*Ecclesiae magno consensu apud nos docent*,”⁵ and repeats this in the following articles with the words, “*Item docent*.”⁶ Not only that, but according to it the true church is in general also “the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered,” Art. VII. But the Lutheran Formula of Concord confesses further, in the name of our entire church, “We believe, teach, and confess also that no Church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other, if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine and *all* its articles, as also in the right use of the holy Sacraments,” Epitome, Art. X, par. 7.

Some people want to be orthodox, but they support fellowships such as the so-called “Lutheran” state churches of our time. By so doing, with their actions those people deny this highly important portion of the confession of our orthodox church. For where is the state church that can say with the Augsburg Confession, “*Ecclesiae magno consensu apud nos docent*?” Where is the state church that fits the Augsburg Confession’s definition of the true church? Where is the state church that fulfills the *conditio sine qua non* of a church that

⁴ Translator’s note: This part of 1 Timothy 6:5 is not in the NIV. It is a variant reading: ἀφίστασο ἀπὸ τῶν τοιούτων It is very well attested to: Cyprian, Irenaeus, the ancient Lectionaries, and so on.

⁵ “Our churches, with common consent, do teach...”

⁶ “Also they teach...” – Specifically, these words begin Articles II, III, IV, VI, VII, and XVII.

one cannot condemn, that its ministers maintain “agreement among them in doctrine and all its articles?” There is no longer such a state church! People seek to salvage their faithfulness to the confessions, despite their fellowship with the modern state churches. Whatever arguments they use are mere excuses. When compared to the clear wording of our pure confessions, they shatter like a reed stem under the weight of a rock. And when brought before the judgment seat of their own consciences, their flimsy alibis must immediately become silent.

Both God’s clear Word and the orthodox church’s clear confession condemn fellowship with the state church of our day. In that same way, up to now, also all faithful teachers of our church have condemned such a fellowship. First of all, there is the admonition Luther aimed at George Major. It is well-known but not repeated often enough. He spoke it to Major shortly before his death. It said, among other things, “Whoever holds his doctrine, faith, and confession to be true, correct, and certain, he cannot stand in the same stable with others who are furthering or having anything to do with false doctrine. Nor does he ever have a good word for the devil and his shed.”⁷ Can people still dare to call themselves Lutherans, when they “stand in the same stable with others that are furthering or having anything to do with false doctrine,” that is, belong to a state church? Nevermore!

Here is how they gloss over their alliance with heretics: in certain state churches, the doctrine of the Lutheran church may still be *doctrina publica*. Without a doubt, they should add the excuse that the officials in these churches still have not set aside their accountability to the Lutheran symbols. That makes the pure Lutheran doctrine the only defensible doctrine in such a state church.

In sundry so-called “Lutheran” state churches, they have repealed the oath upon the Lutheran symbols. (Among others, Saxony has done this.) They have intentionally formulated the vow that takes its place so that it is toned down and ambiguous enough that even an open rationalist is able to take it. Many rationalists do now take it without hesitation, whereas, according to their own admission, they could take the former oath only with sharp pangs of conscience.

However, apart from that, it is nonsense to think that a church may be a true church so long as in it the pure doctrine is *doctrina publica*. Recently the Breslau General Synod declared this very thing as a minor legal finding. What does God care if an ecclesiastical fellowship still retains on paper the law that within its domain only the pure doctrine should count for anything, if, in reality, everyone in it teaches what pleases him, and the ruling church authorities, consistories, synods, and superintendents don’t even give them a sour look? Yes, in most cases the leaders both install notoriously erring teachers and protect them against attack. That the correct doctrine in this way is *doctrina publica* in a state church only makes it all the more reprehensible. Such a hypocritical fellowship⁸ talks nicely about God as did the apostate Jewish church described in his Word: “You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” (Yes, false doctrine is idolatry!) “You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?” (Romans 2:21b-23) Yes, such a church talks nicely about God in exactly that way, because, as they themselves say, the pure doctrine is *doctrina publica* in their midst, while indeed this doctrine gets full play neither *publice* nor *privatim* among them: “What right have you to recite my laws” [namely on paper], “or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction [namely, doctrinal instruction] and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief [namely, a thief of doctrine, John 10:8], you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers” [false doctrine is but spiritual adultery, Jeremiah 29:23], (Ps. 50:16b-18).

