

Church Fathers and Doctrine

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The setting of C.F.W. Walther's essay on Scripture and the church fathers is the election controversy, which raged through several midwestern Lutheran synods during the latter part of the 19th century. The root issue of that conflict may be phrased in the form of a question: "Is faith the cause of election, or is election the cause of faith?" Walther and the Missouri Synod adopted the latter position, by which they sought to safeguard the sola gratia character of a sinner's salvation. Walther's opponents in the Ohio and Iowa synods adopted the former position, maintaining that the stance adopted by the Missouri Synod was deterministic and Calvinistic.

*One of the chief debates in the controversy centered around the Latin phrase *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith). Using this phrase, Walther's opponents argued that God elects people to salvation in view of their faith. Moreover, since they found the phrase in the writings of the 17th- and 18th-century orthodox theologians, they claimed that Lutheran history stood on their side rather than on the side of Missouri. Walther in this essay emphatically denies that the use of this phrase among the orthodox fathers is sufficient reason for making it an article of faith, since it is taught neither in the Scriptures nor in the Lutheran Confessions. This prompts him to engage in a discussion on the relationship of the Scriptures to the writings of the fathers (or for that matter, any expositors of the Word).*

In the preliminary portion of his essay, Walther develops the thesis that not only are the church fathers (both the ancient and the Lutheran) worth listening to, but indeed that Christians have an obligation to heed the word of those who expound the Word. Walther regards it as a grievous error for one to limit oneself to the reading of Scripture in the privacy of one's home to the exclusion of the public reading and exposition of the Word. This is not to say that Walther doubts that such reading would be edifying—although he raises the question of whether or not such reading would in fact take place as claimed. His greater concern lies in the danger that one would ignore, if not despise, God's gifts to the church that come in the form of "prophets"—those who proclaim and interpret the Word. Christians are to receive them with thanks, the same as they receive daily bread or any other gift. "Prophets" and teachers expound and explain the Word of God for the purpose of leading God's people into a deeper understanding of the Scriptures and all Christian truth. Walther proceeds to extol the value of having such teachers and writings within the church. Such a view, he ob-

serves, has always been held by the Lutheran church. He cites as evidence the Formula of Concord's high estimation of Luther as the most eminent teacher of the church, as well as the Catalog of Testimonies appended to the Book of Concord, wherein the formulators drew upon the writings of the early church fathers as support for the Formula's Biblical teaching on Christology.

Although one ought not despise the church's teachers and writers, Walther contends in the second portion of his essay that one must not accept their teachings uncritically and without question. The fathers and their writings were not without error. He makes, however, a sharp distinction between error and heresy. Frequently, when the fathers did err it was due more to ignorance than to any willful and malicious intention. One therefore need not throw out their entire writings; occasional errors need not nullify all that may be valuable. Walther observes, for example, that Melancthon's writings contain a number of errors, but men such as Martin Chemnitz continued to use them discerningly.

*But Walther warns against the danger of idolizing the fathers and declaring loyalty to them in a way that almost resembles how some at Corinth claimed to belong to "Paul" or "Apollos." When this happens, the lines of distinction between Scripture and other writings become blurred and confused. The proper relation and order between the two then stands in danger of being subverted. As valuable as the teachers together with their theological writings are to the church, one dare not make the church fathers a source or basis of doctrine. Implicit in his critique is the charge that those who clung to the phrase *intuitu fidei* in the election controversy were in danger of setting up tradition as a basis of doctrine. Walther makes the critical point that while one can call upon the fathers of the church as witnesses to Scriptural teaching and as testimonies to a Lutheran understanding of the Bible, one dare not establish or prove doctrine by them. As he put it, "When a doctrine is already known to be in general a Scriptural doctrine, then one may without objection cite many things from the writings of the fathers—as long as one does not do this in order to prove doctrine thereby." When it comes to proving or establishing a doctrine, one must rely on the Scriptures alone.*

In spite of the election controversy looming in the background and the occasional polemic that creeps into the essay as a result, Walther's treatment on the fathers and the Scriptures is valuable for its appreciation of the role of teachers and theology within the church. He thus stands against the Biblicistic tendencies that would ignore the Christian teachers and expositors of Scripture, who are God's gifts to the church. Alongside that position, however, Walther guards against the other

extreme—the danger of following mere human doctrine—by always pulling the reader back to the Scriptures as the final arbiter of truth and doctrine.

Our translation is by Bruce Cameron and Reinhold Stallmann, also making use of the partial translation by James Ware in the October 1988 Concordia Journal.

Church Fathers and Doctrine

Preliminary remark: The writings left by the so-called church fathers, as well as those of the pious teachers of our church, are treasures for which we cannot thank God enough. 1 Thess. 5:20 (cf. Rom. 12:7); 1 Cor. 12:7 (cf. Acts 18:24-28).

How objectionable it is to try to base matters of faith on the writings of the fathers and bind consciences to their doctrinal decisions.

This is so objectionable

I. Because it is unscriptural; for it is

A. Contrary to the authority that belongs to Scripture alone, [the authority] to be

- a. alone the pure source of all knowledge of faith (*Glaubenserkenntnis*),**
- b. alone the infallible rule and norm of all teachings and teachers, and**
- c. alone the valid judge in all religious controversies.**

Deut. 4:2; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Acts 26:23; Luke 16:29 (cf. vv. 27-31); Rom. 16:17 (“contrary to”); Gal. 1:8; Rev. 22:18-19. Ps. 119:105; Is. 8:19-20.

Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Luke 10:26; John 10:34 (cf. w. 33-36).

B. Contrary to the teaching of Scripture; for it is

a. Contrary to the nature of the Christian’s faith, which the Scriptures [describe] as based on God’s Word and therefore divinely certain.

Rom. 10:17; Eph. 2:20; 1 Thess 2:13; 1 Cor. 2:4-5; Heb. 11:1; Rom. 4:20-22; Luke 16:29 (cf. w. 27-31).

b. Contrary to the warnings contained in Scripture against trust in human beings in matters of faith, and against all human doctrines, as well as contrary to the admonitions of Scripture to test all things.

Ps. 62:9; John 2:23-25; Matt. 5:21-22; Matt. 15:9 (cf. w. 1-14).
1 Thess. 5:20-21; John 4:39-42; 1 Cor. 10:15; Acts 17:11.

II. Because it is a relapse into the antichristian papacy;

III. Because it is a falling away from the chief tenet of the church of the Reformation.

The conference first dwelt at length on the not insignificant preliminary remark: “The writings left by the so-called church fathers, as well as those of the

pious teachers of our church, are treasures for which we cannot thank God enough.”

On this the following observations were made:

Valerius Herberger [1562-1627], the old pastor at Fraustadt [in present Poland], as guileless as he was gifted and brilliant, writes in his *Epistolische Herz-Postille*: “In their sermons all faithful pastors (1) quote [as their authority] the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; (2) cite testimonies of the old teachers of the church; (3) add their own good thoughts that the Holy Spirit gives them while they are studying or even while they are speaking, in response to their diligent prayer.” (Cf. the *Epistolische Herz-Postille* on the Epistle for the 11th Sunday after Trinity)

The beloved Herberger is no doubt quite correct. All faithful servants of the church have done this from time immemorial. They drew their teaching from Holy Scripture; but they were not ashamed also to cite testimonies of pious teachers of the past and present in their sermons and writings, partly to refute opponents, partly for their own strengthening in faith. And, finally, they added here and there small crumbs of their own, which they had not learned through the agency of any human being, but which were given them by the Holy Spirit in zealous study of Holy Scripture, through fervent prayer, and in the school of consecrated affliction.

We in the Synodical Conference can say, to the glory of God: This is also what we have done hitherto, and our dear congregations have also been and still are completely satisfied with it. We would, in the first place, fear God’s wrath, were we to bring into the pulpit a doctrine that is not drawn from Holy Scripture. And besides, we have also from time to time in our synodical assemblies, pastoral conferences, periodicals, and sermons brought in testimonies from human writings. And finally, we who stand in God’s grace and are ruled by His Holy Spirit have here and there also found a little kernel upon our own meditation, in fervent prayer, and from our own experience.

Have we, with the latter, perhaps slighted the Word of God and based our faith on human authority? Far be it! Our conviction, God willing, is, on the contrary, one that is firmly grounded in Scripture.

1 Thess. 5:20 says: “Do not despise prophecy.” All diligent readers of the Bible will know that the word “prophecy” is not always used in Scripture in the sense of prediction of things to come—of “prophecies”—but it also means the exposition of Scripture. No doubt it has this latter meaning also here. For immediately thereafter, in verse 21, Paul says, “Test all things and hold fast what is good.” But when prophets, moved by the Holy Spirit, prophesy of the future, there it must not be said, “But test it well!” For we cannot test it at all until it is fulfilled. In fact, we do not even always know for sure what is meant in the prophecy and can say only after its fulfillment, “Yes, now we see what the Holy Spirit meant, for it has all literally come to pass.” And it would be a sacrilege to say, “We will now test

it and accept what is good." A Christian accepts it without question. For that belongs to the character of a Christian: He believes the writings of the apostles and prophets. If even today God sent a properly (*ordentlich*) attested prophet, we would have to believe him without question. To reject him would be to spurn God. But if a prophet of the New Testament came to a Jew who did not yet know that he was a prophet, certainly [the Jew] had to test him first. Therefore we have the fine example of the Bereans, who daily searched the Scriptures of the Old Testament to see whether what Paul preached to them was true.

Now, from this it follows that our passage [1 Thess. 5:20-21] must speak of the exposition of Holy Scripture. Here Paul therefore says to Christians, "It is not enough that you most reverently read the written Word of God; you must also not despise the expositions of godly men." He does not say, "You must accept them without question," but only, "Do not despise them." For I should accept only what agrees with Scripture. Therefore Rom. 12:6 also says, "If someone has [the gift of] prophecy, let it be in agreement with the faith." So, if someone has the gift to explain Holy Scripture, good for him! For that is the greatest gift. But let him consider well that he must not rely on this his gift in a fleshly manner, as if all that he says is from the Holy Spirit. No, he must now compare whether his explanation agrees with the articles of the Christian faith. What does not agree therewith he must reject.

Let us now consider well the significance of 1 Thess. 5:20. It says first of all: "Do not say, 'I do not go to church; I have the pure source, my Bible, at home; who knows what the preacher brings to me?'" No, Paul wants to say, go to church and do not despise the human being. God has so arranged it that human beings should explain God's Word to us. Therefore also, secondly, do not despise the books of pious teachers in which Scripture is explained. Otherwise you are shameful despisers of a most precious gift. In fact, the mightier and more powerful an expositor is, the more highly you should esteem him. To be sure, the apostle then adds, "But test all things." Yet this latter does not exclude the former, but includes it. A true expositor, you see, does not cause me to abandon Scripture; he does not lead me out of Scripture but into it. For now I am to determine at the hand of Scripture: "Is he right, or are his explanations human ideas?" Therefore also, do not despise the writings of the old faithful church fathers, the writings of a Luther, Chemnitz, Quenstedt, Gerhard, H. Muller, etc. Otherwise you disobey the Holy Spirit, who commands you, "Do not despise prophecy."

Now, this applies especially to the writings of our beloved father Luther. One who studies Luther diligently will not regard it as partiality or narrowmindedness when we say: "The most excellent books after Holy Scripture are the writings of Luther." No one in the church has so gloriously and powerfully explained Scripture as Luther, and that not only in the writings in

which he undertook to write on this or that chapter of the Bible, but one finds throughout his writings an unsurpassed exposition of Scripture, even in the polemical writings. In fact, it was especially important precisely there to prove his teaching in such a way that even the most shrewd and virulent opponent had to admit, "He is right." And that precisely is exposition according to Scripture.

Not everyone whose explanation is correct necessarily has this greatest of all gifts, but only the one who knows how to make it so clear to his hearers that this and no other can be the sense of this passage, that they must say, "Yes, I cannot do otherwise; I must admit that he is right." A good expositor is therefore, let us say, not—as the newer exegetes imagine—simply one who gives a word its meaning only according to the rules of speech and withal asks little or nothing about the Holy Spirit's meaning. Such a one may think because he knows Latin, Greek, [and] Hebrew, "I am a great expositor." Yet he is really nothing but a literalist.

With Luther it is entirely different. There one notices (though not always immediately): "Luther is thorough and deep. He moves forward slowly, but in such a way that the matter always becomes brighter, always clearer, always plainer. He strikes with the hammer always on the same spot, [hitting] the nail on the head, so that it gradually sinks in ever deeper." Yes, a few years ago a French Catholic priest even admitted to me that all theologians of the Roman church added together did not demonstrate as clearly and as convincingly as Luther that the body of Christ is present in the Lord's Supper; here he was as yet unequalled by any of their most learned men. A good expositor compels his listeners to agree with him. But a person does not have this glorious gift if he brings his hearers no farther than to say, "Now it is, of course, probably correct as he says; he is, to be sure, an orthodox teacher." Such a one will not effect the good results among his hearers as one will obtain who persuades them to acknowledge the correctness of his exposition without question. And that is precisely the case with Luther. After the [Marburg] Colloquy, wretched Zwingli indeed expressed the opinion that Luther had been able to do no more than write the words on the table with chalk, and when he, Zwingli, made his objections, Luther always just pointed to the table: "Don't you see the words there, This is My body?" But everyone who is familiar with Luther's utterances will admit how ridiculous that is. [Luther] in his theological boldness could even, after furnishing proof, go so far as to say: "Christ would indeed have had to be drunk, if at the Lord's Supper He had said, 'This is My body,' if His body had, after all, been absent from the Lord's Supper."

Therefore a person cannot be recognized as one who respects the Bible if he says, "Away with human writings! I read no other books at all apart from the Bible"—because he rejects the command of the Holy

Spirit in the Bible: "Do not despise prophecy."

Calov in his *Biblia Illustrata* also declares that in 1 Thessalonians 5 "prophecy" means nothing else than explanation of Scripture. The following are his words:

"Paul writes: 'Do not despise prophecy' (1 Thess. 5:20). By *prophecy* he does not mean the foretelling of future things; for who knows that there were such prophets there? Rather [he means] the explanation of Scripture, which [explanation] is so called [that is, called prophecy] for the sake of honor and that thereby good expositors of Scripture might receive both dignity and authority, *not* [1] so that they should be *put on a par* with the prophets who [a] on impulse of the Holy Spirit foretell things to come or [b] even set forth divine mysteries by divine inspiration—such were the extraordinary prophets of both kinds [(a) and (b)], for they shone by *divine* authority—but [2] because the prophecies of Holy Scripture must be explained by the same Spirit by whom they were set forth and inspired. 'Prophecy,' according to blessed Hunnius, 'here means explanation of Scripture. For he [Paul] does not want *this* despised or another, set forth by someone else, to be rejected out of prejudice without further consideration, but he exhorts that one should well consider it and, if it is in agreement with the faith, accept it.' " (*Biblia Illustrata*, on 1 Thess. 5:20)

How important it is that Calov here says, "By the same Spirit"! A proper explanation of Scripture is precisely nothing else than Scripture itself. Therefore with these words all unbelieving and heterodox exegetes are condemned. Heretical exegetes do not have the Holy Spirit. Therefore they also cannot be sound expositors, be they ever so sharp and ever so knowledgeable in the languages. They may, of course, contribute to proper explanations, for the Holy Spirit indeed does not teach etymology, nor declension and conjugation, nor syntax and syllogization. These are subjects of human study. But true explanation of Scripture, which unlocks the import of the Holy Spirit, is purely a supernatural gift from the Holy Spirit which is therefore also not to be despised but received and used with thanks.

On Romans 12, Johann Gerhard writes:

"Every explanation of Scripture must be in agreement with the faith. This rule is stated in Rom. 12:6 in the words, 'If someone has [the gift of] prophecy, let it be in agreement with the faith.' The meaning of these [words] is this, that the explanation of Scripture must be so made and arranged that it agrees with the invariable meaning that is presented in Scripture *with regard to each individual chief part (de unoquoque capite)* of the heavenly doctrine;... and though we may even so not always arrive at the *real* sense intended by the Holy Spirit in every point, yet we should take care not to set forth anything against the analogy of faith." (*Exeges. locor.*, 531)

A precious explanation! For according to this, it is not sufficient in the explanation of a passage that it

not be contrary to certain passages of Holy Scripture that treat of *other* doctrines, but it must also, in fact above all, not contradict those passages in which the same article of faith is treated.

This is important also in the present controversy about the election of grace. Our opponents, who hold fast to the *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith) continually cry, "Is this not in Scripture: 'We are saved through faith'?" This we do not deny at all. But they should show that their *intuitu fidei* is in *those* passages that treat of election. They always bring in other doctrines that do not treat of the election of grace at all. So we must call on them, "Show us one passage of Holy Scripture that says, '*Election* is based on faith.' If you cannot [do] that, then all of your would-be proof is nothing but a miserable babble (*Geschwatz*)." Truly, a Luther is needed here. He would give it to them in an altogether different way from us poor latecomers. You see, he had the same experience with the Zwinglians as we today with our synergists. When Luther spoke of the Lord's Supper, they jumped onto the doctrine of the Ascension or of the final coming of Christ, so that Luther had to tell them, "But we are speaking now of the words, This is My body.'" So also our opponents! When we speak of the election of the children of God, then they speak of the general decree of grace, of justification, and of salvation through faith, etc.

The last words of Gerhard are also important. For according to them, a hearer should not immediately think, when his pastor on some occasion gives an explanation of a passage different from what he has read in a good book, "Here my pastor teaches falsely"—provided only that the explanation is in agreement with the faith. Then he can at best say to him, "Your teaching, Pastor, is certainly true, but it does not lie in this passage, as you think, but in another"—assuming, of course, that the latter is indeed the case.

A second proof passage for our preliminary remark is 1 Cor. 12:7: "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." A precious passage! The only gift necessary for a Christian, sufficient to get into heaven, is faith. If he has more gifts, then that is, as it were, something extra for others, whom he is to serve therewith in love. And the apostle says: "To each one ... for the common good." Thus all gifts are there for all Christians. Now, what follows from this?—That it is a grievous sin to despise the gifts; for the Holy Spirit gave them to me and to you and to all; each one should use the other's gift for his benefit. Therefore one who says, "I have enough with my Bible; don't bother me with your Luther," betrays by that only his great blindness. How? Have you not yet noticed which gifts of the Spirit in Luther are also for your benefit? Or do you think that the Holy Spirit will perhaps equip you even as [He equipped] Luther?

Now all of this applies also to all orthodox and gifted teachers of the church. What God has given for 1,800 years by way of gifts to pious teachers and pre-

served for us by His great kindness in their writings, that no one should despise. If one does, he does not esteem God, who has commanded him in Scripture [not to do] so. And such a one will, instead of seeing ever more clearly, become ever more blind. Thus Luther, in his blunt way, speaks of the lazy churchgoers or spiritually arrogant despisers of the holy ministry who say, "I have my Bible at home": "You read the devil down upon your head, if you despise the ministry established by God." And he adds that as a rule such people do not read God's Word at home or read it really only to [their] destruction; it becomes for them, as the apostle writes [2 Cor. 2:16], "an odor of death to death."

Acts 18:24-28 is also a clear proof that one should not despise good human writings and sermons, but thank God for them and use them faithfully:

"Now, there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, born in Alexandria, *an eloquent man and mighty in Scripture*. He was instructed in the way of the Lord and spoke with a fervent spirit and taught diligently of the Lord, though he knew only of the baptism of John. This man began to speak boldly in the school [synagogue]. But when Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him with them and explained to him the way of God more fully. And when he wanted to go to Achaia, the brethren wrote and exhorted the disciples to receive him. And after he had arrived there *he was a great help to those who had become believers* by grace. For he mightily refuted the Jews and *proved publicly from the Scriptures* that Jesus is the Christ."

So Apollos had the gift to make the people certain. This and no other is the import of Scripture. And they thought in Ephesus: "Wait, he must [go] to the great city of Corinth, where the doctrinal controversy is intense; he will overcome the opponents." As we then also see, Apollos soon acquired such great authority in Corinth that one party idolized him and called itself "of Apollos" after him. As wrong as this was, yet we see this much from it, that also the beloved Christians in the apostolic age understood what a great gift it is to have men who explain Holy Scripture clearly and distinctly and can make their listeners sure thereof, and that such gifts should be used and not despised.

And what a great treasure of prophecy precisely we possess, in comparison with the early church! One need only make a comparison between what was extant in Christian antiquity and how extraordinarily large theological literature is today. Here one can learn something from every orthodox dogmatician, and for each of them the word holds true: "Do not despise it!" God does not even want His temporal gifts to be despised. Children should receive bread from [their] parents with thanks and not wait for God to provide for them without parents. A sick man should not despise medicine. How much more does this apply to spiritual gifts. We Germans in particular who above other nations of the earth have been so richly blessed with theological literature should let this be told us. And one

should not discard the early church teachers because something wrong is found here and there in their writings.

Some are surprised that in the present doctrinal controversy we are not willing to let certain statements of the dogmaticians stand, though we formerly cited these teachers rather often. Yes, our opponents misuse this to cry out: "Here you see that these people have taken a totally new road [and] have become totally different people. We however have stuck to the old way, whereas they have fallen away." But one should not let oneself be deceived by this outcry. It is rather thus: Our opponents, if one can hold them to their word, practice shameful idolatry of the dogmaticians, similar to that of the Corinthians with Apollos. As they called themselves "of Apollos," so our opponents can rightly be called "of Gerhard," "of Quenstedt," "of Hunnius," etc. We however have always taught that one should not base one's faith on the dogmaticians; their authority does not bind us. But we think highly of them for this reason, that they explain the Scriptures very clearly. After all, our opponents themselves must concede that nearly all the dogmaticians teach falsely about the Sabbath and falsely about the power of secular authority in church matters. Nevertheless, we think highly of the dogmaticians because in other respects they are mighty and powerful expositors of Scripture. If we did not do this, we would not be true Lutherans. For our Lutheran church confesses not only that Scripture is the sole source and norm of all doctrines, but also that one should use human teachers for one's profit.