Such churches would not sin so gravely, if they would in an external way equivocate⁹ and if, overall, they would in every respect set aside all responsibility to their orthodox confession, rather wearing the confession as a mask, behind which the face tries in vain to hide the blatant look of a false prophet. In his classic writing “Of the Councils and Churches,” Luther, after he has shown that the holy word of God is the mark of the true church, thereupon adds this: “We speak, however, about the external word, which is preached orally

⁷ St. Louis Ed., XVII, p.1477

⁸ One would not want to overlook that this phrase labels neither every member nor every minister of the state church as a hypocrite. Rather the predicate “hypocritical” should apply only to the fellowship in itself.

⁹ *Auf Schrauben stellen*. The sentence is difficult.

through human beings, as through you and me. For such has Christ left behind as an external sign, by which one should recognize his church or his holy Christian people in the world... Now where you see or hear preaching of such word, believing, confessing, and acting in accordance with it, there have no doubt that the same must certainly be a correct *ecclesia sancta catholica*, a Christian holy people, 1 Pt. 2:9, though they are very few in number.”¹⁰ In our time, where can you find a so-called “Lutheran” state church, which has these distinguishing marks? Nowhere. Least of all in our poor old German fatherland.

At his time, Luther could say of his church, “In the fourth place, no one can deny that we have the ministry of preaching and God’s Word in its purity and richness. We industriously teach and promote it, without any additive of our own new, human doctrine, just as Christ commanded the apostles and all Christianity to do. We invent nothing new, but rather hold to and remain in the old word of God, as the old church had it; therefore, as one kind of church with them, we are the correct, old church, teaching and believing the same kind of word of God as they did. Therefore, once again the papists blaspheme Christ himself, the apostles, and all Christianity, when they call us ‘new’ and ‘heretics.’”¹¹ But the papists ridicule the present so-called “Protestant” or “Lutheran” state church as “new” or “heretical.” Do they perhaps also blaspheme Christ himself? – Unfortunately, no! Have we Lutherans, through the self-named “Lutheran” state church become a laughing stock to our enemies! Pointing at the so-called state church, do the Jesuits and their like name the Lutheran church a “Babel,” whose downfall is near? Then we must either cast down our eyes ashamed or confess loudly that those state churches bear the name “Lutheran” in the same way that the Roman church bears the name “Catholic.” The enormous conventions and conferences, which meet here and there are a crying shame. They should be showing the church of the Antichrist that ever still a church of the Reformation exists.

All correctly-believing teachers evaluate our church the way Luther did. For example, J. W. Baier was one of the last representatives of Lutheran orthodoxy. And this is how he defines a true visible church, with which one can and should foster fellowship: “when the public administration of the word and sacrament is pure and uncorrupted. That is, in the assemblies of the church, the word of God is taught purely and without falsifications that contradict the universal faith and good sense that genuine believers carry imprinted in their hearts. In consequence, the non-saints, who err in the faith, are compelled either to conceal or give up their errors, unless they want to be excluded from the fellowship of the church.” According to this definition, only these two options remain. (1) Consider the Lutheran church to be excluded from the true churches and rather among the false corrupted churches – indeed, among those churches that are corrupted in the manner of the Reformed, Methodist, and Baptist churches, and the like. Or (2) deny to the modern so-called “Lutheran” state churches the name and character of Lutheran churches, churches with whom no Lutheran should keep fellowship.

However, the correctly-believing teachers of our church have, in this connection, carried out in practice all that they have taught. Neither the mere name “Lutheran” nor a merely formal confession of the symbols of our church leads them astray. After Luther’s death, the Crypto-Calvinists, Synergists, Majorists, Adiaphorists, and others not only maintained with great determination that they should be called “Lutherans,” but also solemnly pronounced the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and both of Luther’s Catechisms to be their confession to which they adhered. At that time, those who believed correctly maintained no relations at all with these people, neither church- nor altar- nor pulpit-fellowship.

For example, Hesshusius agreed with all of our church’s correctly-believing teachers when he called it incorrect to absolve or commune Christians who are members of congregations that are served by pastors who do not believe correctly. Consequently, he again agrees with all orthodox theologians when he writes in regard to false teachers in his time who appeared under the name “Lutheran”: “Some people do not belong to our parishes. Before their church pews stand representatives of the antichristian papacy or false teachers such as Calvinists, Synergists, Majorists, Adiaphorists, or Schwenkfelders. These are teachers a Christian has to guard against. It happens that people from these churches desire our services and seek the sacrament with us. In such