So it says, e.g., in the Formula of Concord:

"But hereby other good, useful, [and] pure books, expositions of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, [and] explanations of doctrinal articles are not rejected; as far as they are in agreement with the aforementioned type of doctrine, they can be regarded as useful expositions and explanations and used profitably." (Rule and Norm [10; cf. *Triglot*, p. 855; Tappert, p. 506])

Our confession does not even reject a Melanchthon, even though the beginning or root of many errors is found in his writings. Namely, when the Formula of Concord was to be drawn up, many thought that Melanchthon should now be condemned and all his books suppressed. But they were then told: "Just read them, but test everything."

Thus it says in the Preface to the *Book of Concord*:

"We therefore decided hereby also to testify and declare publicly that we do not want ... other more useful writings of Philipp Melanchthon, or of Brenz, Urbanus Rhegius, [Johann Bugenhagen] of Pomerania, etc.—so far as they agree with the norm incorporated in the [*Book of*] *Concord*—to be rejected or condemned." [Cf. *Triglot*, p. 17; Tappert, pp. 9 f.]

So Melanchthon is here grouped with Brenz, Rhegius, Bugenhagen, and others.

Moreover we read in the [Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope]:

"Here certain passages are quoted against us, namely Matt. 16:18-19: 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church' (*Gemeine Oder Kirche*)\ also: 'I will give you the keys'; also [John 21:17]: 'Feed My sheep' and more like that. *But because this whole controversy has been treated diligently and sufficiently by our [theologians] ... we refer to those writings here and wish to regard them as reiterated (referimus nos ad ea scripta, eaque pro repititis habere volumus.*" That is, in German: "So *beziehen wir uns auf diese Schriften und wollen wir dieselben hiermit wiederholt haben.*" [Cf. *Triglot*, p. 511; Tappert, pp. 323 f.]

Therefore, when we study the personal writings of the teachers of the church in depth, we do this on the advice and exhortation of our own confession. Here it says that we should look into Luther, Brenz, Rhegius, etc. Also to be noted is the great Catalog of [Testimonies of the] church fathers, which is appended to our *Book of Concord*. At first this was to be part of the Formula of Concord. But the beloved confessors thought it made the book too large. This catalog is now appended [to the *Book of Concord*] so that the Zwinglians and others would not be able to say that the Lutherans have introduced completely new doctrines.

At the end of the "Catalog of Testimonies of Holy Scripture and the orthodox ancient teachers of the church, [showing] how these have taught and spoken concerning the person and divine majesty of the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ" it says:

"These testimonies of the ancient teachers of the church have been here set forth, not with this meaning, that our Christian faith is founded upon the authority of human beings.... But because fanatical spirits, by the special and uncanny craft of Satan, wished to lead the people from Holy Scripture—which, thank God! even a common layman can now profitably read—to the writings of the fathers and the ancient teachers of the church as into a broad sea—so that he who has not read them cannot precisely know whether they and their writings are as these new teachers quote their words, and thus is left in grievous doubt—we have been compelled to declare by this Catalog and to point out for the attention of all, that this new false doctrine has as little foundation in the writings of the ancient orthodox teachers of the church as in Holy Scripture, but is diametrically opposed to it. They quote their testimonies in a false meaning, contrary to the will of the fathers." [Cf. *Triglot*, p. 1149; not in Tappert]

We see from this that our fathers followed the same course as we. We do not make idols of human teachers, but we also do not make them heretics. Their writings are precious to us, priceless. If we were to reject them because of a few false statements, what books could we then otherwise accept besides the Bible? In all there is some hay and straw. Paul therefore

does not say, "Test all things and discard also the good," but, "Hold fast what is good."

And it is especially important to note that the Formula of Concord wants us above all to cling to Luther's writings. Our opponents, on the other hand, have such respect for Luther as says: "Most preferably ten steps away [*Am liebsten zehn Schritt vom Leibe*]." They have the impudence to say that until the year 1530 Luther was a Calvinist. And with that they make him out to be one of the worst deceivers of land and people. For Luther later still continues to call *The Bondage of the Will* [1525] his best book, and in addition ranked next to it only his catechisms [1529] to be with it as his dearest books. All others could perish, provided these would be preserved. And our opponents say, "Just be sure to beware of the book on the bondage of the will!" Isn't it dreadful that such people still want to be Lutherans? Here they have unmasked themselves as enemies of the Lutheran church, in that they have made Luther out to be a heretic.

One should just read the following passages of the Formula of Concord:

"So also Dr. Luther wrote about this matter in his book, *The Bondage of the Will*, that is, the captive will of man, against Erasmus, and he well and thoroughly elaborated on and supported this matter. And later in [his] splendid exposition of Genesis, and most especially of ch. 26, he repeated and explained [it]. There he also briefly mentioned some other special points of dispute introduced incidentally by Erasmus, for example, absolute necessity, [and] defended in the best and most diligent way, against all *misunderstanding and perversion*, the way he *meant* them and wanted them to be understood. We also hereby appeal to these [statements of Luther] and refer others to them." (Solid Declaration II, [Par. 44; cf. *Triglot*, p. 897; Tappert, p. 529])

And in Art. VII of the Formula of Concord we read: "And Dr. Luther, **who, of course, above others, understood the true [and] proper meaning of the Augsburg Confession and stuck by it and defended [it] steadfastly until his end**, shortly before his death repeated his faith regarding this article with great fervor in his last confession, where he writes as follows: 'I rate them all as one concoction, that is, as Sacramentarians and Enthusiasts, which they also are who do not want to believe that the Lord's bread in the Holy Supper is His true natural body, which the godless or Judas receive orally as well as St. Peter and all the saints; one who refuses to believe this, I say, should just let me alone and simply expect no fellowship with me. This will not change.' From these statements, *but especially from the statement of Dr. Luther, as the chief teacher of the Augsburg Confession*, every intelligent person who loves truth and peace can perceive beyond doubt what the Augsburg Confession's real meaning and sense in this article has always been." (Solid Decla-

ration, Art. VII [par. 33-34; cf. *Triglot*, p. 983; Tappert, p. 575])

One should well note here that the Formula of Concord says that Luther, above others, had the true [and] proper meaning of the Augsburg Confession. So when we take Luther to help in the exposition of the Augsburg Confession, then we follow our Confession. In contrast, the Philadelphians say, "We will not speak of Luther here [or] express ourselves any further about him." When Prof. [H.E.] Jacobs [in Philadelphia] formerly rejected, among other things, also our teaching on church and ministry and said that one cannot be guided by Luther, he was answered in 1875 by the present gang leader (*Rottenfuhrer*) of our opponents: "The later dogmaticians do not bring light and clarity into Luther, but Luther [is the one who] first brings the true light into the dogmaticians." (*Lehre und Wehre*, XXI, p. 331)

One should also note this, that Luther himself continually cites church fathers in his writings. In the *Confession on the Lord's Supper* he begins with Cyprian and continues into the sixth century. In spite of the idols that the papacy made of the church fathers, Luther did not want to discard the baby with the bath water. He esteemed the church fathers highly as excellent men, but for his part he also regarded their writings *cum iudicio*, i.e., with keen judgment.

Therefore he says:

"One should not discard the ancient fathers and teachers, such as Augustine, Hilary, Ambrose, and others, completely but hold [them] in honor and esteem (even though they often err) because of the testimonies of faith that one can nevertheless find in their writings, that they also believed in Jesus Christ, even as we; so also did the Christian church from the beginning of the world believe just as we [do] now. St. Bernard excels all other doctors [of the church] in his sermons, even Augustine himself, for he teaches Christ extremely well. But when he gets into disputations, he often opposes himself and fights against what he had formerly taught and preached, becomes a completely different man, [and] attributes far too much to the Law and free will." (Erlangen Edition, LXII, 99, note)

So if I see that a man believes in Jesus Christ with [all] his heart, I should not despise his writings, though here and there a grain of false doctrine remains. These are not heresies, but weaknesses, blemishes.

We have made these remarks preliminary to our theses only for this reason, to give evidence that we do not make the blessed theologians out to be heretics nor condemn their books, but hold them in extremely high esteem. How dreadful it would be if all at once we would say to our church members, "Put these godly books away; they are suspect!" They have up to this time thought highly of them but probably also noticed that here or there something is not entirely right. So, for example, the *Altenburger Bibelwerk* is an exceedingly fine devotional book. And yet, many a one will

probably have noticed that when it comes to speak of the [secular] authorities, it ascribes far too much to them; for example, it demands of them to see to it that orthodox teachers are appointed. With this, the authorities as such have nothing to do. For Christ says: "My kingdom is not of this world. Were My kingdom of this world, My servants would fight for this, that I would not be turned over to the Jews; but now, My kingdom is not from hence."—Yet one does not discard the whole valuable book for this reason, but this applies here: "Do not despise prophecy. Test all things and hold fast to what is good." God the Lord knew very well why He has no longer made anyone infallible [and] inerrant, like the prophets and apostles. Because we then would no longer care for the written Word of God but say: "Here is a man who is infallible; I will believe him." No, with regard to teachers of the church I should keep my eyes open and be able to say, "The teacher has not only *said* so, but he has *proved* it to me out of the Bible. Where he does not do this, there I will not follow him."

On this, Luther writes the following:

"If the [*church*] fathers were human beings, they would also at times have thought, spoken, [and] acted like we think, speak, [and] act; but afterward they would have had to speak (like us) the beloved prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive,' etc., especially since they did not have the same promise of the Holy Spirit that the apostles [had], but had to be the apostles' disciples. If the Holy Spirit had been so foolish as to expect or trust that the councils and fathers would do everything well and make no mistakes, there would have been no need for Him to warn His church against them, 1 Cor. 3:12, that one should test all things and beware where one would build [with] straw, hay, and wood on the foundation. In that way he foretold, not privately and feebly, but openly and mightily, that in the holy church there would be included those who build with wood, straw, and hay, that is, teachers who would still remain on the base or foundation and be saved, even though harmed by fire. This cannot be understood of the heretics, for they lay a different foundation. The others, however, stay on the foundation, that is, in faith in Christ, are saved and are called God's saints, even though they too have hay, straw, and wood, which must be consumed by the fire of Holy Scripture, albeit without injuring their salvation. Thus St. Augustine says of himself, '*Errare potero, hereticus non ero*,' 'I may err, but I shall not become a heretic.' The reason: Heretics not only err but do not want to be instructed; they defend their error as if it were right, and fight against the *recognized* truth and against their own conscience." (*On the Councils and the Church* [cf. LW 41, 49 f.])

For 1 Cor. 3:11-15 says: "No one can lay a different foundation than the one that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if someone builds on this foundation gold, silver, gems, wood, hay, [or] stubble, everyone's work will become known; the Day will disclose it. For

it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test everyone's work [to determine] what kind it is. If someone's work that he has built thereon will survive, he will receive a reward. But if someone's work will be burned up, he will suffer loss by it; however, he himself will be saved, but so as through fire." So the apostle is not speaking here of the heretics, for they forsake the foundation. He is speaking of those who are saved, whose wood, hay, and stubble of mistaken opinions burn up, but their gems of pure doctrine remain. Therefore, when our opponents now cry that we make the church fathers out to be heretics, one can confidently say to them, "You are liars!" If we formerly did not speak as plainly as we do now about the faults of the church fathers, one should consider this, that we first had to bring their writings to America, to our needy Lutheran people. How we were decried! Soon it was said: "You are Catholic!" because of our teaching on absolution; "You are unionists!" because of the teaching on the spiritual priesthood; "You are Enthusiasts [*Schwärmer*]." because of the teaching on repentance, conversion, [and] the new birth. How were we now to show that we are Lutherans? With the Bible? Yes, our doctrine is indeed written in the Bible, but it does not say next to it, "This is Lutheran." So we had to take the Symbolical Books, Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard, etc. In this way and by the grace of God a truly Lutheran church came into being here, for which we eternally cannot thank God enough. Next to God, we have these dear fathers to thank that thousands upon thousands have joined us—pastors, people, and entire synods.

Dannhauer writes among other things:

"A fundamental article of faith is one that either leads necessarily to faith or flows necessarily from it." (The old [teachers] distinguished between unqualified articles of faith, such without which no one can come to faith, and articles of faith in a limited sense, such as one may know or not know and yet remain in faith. The latter flow from the others.) "... The latter articles can indeed be unknown and denied without harm to salvation, *either before their revelation takes place* (for Eve, without harm to salvation, did not know that the Messiah would be born of a virgin, for the revelation that a virgin would be the mother, which is found in Isaiah 7, had not yet taken place; moreover, Nathanael was praised as a true Israelite, although he denied that the Messiah would come from Nazareth) *or before clear and sufficient elucidation*. Therefore the fundamental errors in the fathers, who became involved in controversial matters that had not yet been sufficiently set forth, when the ice had not yet broken, are called **flaws** (*naevi*), *not heresies*. But after the revelation and the discussion have taken place, they [these articles] can neither be unknown nor denied without harm to salvation." (*Christeis. Protheoria.*, p. 45)

It is therefore an important distinction whether to say, "This book contains heresy," or, "It contains errors." It is possible that at some time a doctrine has

not yet been handled and explained at some place and that therefore some hearers have the wrong idea about it. In this case, I cannot immediately say, "This is a heretic." We must not deal that way with our simple people; and just as little should we do so with our church fathers. You see, there is also a great difference between formerly and now. People say about us that we are inconsistent, that we defend or at least excuse Gerhard and others and call our opponents false teachers. But one should consider: If in Gerhard's time such a church body had existed as now, and someone would have said to him, "Reverend Sir, I cannot understand how you can hold to the *intuitu fidei*!" And had he then refuted it for him [Gerhard], Gerhard would certainly not have said, "What? Do you think you know it better than I?" But be that as it may, if someone today—when this doctrine has been thoroughly studied and fought out—still holds to the *intuitu fidei*, even though it has been proved wrong to him and he has been persuaded in his conscience by the weight of the counterarguments, he is certainly a false teacher who holds to his *intuitu fidei* for totally different reasons than those dear old teachers of our church.

Now, the theme now of our essay is: **How objectionable it is to try to base matters of faith on the writings of the fathers and bind consciences to their doctrinal decisions.**

The reason why precisely this subject has been chosen for discussion by the honorable Synodical Conference is this: Four years ago there arose an erring spirit within the Synodical Conference, which has already gained a considerable following. [This spirit] holds that the only correct presentation of the doctrine of the election of grace is this, that the elect are chosen *intuitu fidei*, that is, in view of faith. For this, they say, is the teaching of the orthodox church of the past, the doctrine of all our church fathers (*Lehrvater*). They say that therefore those are Calvinists, or at least Calvinized, who opposed this kind of teaching [and] who, like us, by no means accepted [this teaching] but posited only two causes of election, namely the mercy of God and the merit of Jesus Christ and therefore taught that faith does not precede election but that, on the contrary, election is the cause of the faith that endures to death.

But, according to God's Word, that is what we must teach. Paul says: "Whom God ordained (*verordnet*)" (i.e., predestined [*vorherbestimmt*], as all who know Greek will agree), "them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). Paul thus puts in the first place the ordaining or predestining. Upon this follows the call, then justification, and finally the splendor of eternal life. But our opponents reverse this order. They put the call first, justification second, and predestination third. Thus they reverse the divine order in this chief passage of Holy Scripture on election. For this passage teaches clearly that the reason for my call, why God justifies and finally saves me is this: God

has predestined me thereto. This is also the teaching of the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI, 8.

A second chief passage of Scripture on election is Ephesians 1. There it says, "God has ordained us to be adopted as His children, through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5). Again, one should not forget that ordained means predestined. Here again it is clearly stated that we are predestined to faith. For how could we otherwise be ordained to adoption? Only through faith am I a child of God. So, according to this passage, I do not have myself, that is, my conduct, to thank that I am a child of God and have become obedient to the Gospel, but rather I have only God to thank for this. He has said: "This poor, unworthy sinner shall be saved; I will give him faith." Only this mercy of God, united with the precious merit of Jesus Christ, are the two causes of my election. Therefore it also says here: "through Christ," which means nothing else than "for Christ's sake," "for His merit's sake."

A third passage is John 15:16: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." Thereby the Savior tells His apostles: "There is no reason in you, why you are chosen; you did not begin it. Do not speak to Me of anything you have done, because of which you were chosen. I am the cause; My grace has chosen you."

The fourth passage is John 15:19: "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." Here it does not say that Christ had chosen the disciples in view of the state of [their] faith, but out of the world. "I saw in you nothing but worldly-mindedness; I have taken you, as children of the world, out of the world." Our opponents, on the other hand, have Christ say: "I first saw faith in you, your mind turned away from the world, [and] your penitent heart; in short, I saw you as dear children of God, and therefore I have elected you to salvation."

Finally, the fifth passage is Acts 13:48: "All who were ordained to eternal life believed," or, according to the Greek, "as many of them as *had been* ordained to eternal life," i.e., already from eternity, even before they believed. For as many of them as had been chosen already from eternity, so many also believed in time.

One should note these five passages well. They are irrefutable, and only the most pitiful sophistry can twist them and then say, "No! First came faith, and then God thought, 'Now I will call him; he has been so good as to receive My Gospel.'" Gerhard did not teach such a doctrine. He did not say, as Professor Loy¹ [says], "Election depends upon man's conduct" [English in original]. No, God looked only at Himself. In us He saw nothing but death, sin, [and] corruption. There He saw only what could incite Him to anger.

¹ Matthias Loy (1828-1915), professor at Capital University, Columbus, Ohio, and president of that institution. Served as president of the Ohio Synod.

The Ohio Synod has gone further than any of [our other] opponents. Since it now has separated from us on account of the doctrine of the election of grace, it will be in place to hear what it resolved, when it decided to leave the Synodical Conference—which doctrine it would henceforth hold to, under whose banner it would rally, and why it no longer wants to work together with us for the kingdom of God. In 1881 it publicly and solemnly set forth the following as its confession of faith, under the title "Our Position on the Doctrine of the Election of Grace": "We hereby *declare allegiance* anew (?) to the doctrine of the election of grace, as it is contained in the Formula of Concord *and also* as it has *always* been set forth *by and large* (!) in agreement with it [the Formula] by the *fathers (Lehrvater)* of our church; in particular we regard as in agreement with Scripture and [our] Confessions (and thus as truly Lutheran) the doctrine of our fathers that the ordaining of the elect to eternal life happened *in view of faith*, i.e., in view of the merit of Christ *appropriated* by faith. Therefore *be it resolved*, that, as in the past (?), so also in the future, the teaching here confessed by us anew shall be the *only authorized* [teaching] in our institutions, schools, publications, and churches." (Proceedings of the 25th Extraordinary Convention of the General Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio and Other States, held at Wheeling, W. Va., September 1881, p. 39)

After this followed a protest by the men who later withdrew and formed the Concordia Synod as a protest. In response, the [Ohio] Synod later also declared the following: "That we as a Lutheran Synod accept the Formula of Concord as the church (?) has always received and understood it, namely in this way, that the *teaching*, 'the election of persons has taken place *in view of faith*,' is in conformity with it [the Formula of Concord] and therefore truly Lutheran. *Now, one who really has a contrary doctrine* can certainly not remain with us without being a unionist." (Ibid., p. 50)

Hereby the Ohio Synod has documented the fact that they have fallen grievously.

1. It causes all the members of that synod to base their faith also on the church fathers (*Lehrvater*). To be sure, they do not say this expressly. But one should consider what they do. Everyone is obligated to confess what the fathers have always taught about the election of grace. All laypeople, who understand no Latin word, and all the preachers who also do not know Latin or at least have never read these fathers, should, without testing [the fathers], blindly say, "Yes, we side with the church fathers (*Lehrvater*) in this point." Nothing like this has yet occurred in Christianity, except for the papacy, that the dear simple Christians (and no doubt there are, of course, many of them also in the Ohio Synod) are misled to believe what they do not at all know. The poor farmers have never in their life gotten hold of a Latin book, and now they should confess, publicly and solemnly before God and all Christendom,

as their faith, a teaching that is set forth mostly in Latin books and that is therefore not at all known to them!

Only in the antichristian papacy, as we have said, does it still happen that one says, "If you believe what the church believes, then you can rest content, even if you do not know what the church believes." Among us one can have the good opinion, at least of the older congregations, that if we would make such a demand of them as in the Ohio Synod, they would say to us, "Are you mad? What do we know [about] what the dogmaticians write—and you want to bind us to something that we have not read?" It is utterly clear that our opponents make idols of the fathers. And God has allowed them to fall into this. They will say, of course, that they have not the least intention to teach that one should base his faith on the fathers. But we fittingly ask, "Then why do you *act* thus? Why have you misled your people to proclaim loyalty to the dogmaticians, without knowing what they teach? That is hoodwinking the congregations."

But if one says, "After all, the fathers were more learned than you in the Synodical Conference, therefore it is, of course, safer to side with them than with you"—we indeed, gladly grant immediately that we are not as learned as [they]; but with this argument our opponents prove precisely the abominable idolatry that they commit in their attitude toward the fathers. Is it not terrible, in deciding matters of faith, to weigh who among the teachers is more learned? Is that faith?! No, that is not faith; that is superstition.

Just hear what Luther says about this:

"That is what the papists say now too. They believe what the church believes; and as one says of the Poles, that they should say, 'I believe what my king believes.'... It is said that a doctor [of theology] asked a collier on the bridge at Prague, in compassion on him as a poor layman, 'My good man, what do you believe?' The collier answered, 'I believe what the church believes.' The doctor: 'And what does the church believe?' The collier: 'What I believe.' Later, when the doctor was dying, the devil so severely attacked his faith that he knew not where to turn and found no rest until he said, 'I believe what the collier believes.' Similarly it is told of the great Thomas Aquinas that at his end he could not fend off the devil until he said, 'I believe what this book says,' while he had the Bible in his arms. But God preserve us from such a faith. For as they believed nothing else than this, both the doctor and the collier believed themselves into the abyss of hell." ("A Warning Letter to Those in Frankfurt am Main, to Beware of Zwinglian Doctrine and Teachers," 1533; XVII, 2442 f. [*WA* 30/III, 562-63; cf. F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* II, 429 n.])