¹⁰ St. Louis Ed., XVII, p.2785f

¹¹ “Against Hans Worst, Jan., 1541,” St. Louis Ed., XVII, p.1659

and similar cases, we preachers are at liberty to distribute the sacrament to each and every human being (insofar as he is rightly penitent and believes the gospel). In this regard, we cannot be held back any more than can the sun in its daily course. John 16 gives us this authority: “[The Holy Spirit] will convict the world.” That is, the borders of Christ’s kingdom and of the preacher’s holy office encompass the whole world. They are bound by neither place nor person nor time. Some Christians shun their own parishes, which give out false doctrine and blasphemy. They seek the sacraments in other parishes that have upright teachers. That these Christians behave in a Christian way is evident from Christ’s words, Mt. 7:15, as well as Paul’s words, Ph. 3:2 and Ro. 16:17.”¹²

Indeed, many state church people suppose they have proven that our struggle against their church is completely illegitimate. And this is what they especially point to. Surely they didn’t create the ecclesiastical situation they are now in. Rather they are victims of circumstance. Their situation is only the result of a historical development. Whoever fails to come to that same conclusion is a stickler for principles and has an unhistorical mindset.

That verdict is more worthy of a papist than of a theologian who is trying to be Lutheran. The Pope’s empire is also the result of a historical development. Yes, so is Satan’s empire. We did not create these empires. We are victims of circumstance. So if someone refuses to call those empires legitimate and instead looks for ways to get rid of them despite every risk, then that someone demonstrates he is a stickler for principles and has an unhistorical mindset?!

Many of our opponents themselves say, “Even we admit it can’t go on this way. In the end, relations must be broken off. It’s only a matter of time before state and church separate, and with that the national or state church dissolves. But the time has not yet come. Yes, it would even be dangerous for us to go our own way. God himself must give the signal for the Exodus. The Lord said to Moses, ‘So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt...I will be with you,’ Ex. 3:10, 12. When the Lord says the same to us, yes, then we also will leave the house of our slavery to the state church and forsake it all. And not a hoof is to be left behind.”

First of all, this is nothing more than Israel's old way of talking. The prophets rebuked this kind of talk. For example, when they were commanded to build the second temple, they said, “The time has not yet come for the Lord’s house to be built,” Hg. 1:2.

This is even more wicked. Through remaining in the state church, not only are commands transgressed, about which they rightly say, “*Praecepta affirmativa obligant quidem semper, sed non ad semper*,”¹³ but also prohibitions are transgressed, about which they rightly say, “*Praecepta negativa obligant cum semper, tum ad semper*.”¹⁴ For we poor humans in many cases aren’t able to do what is commanded us to do. But we should and must discontinue, under God’s disfavor, in all circumstances, what is forbidden us.

Their excuse is nothing but open fanaticism. If God’s Word says what we have to do, then it is enthusiasm to wait for another special, new divine revelation before one intends to fulfill God’s clear command. To be sure, the Lord must do it all, even leading the exodus out of the apostate state churches. But he wants to do it through us, and not by forcing us like Pharaoh, rather by leading us like Israel, through the thunder- and fire-pillar of his Word. The thought, “If the Lord himself goes ahead, then we will joyfully follow,” is nothing but a chiliastic, enthusiastic bed of laziness for the Old Adam, small faith, and unbelief. The time for exodus has long since come. And it is not true that we so-called “Missourians” were the first to sound the call for a break-up. Men like the sainted Rudelbach did that long ago.¹⁵

¹² S. Dedekennus’ “Thesaurus etc.,” II, p.438. Hesshusius’ point is that it would not be “sheep-stealing” to receive people who were fleeing false churches. Walther is not arguing that such people should remain members of false churches.

¹³ “Commands that command something are indeed binding always, but not for always [that is, not in every case].” It would not be possible, for example, to commune in an orthodox congregation if none existed where one lived.

¹⁴ “Commands that **forbid** something are also always binding, as well as for always [that is, in every individual case.]” The absence of an orthodox teacher, for example, does not justify allowing a false teacher. On these axioms see Fritz’s *Pastoral Theology*, CPH, 1945, p. 228. Also Aquinas, *Summa*, II, 2, Q 79.

¹⁵ Andreas Gottlob Rudelbach (1792-1862). Danish pastor, served in Saxony, returned to Denmark.

Finally, here is the most plausible argument they continue to give for remaining in the state church: If the believing pastors leave the state church, then many dear souls who nevertheless remain in it would be lost. They say rightly, "*Salus populi suprema lex esto!*"¹⁶

Even this is only an apparent argument. First, it would follow from this argument that a preacher in the United church or in a deadly sect, even the papistic, who comes to a pure understanding of doctrine has to remain in his church on account of the dear souls in it. God's Word clearly condemns this throughout. This train of thought follows the principle of the Jesuits, "Let us do evil, that good may result," Ro. 3:8.