Faith consists of three parts: knowledge, assent, and confidence. Where the first part, knowledge, is lacking, faith is entirely lacking. As Scripture says, "This is eternal life: to *know* You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Truly, the conduct of the

Ohio Synod is an example in the most recent church history that is unequalled at least in the so-called Protestant church.

2. The second thing we see from the Ohio Synod's declaration is *that its confession is unsteady and unstable*. No human being can know what [that synod] really holds fast in the election of grace. For they say: "As it has always been set forth *by and large* ... by the *fathers* of our church." That is a wide door through which much can be brought in and out. If one shows them something from a dogmatician and asks, "Do you also believe this?" they can say, "No, for, you see, we say only, 'by and large.'" This is a device that brings the leaders of the Ohio Synod into ill repute.

3. Finally, we must also rebuke the Ohio Synod for binding consciences to the same terms that the dogmaticians use. For they say: "Only the doctrine 'in view of faith' is authorized among us, and whoever opposes this expression and the teaching now connected with it must either leave our synod or, if he remains, he reveals himself as a unionist."

These are three dreadful errors, into which God has allowed them to fall, because they did not stick with what Holy Scripture teaches about election. Besides, in their declaration they repeatedly say what is *not true*. For example, "We declare *anew*," and "*as in the past*." For it is simply not true that the Ohio Synod formerly had any definite teaching on the *intuitu fidei*. Indeed, on the contrary, it is a fact that shortly before the outbreak of the controversy it had a teaching to the contrary. For in 1877 a preacher of the then Illinois Synod received upon request an opinion from the faculty in St. Louis and from that in Columbus as to whether the old Herford catechism was doctrinally pure. In it the faculty, after rightly praising much in this catechism, expressly stated that the expression "in view of faith," which is in the catechism, is questionable, *since "it could easily lead to error"*! That is what professors Loy and Lehmann² said in July 1877, and the Missourians did not discuss the election of grace until October 1877. So the former could not have been misled by the latter to the above statement. And today Prof. Loy says that the expression "in view of faith" is the only right and authorized one! (Cf. *Der Lutheraner*, 1881, pp. 116 f.)

Further, the Ohioans say, "The fathers of our church have *always* held this teaching of *intuitu fidei*." Again, that is not true. This doctrine was first taught in the last decade of the 16th century, about 1590, by Aegidius Hunnius against Samuel Huber. Before this there is no mention of it in Luther, Brenz, Osiander, Hesshus, [or] Chemnitz. A single time Jakob Andrea tried to justify "in view of faith" against the Calvinists, saying that it need not necessarily be Pelagianizing.

² William F. Lehmann (1820-80), Loy's predecessor at Capital University. Served as president of the Synodical conference and of the Ohio Synod.

Beza had accused the Lutherans of this. Probably some lesser spirits had used this expression and good Andrea then tried to justify it at the Colloquy of Montbeliard in 1586, therefore not until nine years after the Formula of Concord was drawn up.

Therefore the Ohioans either write this against their better knowledge or they must think that Luther and others do not belong to the fathers (*Lehrvater*) of our church. If now some among our opponents, as they cite the church fathers, perhaps think thus: "If we are mistaken, then highly respected fathers of our church whom we have followed have also erred. Now, if one does not venture to condemn them, then he must not condemn us either. So there is no danger here. Just let us with our faith; we intend to get to heaven the same way as the church fathers"—if they think thus, then let them hear what Luther thought of their comfort. At his time the papists in general took such comfort. "What?" they cried to Luther. "Will you condemn the church fathers?" To this Luther replied, "No, I do not condemn them." "Then," they said, "leave us alone too, for we can prove our doctrine from the church fathers; if we have erred, then they also have erred; and in that case it harms us as little as them."

To this Luther replied as follows:

"Do we not see in Augustine many errors that he retracts? They would have condemned him if he had not been preserved by his faith; after all, they are for the most part contrary to faith; but confession and the fear of God made them harmless for him. *Whoever follows them now, follows [them] to his ruin.* That happens to many who follow the sayings of the fathers indiscriminately, just [as] if they were divine truth. From this it is clear that the saints err at times, also in faith (that is, they are not yet perfect); but because of faith that has begun and is growing they do not perish. But those are lost who accept their error as truth and follow it as an example. [It is clear] also that it will do no good at all if someone has followed a *saint* beyond [the warrant of] Scripture. ... For God beholds, searches, and judges the hearts and minds [*Nieren*], Ps. 7:9, that is, inner desire. Hence it comes that God remits and forgives an error to one that He condemns in another, because their hearts are unequal in faith and humility.

... Since we have now recognized the error, it is not fitting that we should continue to err and regard Mass as a sacrifice. For this would be sinning against the whole faith and our own conscience. *Here no faith, no confession could excuse us. You cannot say: I will err in a Christian way. A Christian error occurs out of ignorance.* ... Those who now know and recognize the error and nevertheless cling to it just [as] if it were no error, *they follow the fathers [in this life], but they will not join them [in heaven],* because they follow as an article of faith and persist to the end in *what the fathers finally abandoned and wherefore* [because they abandoned it] *they obtained mercy.* ("The Misuse of the Mass," 1522; XIX, 1381-85 [cf. LW 36, 188 ff.]

We must also bring our opponents face to face with this. For one day before God's throne it will not at all help them either if they would say, "But we have followed our fathers, such great [and] enlightened men." For God would then say to them, "Did I not give you My Word and am I not the true Father?" Of course, it seems to be only a very small, excusable, easily forgivable sin, to accept an error because of pious and, besides, highly respected people. But woe to us if conscience should once awaken for us! Then the crucial issue is: "What have you done? You have regarded flesh as your strength and in your heart have turned away from the Lord. Alas for you eternally!" Then laughter carries a price already here (*Da wird schon hier das Lachen theuer*). And blessed is one for whom conscience awakens already here, for then there is still hope, but only then!

And second, there is also a great difference, as Luther points out in the [above] passage, as to who errs and how one errs. I may have committed a sin, and it is forgiven me. Someone else commits the same sin, and he goes to hell. Why? I believe in my Lord Jesus Christ; the other person does not believe. It is the same also with error. One person errs in a doctrine, but he does not know that he errs. No one has ever refuted him with arguments, and so he goes quietly on in his mistaken opinion and yet is saved, despite his error. Another person entertains the same error, but he is faced with the light of the divine Word, and so all of his arguments are taken away from him; and yet he remains in the error, in fact perhaps even says: "I happen to be in our synod, and there must be unity. I will therefore not break the bond. If I am wrong, then we all are wrong." Whoever takes such a stand has as little of the true faith as the one who lives in conscious and wanton sins. Therefore what he calls faith also cannot cover his error. One should therefore mark the word of Luther: "Whoever follows them (the fathers) now, follows [them] to his destruction."

Third, one should mark also what Luther says about "*Christian*" error. The papists said, "Now, if the church fathers have erred, they have erred in a Christian way; so then I will also err in a Christian way." To this Luther says: "That is not a valid line of thought! A Christian error occurs out of ignorance. If I am a Christian, I certainly cannot say, 'I will err.' No, a genuine Christian says, 'I do not want to err at all, but build my faith on God's Word alone.' But they who want to follow the fathers in error are no Christians at all." Precisely for this reason [there stands] the terrible word of Luther: "They follow the fathers" (that is, in this life), "but they will not join them" (that is, in heaven). Yes indeed, it is a mere phantom of faith if someone says, "A pious, wise, enlightened man believes this; therefore I believe it also, though he may err, for he errs in a Christian way; so I will do it too."

Finally, it is important what Luther, in the [above] quotation, thought of the early church fathers. He was

thoroughly convinced that they were saved; that is, although they indeed had many errors, [yet] when they came close to death, they cast everything overboard and relied only on the blood of Jesus Christ. And then the fire of death's final affliction indeed consumed the wood, hay, straw, and stubble—these did not help them any; on the contrary, they abandoned all these—but they themselves remained standing on the golden purified foundation of the precious, pure Gospel. In fact, Luther said even of Zwingli that he still hoped that he [Zwingli] was yet saved. Yes, Luther believed this even of Thomas Aquinas, of whom he, after all, once wrote: "It was as if in this man the devil had become human, namely because he [Aquinas] was such a powerful proponent and propagator of the papist errors." In love, Luther believed that he [Aquinas], after all, probably at last clung to the Lord Jesus alone. So also are we far from wanting to condemn our opponents because of their error. For we cannot see into their hearts. But we must condemn their *teaching*, just as St. Paul does in Gal. 1:8.

It was then reported also how the Ohio Synod has limited their synod's aforementioned declaration, namely first, that with it they do not follow every dogmatician, for there may be one who does not have the *intuitu fidei*. And second, the words "by and large" were explained in this way, that they refer only to the doctrine of election. One should not follow every single related teaching of the dogmaticians, but, on the whole, this their teaching of the election of grace.

But that changes nothing of what is said above as to how the Ohioans cling idolatrously to the church fathers (*Lehrvater*). For we know also that they do not indiscriminately profess each and every article of the Christian faith as treated by the church fathers, but here only their doctrine of election. According to the Wheeling resolution, the Ohioans certainly build their faith on human authority. On the other hand, they indeed tried to talk their way out by remarking, "We hold to the teaching of the fathers, which is in agreement with the teaching of the Formula of Concord." But now, you see, according to the teaching of our opponents the later fathers teach an election in the so-called narrower sense, whereas the Formula of Concord, according to them, teaches an election in the so-called wider sense, or in both senses. Thereby it is granted that the Formula of Concord at least does not yet express the teaching of the later fathers, so that one who knows the teaching of the Formula of Concord does not thereby have with it the teaching of the later fathers.

So it becomes clearly evident that, through the Wheeling resolution, consciences are bound to something they do not know; for the Formula of Concord, as is well known, does not use *intuitu fidei*, but says on the contrary that faith follows election and does not precede it. On the other hand, they cite only the fathers, giving it to be understood that they, after all, would certainly have understood the Formula of Concord cor-

rectly. So they carry the *intuitu fidei* out of the fathers into the Formula of Concord, and through the Formula of Concord into Holy Scripture. So then we can withdraw our charge—that the Ohio Synod is practicing idolatry of the fathers—only if it withdraws its confession and says only that it declares allegiance to the writings of the fathers, *insofar as*, and *to the extent that*, these writings agree with Scripture and Confession. That indeed says practically nothing regarding faith and the teaching of the fathers. But without such a change in its confession all glosses do not help at all, and our grave accusation remains standing before God and man.

However, one thing about the Wheeling convention is encouraging. Its leaders had to strike from the declaration or their confession the words: "*We reject all contrary teaching.*" For several people opposed this [statement]. It was too strong for them. And they had to strike it. One sees from this that the leaders are not sure of their cause. For one who is must say, "If all of this alone is true, then everything else is false and must be rejected." But they could not make the correctness of their teaching clear for the simple folk. Would to God that we could lance the bad abscess in the Ohio Synod, so that the upright would come into their own and become free of this yoke of servitude. But let Ohio have a mind to reap, wherever possible, where many have sown—we as true Lutherans, who always do only what we are called to do, cannot and do not want to give tit for tat here.

Now, after the occasion of our theme had been set forth, the convention turned to the proofs of the posited theme. **It is so objectionable to try to base matters of faith on the writings of the fathers and bind consciences to their doctrinal decisions,**

I. Because it is unscriptural; for it is

- A. Contrary to the authority that belongs to Scripture alone, [the authority] to be**
 - a. alone the pure source of all knowledge of faith (*Glaubenserkenntnis*),**
 - b. alone the infallible rule and norm of all teachings and teachers, and**
 - c. alone the valid judge in all religious controversies.**

It may seem unnecessary further to discuss the fact that Scripture has this threefold authority. For not only we confess this, but all who want to be Lutherans. Also the Ohioans do not deny this expressly. But the more generally a principle is accepted, the more easily it is denied in practice. Daily experience shows this. One thinks: "It is self-evident that Scripture is the only source, rule, and judge; that is simply beyond question, and no one will believe me capable of denying it." And yet precisely in the time of conflict the principle is most quickly abandoned. For example, all Christians know that the chief rule for a Christian life is: "Love God with [your] whole heart and your neighbor as yourself." Everyone will say, "Do you think that I don't recognize

that?" And yet it is a fact that precisely this chief principle of so-called Christian morals is transgressed daily and hourly without one knowing it. So it goes also with the firmly established principle that Holy Scripture has such an authority as nothing else in the world has. And what is this authority? First, it [Scripture] alone is the pure source of all knowledge of faith (*Glaubenserkenntnis*), the only fount (*Brunnen*) from which the divine, pure, saving truth flows and can and should be drawn. Ps. 46:4 says of the church of God that it has founts (*Brunnlein*). And thereby nothing else is said than that it has many writings of prophets and apostles; there is an Old and a New Testament. These are the various founts, all of which, however, have their source in the one Fount: God.

To prove that Scripture alone is the pure fount of all knowledge of faith (*Glaubenserkenntnis*), we first quote Deut. 4:2: "Add nothing to what I command you, and subtract nothing from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you." If one may not add to Scripture, and yet one finds the truth from it, then it alone must have the authority to impart all knowledge of faith and to communicate all divine saving truths. The papists indeed say, "That is not a correct exposition of this passage, for many things were added after the five books of Moses." But where does it say here that God may not add anything? He forbids us, us human beings, to add anything. Thus one certainly cannot prove from the five books of Moses that Christ was to be born of a virgin. God first added this revelation much later through the prophet Isaiah. Now, even though at the death of Moses there was no further divine Word than the five books of Moses, yet these were then the complete canon. One who taught something not written in the five books of Moses and could not prove that he had received a new revelation from God was a heretic if he stubbornly persisted in it [his teaching]. Thus the children of God already then had their entire Bible, and that was enough for them.

Another proof passage is 2 Tim. 3:15-17: "And because you since childhood know the Holy Scriptures, they can make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. For all Scripture, inspired by God, is profitable for doctrine, for rebuke, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that a man of God may be perfectly fit (*vollkommen*), equipped for every good work." Here it is said not only that all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is profitable in a fourfold way but also that it makes a servant of God perfectly fit, equipped for every good work. Now, whatever makes a man perfectly fit must be perfect (*vollkommen*) itself. Therefore, according to this, it goes without saying that if Holy Scripture is perfect with regard to its purpose, then it is altogether unnecessary to seek still other sources. If these other sources teach the same thing, they are certainly unnecessary; and if they teach something altogether different, then we must all the more reject them. Therefore one who sets up beside

Scripture another source of the knowledge of faith (*Glaubenserkenntnis*), denies the authority that is due to [Scripture] alone.

Further, Acts 26:22 says: "And I am saying nothing more than what the prophets and Moses have said would happen." Even a Paul did not want to say anything beside and beyond Scripture; how much less have we the authority to do so! Also what we teach may not contradict Scripture, indeed agree with it, yet it is to be rejected if we cannot show that we have drawn it out of Scripture.

Luke 16:27-31: "Then he (the rich man) said, Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house. For I have five brothers; let him warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' But he said, 'No, Father Abraham. But if one from the dead would go to them, they would repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not believe if someone would rise from the dead.'" Now, with this the blessed Abraham in heaven has solemnly declared that Scripture is so perfect that nothing may be added to it. Even if someone would come out of eternity and preach to people, it would not be a means to bring them to faith, if the written Word of God does not do it.

Rom. 16:17: "Now I urge you, dear brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and obstacles beside the doctrine you have learned, and avoid them." It does not say here: "contrary to (*gegen*) the doctrine," but: "beside (*neben*) the doctrine." So if a doctrine is not drawn from Scripture, even if it does not contradict Scripture, we must nevertheless trample it underfoot if it would be forced on us as divine truth. Thus, you know, many people imagine many things about the nature of heaven but [do so] outside of Scripture. Now, even if it were possible that the nature of heaven is such as the visionaries say, but one wanted to make us believe it, we would have to contradict him and say, "You are an Enthusiast (*Schwärmer*)." So if one draws a teaching from the fathers and cannot prove that the fathers have drawn this teaching from the Bible, one should reject him, no matter how engagingly he speaks of it. All that faith is to know (*Glaubenserkenntnis*) is simply to have flowed out of Scripture.

Gal. 1:8: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you, let him be condemned." The apostle does not say here, "Whoever preaches against my Gospel is condemned." No, "whoever only preaches other than what I preached." Though it seems to reason that the doctrine brought in beside harmonizes excellently with Scripture, it is condemned if I cannot prove that Scripture forces me to teach thus; and at the same time I must then also present it to my hearers in such a way that they must understand it. For only that is a true expositor. Though my preacher himself may be ever so certain of his ground, what help is he to me if

he cannot make me certain, so that I can die on it?

Rev. 22:18-19: "I warn all who hear the words of the prophecy in this book: If someone adds to it, God will add to him the plagues written in this book. And if someone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the Book of Life and from the holy city and from what is written in this book." With these words the entire Holy Scriptures come to a close. In Moses already, therefore at the beginning of Scripture, we are commanded to add nothing to it, and at the close it is once again emphasized: *Be sure to add nothing*. One should be sure not to think: "With good additions, you see, a great light falls on Scripture." The evil foe would thank you for that! No, we have the light before us, namely the Bible itself. We need only open our eyes. And one who, out of his own reason, wants to bring still another light to this light so that it will become brighter, acts just as foolishly as one who wants to make the sun bright for me with a tallow candle. And that is what most of the modern theologians do, casting the light of their reason on the Bible.

Therefore Holy Scripture is the only fount, the only source of all knowledge of faith (*Glaubenserkenntnis*). And our beloved Lutheran church also confesses that. In the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, under the title, "Of the Summary Formulation, Basis, Rule, and Norm, Whereby All Doctrines Should Be Judged in Conformity with the Word of God and Errors That Have Occurred Are to Be Explained and Decided in a Christian Way," it says that we pledge ourselves "first to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the *pure and dear fountain of Israel*" (Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm [cf. Tappert, p. 503]). This confession is extremely important precisely in our time. For the "modern-faith" [*modern-glaubigen*] theologians indeed concede that Scripture is the *rule and norm*, but they deny that it is the only *source* of all knowledge of faith. Even a Philippi said, "There are a number of principles of Christian knowledge of faith." (Principle [*Princip*] means starting point, something from which one proceeds, a source.) And among these principles he includes among other things enlightened reason. But it [the latter] cannot produce the smallest trifle. Schleiermacher says, "I start from Christian consciousness." And [J.C.K. von] Hofmann in Erlangen [says], "My principle is my own person. I am a Christian, and from that I then develop the entire theology." He indeed then permits someone else to test his theology, for he concedes that the Bible is the rule and norm, but he himself as a Christian remains the source!

And the authority of Holy Scripture consists secondly in this, *that it alone is the infallible rule and norm of all teachings and teachers*. This we prove from Ps. 119:105: "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." There is therefore no other beacon to heaven. If we wish to know whether a teaching is true,

only the light of the divine Word will show us. It alone is [our] light and lamp on the way to heaven, [and] therefore the only rule.

Moreover, Is. 8:19-20 says: "And when they say to you, 'You must ask the fortunetellers and augurs, who whisper and mutter,' (then say,) 'Shouldn't a people ask their *God*? Or should one ask the dead for the living?' Yes, *to the Law and testimony!* If they will not say that, then it will not dawn on them." First the prophet says, "You should ask *God*, and not the dead or even the devil." And then he adds what he means when he says that they should ask God, namely that they should ask His Word, "Yes, to the Law and testimony," and that is the *written Word of God*. For as often as this expression, "Law and testimony," appears in the Old Testament, it always means the Bible. That God added still more in the course of time to the Old Testament, and finally the New Testament, alters nothing in the matter. For now doctrines should be judged also according to this "Law and testimony" added by God Himself.

The Lutheran church also teaches this. In the Formula of Concord it says:

"We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the *only rule and norm* according to which all doctrines together with [all] teachers should be weighed and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105: 'Your *Word* is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' And St. Paul [says] in Gal. 1:8: 'If an angel would come from heaven and preach *otherwise*, let him be accursed.' But other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever name they bear, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture, but one and all together should be subordinated to the same and not received in another way or further than as *witnesses* to the fashion in which and the places where such doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-Apostolic times." [Cf. Triglot, pp. 776 f.; Tappert, pp. 464 f.]

The teachers of the church are therefore nothing else than *witnesses*. Every true Lutheran believes that. Oh, it is terrible when one always directs the poor lay-people only to human books, instead of to Scripture, whereas a teacher of the church should say to them: "First go into Holy Scripture, but then also do not despise prophecy, but there test all things carefully!" One cannot express what heartbreak can yet come to our Lutheran church [here] in America because, only to keep people, some have begun to direct them to human writings and to mislead them [by saying]: "Just look at these men! They are highly enlightened, pious, godly, highly gifted church fathers, whom even our opponents cannot reject, and they teach such and such; we must hold fast to it as solely truly Lutheran."

Then each Christian should stand up, even if he is a cowherd, and say: "All [due] respect to these great men! But I do not rest my poor soul on them; I am not baptized in their name, [and] they are not my God and

Savior. I gladly let them lead me, but only where they show me the way with the lamp of the divine Word. I shall not be seduced by their good name to accept something that is contrary to Scripture."

Therefore Luther says, "Consciences cannot be bound, except by God's Word alone" (*Bondage of the Will*; XVIII, 2098 [cf. LW33,49]). Let this be noted well. Whoever binds consciences to a doctrine and does not say and prove that this is written in Scripture, he is a miserable tyrant over conscience; in fact, he makes himself God. We should know that no man is immune to error. As Luther writes: "Only he who in this life is without *sin* can boast that he has never *erred* in any respect" (Epilog on the Exposition of the First 22 Psalms, 1521; IV, 1621 [cf. SL IV, 1222]). Now, one can draw from this that it is certainly not arrogant to say, "Even a Hunnius can err; even a Gerhard, [a] Quenstedt, and whoever they all are can err." One who does not want to acknowledge this is an abominable worshiper of the creature.