Second, they have it all wrong. For the sake of God's command and for the sake of their consciences, the believing pastors leave the state church. No soul would be lost through that. Those who belong to God would either follow them out or, if out of weakness of understanding they stay behind, they will be protected through God's grace. However, when the believing pastors remain in the state church after it has fallen away and when they seek with all their might to keep this church together, through those actions without a doubt innumerable souls have already been lost. And even more will yet be lost. At the same time, the believing pastors could walk out. They could assemble a church freely founded according to God's Word, with the pure word and the unadulterated sacrament as well as an evangelical manner of teaching and living. Through that the Lutheran church would then become a city on a high mountain again. And thousands upon thousands of those now asleep would wake up and be rescued. The devil has never had anything against letting individuals be rescued if he receives in compensation thousands who are being lost.

Perhaps the believing pastors in the state churches point to the small size of the flock of those who have separated. And because of that they intend to detain their own members within the state churches. Then they only condemn themselves in their quarreling. For who bears the guilt for the free church being so small? Truly it isn't only the believing lay people in the state church. Are they not listening to and serving these same pastors? We gladly believe it is not due to their bellies but out of weak faith that these lay people would rather remain in fellowship with Christ's enemies than come in and hold fellowship with those who confess the truth. May God hear the outcry against these teachers!

So then, this periodical will not keep back its testimony against the corrupt, so-called "Lutheran" state churches, even in the new year. More and more, the believing preachers in the state churches defend their churches in a frightful and soul-destroying manner. More and more, these preachers dull the sentiment that aroused Christians have for what is true and right. And so they make a turnaround for their church next to impossible. More and more grievously the believing members of the church government and the believing pastors sin. As often as the Holy spirit works to wake up a conscience, they go to great trouble to lull that same conscience back into the sleep of security by varnishing over the circumstances that are contrary to God's will and so muffling the Holy Spirit's work. So more and more we perceive it our duty to lift up our voice against it all.

We know quite well how weak this voice of ours is. But we also know how strong and mighty the truth is. We are even a little bit preoccupied with the hope that our testimony will win great victories for us. But we don't use that standard to evaluate whether our testimony is bringing us results and blessings. There is one blessing we are hoping for above all. Some believers do not have the strength of faith to give up on all of the church's earthly props and, in the name of the Lord, enter the kind of situation in which the apostolic church once found itself. We hope that those believers still stay safe against accustoming themselves little by little to their condition, until they surrender themselves and their families to it without resistance. Rather we hope that they are startled into fighting against the corruption that is penetrating further into their church, so that they rescue the old correctly-believing church from the wreckage, as much as they can still possibly rescue it. Or we hope that many people seek out again the old Lutheran treasures, even as they study how to prove, however prematurely, that a separation from the state church is unnecessary

Does our struggle yield for us ourselves nothing but hatred and shame? Even so, those believing souls whose believing¹⁷ pastors still hold them captive in prison, that is, in the state church, may benefit from our

¹⁶ "The salvation of the people is the highest law!"

confession. We have already had this experience, that our testimony compels many such pastors to pledge their allegiance to the Lutheran church and doctrine and practice, although in their hearts they remain hostile to these things. Is that a blessing for these pastors? It is not; but it is a blessing for the people entrusted to them! In this, we comfort ourselves along with Paul, who writes to the Philippians, "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice," Ph. 1:15-18. It is well known how much Luther rejoiced over the good that, through his testimony, was effected even in the papacy.

Finally, however, what matters here above all is not the question, "What good will your struggle do?" but rather, "What advances God's word?" If we have the answer to that, then what matters is that we obey. How much do we obey? As much as God's grace and our blessed end is dear to us. And we confidently entrust to God the results of our obedience. And if it seems that our obedience would cause the ruin not only of the world but also of the church, then we can and should cheerfully look on: God will make it well.

May it be permitted us to conclude our Forward to this periodical's new volume with a threefold testimony that is relevant to our discussion: testimony from a heathen, from the ancient church, and from a correctly-believing Lutheran theologian ---

Cicero writes, *Aut undique religionem tolle, aut usquequaque conserva.*¹⁷

The Synod of Laodicea stipulated, Ὅτι οὐ δεῖ ἀίρετιχοῖς ἢ σχισματιχοῖς συνεύχεσθαι.¹⁸

Dannhauer writes, *Non est dicendum ave, quibus Deus cave!*¹⁹

¹⁷ The following context seems to require "unbelieving" here.

¹⁸ Phil. II, "Either cancel the whole religion or maintain it in every point."

¹⁹ Can. 33, "That one should not pray with heretics or schismatics."

²⁰ *Liber conscientiae*, P. I., p.624, "One may not say, 'Be of good cheer!' to those of whom God says, 'Keep clear!'"