J. Gerhard also writes concerning the fathers:

"Although we are ready to establish, with clear and plain testimonies of the older fathers, each and every article of our faith that is disputed between us and the papists, and though this has already been done often by our people, yet we neither can nor may recognize the writings of the fathers as the *norm* of doctrine in the church: (1) because this dignity and authority belongs only to the canonical writings of the prophets and apostles; (2) because the fathers themselves call for their writings to be tested by the norm of the divine canon; (3) because the papists themselves deny that the authority of the fathers is always authentic (that is, one cannot always know whether the church father has really written what has been ascribed to him); (4) because neither in the doctrines of faith nor in the interpretation of Scripture are the fathers unanimous throughout; (5) because many writings of the ancients are lost; (6) because, on the other hand, the writings that are still extant are forged and corrupt in many places; [and] (7) because in the writings of the fathers dross is found mixed with the gold, stubble with the gems, [and] the leaven of human opinions with the unleavened bread of the heavenly doctrine." ("Locus on the Church," par. 203 [Ed. Preuss Edition, Berlin, 1867; IV, p. 453])

So we do not know at all what all the fathers taught, because many of their writings are lost or corrupted. After all, for example, many wrong things were added even to the *Loci* of Gerhard shortly after his death, in the Frankfurt edition. Therefore the fathers can never be the norm of doctrine.

Finally, the authority of Scripture consists thirdly also in this, *that it alone is the valid judge in all religious controversies*. We see this from the example of Jesus Christ in Matt. 4:4, 7, 10. What an astounding sight, which all angels and archangels beheld with amazement, how the Son of the living God, as He struggles

with the devil, quotes only Scripture! Satan attacked Him three times because of the doctrine that Christ is the Son of God. And three times the Lord says only: "*It is written.*" The third time the devil had to flee. We could not have a more glorious demonstration of how we should conduct ourselves in doctrinal controversies. There we should not say, "Thus it is written in Gerhard! Thus it is written in Hunnius! Thus in Hollaz!" But as Christ [said], so we also should say, "It is written," namely in Scripture. Christ does not add the [words] "in Scripture," because that is self-understood. Only it [Scripture], you see, is the Book of all books.

Thus it is a pity that cannot be bewailed enough, that when one is to prove the correctness of his position in the present controversy, he, as a rule, immediately comes armed with passages from the dogmatists. What consequences this yet will have! Thereby Christians are led away from Scripture and are led into the pattern of letting themselves be bound to [the teachings of] human beings. Many will thereby finally lose all faith. For a faith that is not grounded on Scripture is no faith. God's Word and faith can no more be separated from one another than hill and dale.

In Luke 10 we are told that an expert in the Law asked Christ, "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And what did the Lord answer him? In verse 26 it says: "And He said to him, '*What is written in the Law? What do you read?*'" As equally God in essence, you see, Christ could immediately have shown the expert in the Law what is necessary to get to heaven and have refuted his false opinion. But He directs him to the written Word of God, to show thereby that the Word is the judge in all religious controversies. Now, if the Son of God directs us to Scripture, what wickedness it is if we human beings do not want to do so! What a shameful idol a person makes of himself, if he does not want to say with Christ, "What is written in the Bible?!"

John 10:33-36 testifies to the same thing: "The Jews answered Him and said, 'We are stoning you, not because of a good work, but because of blasphemy and because you are a man and make yourself God.'" So the point here is the doctrine of the deity of Christ, namely precisely the question whether the *man* Jesus may be called God, [and] thus whether in Jesus the Godhead was united with humanity in one person. Now, what does the Lord say in reply to these blasphemers? In verses 34-36 it says: "Jesus answered them, '*Is it not written* in your Law, "I have said, you are gods"? If He calls them gods, to whom the Word of God came, *and Scripture cannot be broken*, do you say of Him whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, "You blaspheme God," because I say that I am God's Son?"' The Lord says in effect, "You have a Book, you know, from which you can understand this; I do not refer you to anything else." So the Lord settles the dispute over His deity in no other way than by quoting Scripture. He could indeed have just as easily brought quite a number of other proofs of His deity, but He did

not want to lead the people away from Scripture.

What Christ teaches us here from Scripture, our Lutheran church also teaches. Thus it says in the Formula of Concord:

"In this way the distinction between the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and *all other writings* is maintained, and Holy Scripture alone remains the *only judge*, rule, and norm according to which, as the only touchstone, all doctrines should and must be discerned and judged as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong. *The other symbols and writings cited are not judges* but only a *testimony and declaration* of the faith, as to how at any time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the articles in controversy in the church of God by those then living, and how teachings contrary to them were rejected and condemned." (Part I, Epitome [Rule and Norm, pars. 7-8. Cf. Tappert, p. 465; *Triglöt*, pp. 778 f.])

According to this, therefore, there are no other judges in doctrinal controversies than the Holy Scriptures. Even the Confessions themselves, according to this, do not have this authority. Let no one answer us: "After all, in controversies you too always immediately bring up the Symbolical Books." For that is something quite different. We wish to show thereby that our doctrine is *Lutheran*, since we are decried as being Calvinists. That our doctrine alone is *true*, this we show only from Scripture. Therefore, when we met with the leader of our opponents in Milwaukee, we drew on the Bible, for there the point at issue was to show which teaching is the correct one. First, we had to show our poor Lutheran Christian people—who have been to some extent frightened by the slanders of our malicious enemies—that those who call us Calvinists are lying. But when thereupon also the question was raised whether the teaching of the Symbols, which we confessed, is the correct one, that was a matter to be proved from Scripture.

Luther says therefore:

"When they (the papists) bring up a passage of the fathers against me, they ring all the bells, beat all the drums, and cry with animosity that they have won; they shut both ears and eyes [and] want thereby to have all Scripture shut and silenced for me.... But one must read the books of all the fathers with discretion, not believing them but noting whether they also cite clear Scripture and interpret Scripture with clear Scripture... so that nothing more than the drawn sword, the Word of God, rules everyone." (*Answer to the Hyperchristian, etc.*, *Book of the Goat Emser*, 1521; XVIII, 1583, 1585 f. [cf. LW 39, 163, 165])

In this connection we must also remember that the Scriptural proof must be rightly drawn. When, for example, there is in Holy Scripture an obscure passage on a doctrine full of mystery, we must not interpret it in the light of reason, but in the light of clear passages of Scripture. For only the eternal light can make the eter-

nal light visible to us. And then, second, the Scripture passages must also be such as deal with the same matter. The tactics of our opponents, however, are these: If they have before them an obscure (or even a clear) passage about election, then they bring in such passages as deal with an entirely different matter, for example: "Whoever believes, will be saved." But it shows absolutely nothing about election that one says, "We are saved through faith." You see, that is a totally different doctrine, namely the doctrine of justification. If our opponents want to prove their teaching, they must rather show us a passage that says, "Faith is the cause of our election."

It is indeed contrary to all of Scripture that God reached into a grab bag, as it were, and said, "This person I will save and the other one not." For all of Scripture testifies as clearly as the sun that God wants to save all, all sinners. And yet both remain true: "God has found no cause in man for electing him to salvation" and "Whoever is elected, is so [elected] out of God's free mercy." Why? Because Scripture precisely teaches both in the plainest and clearest way. Now, however, how this fits together we do not know and should not and do not want to know. And this is precisely the abomination of *Calvinism*, that it does not want to let this mystery stand but [wants to] solve it through a blasphemous denial of universal grace. And [this is] also the abomination of *synergism*, that it wants to solve the mystery in this way that—shamefully denying salvation by grace alone—it holds that the cause of a person's election lies in his superior *conduct* and in his own *decision*.

How one should regard the church fathers over against the Word of God was shown already by Hieronymous Kromayer:

"*The fathers were lights, not gods (Patres fuerunt lumina, non numina)*. We are built only on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus Christ is the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). The fathers, however, did not have the privilege of *infallibility*, and they did not write their works with the necessity that one believe them, but with the freedom that one judge them. Yes, they have also written *even books of recantation*.—We add here incidentally that the collected writings of the fathers are to be read with two kinds of eyes: (1) with the eye of discretion and (2) with the eye of love. With the eye of *discretion*, in order not to confuse the genuine writings with the false or garbled, the later (which have suffered more corruption) with the older and thus the golden age with the leaden, [nor] the doctrinal books with the polemical writings and sermon books. However, the writings of the fathers are to be read with the (eye) of *love* when they either, because of their time, have been carried away to error as by a raging river, or when they, because of agitated controversies, spoke much too unguardedly and offhandedly (*securius*), or if in writing they grew in understanding or wrote as they grew. For it is not easy to find one

among the fathers who does not have his flaws (*naevi*). Albeit, so far as it can be done in good conscience, the blunders (*pudenda*; lit. shame) of the fathers should be covered" (*Theologia positiva-polemica*, Part II, p. 36). [Walther's footnote to the last sentence: That we have done this is now being made a reproach against us.]

Moreover, the Lord Christ says of His Christians, "You are the light of the world." He does not say, "You are the gods of the world." We should say of all the fathers, "They can err, and they have erred." Even in Luther's writings there are errors, namely from the time when he had not yet clearly seen through the mystery of iniquity. But he later rejected these errors and explicitly asked that one have pity on him, for he had to come to understanding only little by little, since he did not receive the true doctrine from the Holy Spirit by direct inspiration. But after the year 1523 Luther no longer taught error in any article of the Christian faith, though he remained a human being liable to err. Also worth noting in the quotation above is that Kromayer says, "The later the church fathers are in time, the more errors one finds in them." But as far as the early church fathers are concerned, they often fell into error in controversy. The same happened to the Lutheran fathers, e.g., in the controversy over the doctrine of election, when Samuel Huber arose and taught that all people are elect. Now, to refute him, our Lutheran fathers said, "No, not all people are elect, but only those of whom God has foreseen that they would believe in Christ, and indeed in view of this faith of theirs." So this doctrine entered our church with the best of intentions, namely in order to refute that erring spirit with it. At certain times, when errors became very common, even many otherwise orthodox teachers were swept away unawares into this current and swam along with it. This happened often, e.g., in that dreadful time after Luther's death until the formation of the Formula of Concord.

At other times, theologians hit upon wrong modes of expression in a doctrine when there is no controversy at all over it; then they all too easily become unconcerned. But if opponents arise, they become, as it were, sharpeners of the true teachers, polishing and constraining them to express themselves carefully. Therefore we also should not be so sad about the controversy that has broken out among us. For those who have fallen away it is indeed a terrible disaster. Having wandered onto false paths, they stray ever farther away from the truth and now blindly promote their error and thereby imagine firmly and strongly that they perform the office of watchmen over pure doctrine. But to those who are of the truth the present controversy brings only blessing. What a bright light this controversy has shed on this, [1] that the free will is nothing, [2] what it means to be saved through faith and to be saved by grace, [3] what it means to hope for salvation, etc.! How much leaven of synergism has been cleaned out by it, also among those who thought they were free of it! How much more carefully, more unmistakably, and more

specifically has this controversy taught us to speak and to write! In controversy one simply must be careful not to say anything that an opponent perhaps could use to hide his false teaching behind it or to cast suspicion on your truth and to malign it.

Also not to be overlooked is this, that Kromayer is speaking not of *heresies*, but only of flaws of the fathers. These pious men did not consciously depart from Scripture but [did so] out of human frailty. For this reason, so far as it can be done in good conscience, one should also cover the blunders of the fathers. Now, we have also done that. We are, of course, accused of having spoken of the fathers quite differently formerly than [we do] now. But what call did we have formerly to make our Lutheran Christian people suspicious of these dear men, whose doctrine we first had to bring to the people? And in due time we could also say, "See, dear brothers, in this and that point the doctrine of even these dear teachers is not entirely right." And we have also not kept entirely silent about this even from the beginning. We have, e.g., pointed out that they do not teach correctly about Sunday, when they say that Sunday was instituted *by God* and put in place of the Jewish Sabbath.

Now, with all of this we are not saying that, on the other hand, our opponents know absolutely nothing about Scripture and want to know something only about the fathers. For had they done this, they would of course immediately have revealed themselves plainly as heretics to all Christendom. And, you know, no heretic has yet done that. Neither Arius nor Pelagius, neither Zwingli nor Oecolampadius, in short, no heretic, not even the pope says, "I do not follow Scripture." On the contrary, our opponents *speak* very highly of Scripture. But we ask, "Where did they get the *intuitu fidei*?" Answer: From the fathers and not from Scripture! They first had to reinterpret Scripture accordingly, as they do, for example, in Romans 8. Whereas the apostle here says of God that He *foreknew persons*, that is, elected them (as our Confession rightly explains this word), they say, "He *foreknew—faith*." So they first bring faith into this Scripture passage and give their people the impression that they too prove their doctrine by Scripture. Now, because they steadfastly insist on a doctrine that they have drawn neither from Scripture nor from the Confession but only from the private writings of human teachers, we must say: "In this they do not stand on the foundation of Scripture. Their doctrine and their faith concerning election is, on the contrary, built on human beings, protests notwithstanding."

Unfortunately there has constantly been among certain individuals also in the orthodox church a wrong, "parrot" mind-set. One would follow this or that great teacher. Now, as long as this had reference only to what is right, it may indeed not have caused particularly great harm, although, considering its character and nature, it always was and is something extremely dangerous. Furthermore, we do not deny that also among

us there have been and perhaps still are people, and in fact good, guileless people, who simply say in their defense, "You see, it says so in the *Proceedings* of the Western District." Or if one asks that this or that point of doctrine might be proven, one can perhaps also sometimes hear, "You see, it says so in Walther's *Pastorale*." This indeed happens as a rule in pure simplicity, without any intent to place human writings next to Scripture or even above Scripture. Yet it is and remains papistic, dangerous, and harmful to faith; therefore we cannot among ourselves oppose this tendency earnestly enough.

Among the Ohioans this custom of [hero] worship has grown up on a false basis and foundation and is veritably being preserved and cultivated on it. They lead the people by the nose with their glib talk and chatter about the fathers. If one says, "So then, are you minded to prove the correctness of your doctrine by the fathers?" they are capable of crying out to us, "Get thee behind me, Satan! The Bible alone is the golden foundation, on which we stand. Who would want to prove a doctrine by the fathers?" But even though they say this, if someone among them will put up with it, they rattle around him with the fathers so that he becomes anxious and alarmed. They do this all the time. They make the people downright afraid with Gerhard, Hunnius, etc., so that timid souls do not even venture to ask, "But now, isn't this term [or] this teaching wrong?" One ventures this at most when one can also counter with other and, if possible, even higher authorities.

As Ohio has done, so also, as you know, has Professor Schmidt.³ Just consider what he has done again recently in the Norwegian Synod. He knew that Pontoppidan (who died in 1764) is the darling of the Norwegians.⁴ Therefore he proposed that also the Norwegian Synod should confess that they agree with the way Pontoppidan sets forth the doctrine of election. Similarly he wanted to turn the piety of the people towards one man to this end, that [the people] would be misled to his (Schmidt's) false doctrine; however, he did not succeed in moving the entire synod to that confession. He should have said as a true Christian: "You know, of course, that in the doctrine of election Pontoppidan stands on my side. But that does not decide anything; we must go into the Bible."

There is a great difference in the use of quotations from the fathers. When a teaching is already generally recognized as a Scriptural doctrine, then one may without objection quote at length from the writings of the fathers in support of it, provided only that one does not do this in order to prove the doctrine thereby, but

³ Friedrich August Schmidt (1837-1928), Norwegian Synod churchman. Professor at Concordia Seminary (1872—86), at United Norwegian Church Seminary (1893-1912). He opposed Walther in the election controversy.

⁴ Erick Pontoppidan (1698-1764), a Danish bishop wrote a catechism much used by Norwegians. It did not agree with Walther's position on the doctrine of election.

because very often the church fathers confirm a doctrine from Scripture much better than one can do it on his own. But as soon as a controversy arises about a doctrine, then one must go back to Scripture. Therefore though Professor Schmidt may ever so strongly assert that he is not making idols of the fathers and is letting Scripture alone be the judge, he contradicts this with his actions.

Now, when it is said here that our opponents have acted, spoken, and argued papistically, that is not saying that among them this papistry is the fundamental error. For there is no doubt that their fundamental error is rationalism, the religion of reason. They want to harmonize certain apparently contradictory passages according to "common sense," instead of taking their reason captive. Therefore they take their well-known stand on the doctrine of the election of grace. But in order to spread this among the people, they use the fathers. And so they fall unintentionally into a thoroughly papistic approach. Right in the first article they wrote against us they said, "Could it be possible that in this matter our fathers have been in error for 300 years?" Now, that is precisely real papistic talk. The principle of subjugation under traditional explanations is thereby clearly established in the Ohio Synod. And if, in individual cases before their congregations, they do not so heavily stress the fathers, but rather act as if they draw everything out of Scripture, whereas they have really drawn the main point out of the fathers, that is so much the worse for the poor people, and the danger so much the greater. If they would always and everywhere put forward the fathers, then this person or that one could more easily have his eyes opened, have his doubts about them, and say, "In the end, our stand is really not right."

The second reason why it is contrary to Scripture to base matters of faith on the writings of the fathers and to try to bind consciences to their doctrinal decisions is:

Because it is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

Indeed there is already reason enough to reject this, that in matters of faith one tries to bind consciences to the writings of the fathers and to their doctrinal decisions, in the fact that this conflicts with the authority that belongs to Scripture alone. For thereby Scripture is toppled from the throne and human beings are set upon it. Thereby the church's eternal foundation is pulled away from under its feet; then, you see, it no longer stands upon a rock that cannot be moved, of which the Lord Christ says, "I will build My church upon this rock, and the gates of hell shall not overpower it" (Matt 16:18). For if one substitutes the teaching of the fathers, it is built on sand and will collapse in the first trial that comes along. The first windstorm of false doctrine will leave it in ruins. As soon as one wants to bring human wisdom into the church and thus have Holy Scripture dethroned, then we should for that reason

immediately arise, rend our garments in indignation, and resist it with all our might, so that no particle of human doctrine appear. The honor of God and the salvation of the poor sinful world demands this.

But the following is also a reason to reject that principle: it is contrary to the *doctrine* contained in Scripture. Now, we could indeed have adduced quite a lot of doctrines that are contradicted by the principle of basing matters of faith on the writings of the fathers and binding consciences to their doctrinal decisions. But for our argument it will suffice if we, as is done in our theses, compare with it only the two chief doctrines concerned.

For it is, first of all, **contrary to the nature of the Christian's faith, which the Scriptures [describe] as based on God's Word and therefore divinely certain.**

It is true: It is very easy to believe, when one is used to saying, "So writes a Luther, Hunnius, Gerhard, and others, and they certainly are correct, and because they believe thus, I believe it too." Thousands have this faith. But that is not a true faith, but only an imitated [*gemalter*; lit. painted] faith. For it stands on a false foundation. True faith stands on God's Word alone. It is indeed hard to hold that a teaching is irrefutably true if one has no witness for it from great holy men, yes, when practically everybody cries out to me, "You teach falsely!" and I should say, "Nevertheless, I am right; even if the whole world opposes it, I will still hold to this doctrine."

Luther is the best example of this. When he came forward in the 16th century with the pure teaching, he had to say to himself that this teaching had not been proclaimed for more than 1,000 years. The papists could adduce quotations from a church father *against* each of his teachings, although Luther could, of course, in turn adduce individual quotations from the church fathers *for* his teaching. But in his entire teaching he could not quote a single council, much less the teachers of the Middle Ages, the scholastics, nor the pope, nor the cardinals, nor the theologians of the faculties, nor the teachers in the monasteries. Yes, also all the so-called "enlightened," who in many points did not agree with the pope, e.g., an Erasmus, were also against him. His own fellow confessors were often frightened and alarmed, especially when the uproar became so great that it appeared as if both state and church would be destroyed on account of Luther's teaching. They all thought then, "If Luther had just rather kept silent, or had spoken more gently!" Yes, Luther himself was at times distressed and fearful, when he saw how great the tumult became and that the so-called Lutherans misused his teaching and caused great offense thereby [and that] others, who at first had confessed the pure Gospel with heart and voice, shamefully fell away [and] became opponents, either all the worse papists again or wild Enthusiasts, just as always with the all-reviving spring come also the most poisonous insects. All this

indeed troubled Luther also, yet his teaching was not therefore uncertain for him. Why? Luther had drawn it from Scripture, and therefore he sang not only with [his] mouth, but with all his heart: "Though the world be destroyed and the mountains sink into the midst of the sea; though the sea rage and seethe and the mountains give way to its fury; yet the city of God shall remain perfectly glad with its streams" [Ps. 46:2-4]. Several times he lost all his friends, but he stood firm, also when standing alone. Why? Precisely because his teaching was not based on human beings but had an eternally unwavering foundation, namely the Word of God. And that, yes that alone, is faith.

But, you see, such a faith is not everyone's thing. Let us hear God's Word itself on this:

Rom. 10:17 says: "Now, faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached [comes] through the Word of God." This is an irrefutable proof that a faith that rests on human books is not [real] faith. It is a pretended faith, a faith based on reason, a human faith. True faith is worked in me through God's Word, and it then says: "God has said this, and now let all the devils and the whole world, yes, let even all the saints try to persuade me otherwise—God has spoken it, therefore it is true; He is almighty, therefore nothing is impossible for Him." "Firm as a rock His Word shall stand, unmoved by any daring hand or subtle craft and cunning" [cf. *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 306:3]. Whoever can speak thus shows that the true living faith dwells in his heart.

In Eph. 2:20 we read that all Christians are built "on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone." Woe therefore to him who allows himself to be misled to believe and to teach something because human beings have believed, taught, and defended it. He is in this point no Christian, and this faith is no true faith. For we do not wish to say that such a one cannot be a Christian at all. In other teachings he may stand on God's Word, and there his faith is true. But where the Word is lacking as the foundation of faith, there, as Luther says, there is only a self-produced thought in the heart that says, "I believe."

1 Thess. 2:13: "Therefore also we thank God without ceasing because when you received from us the divine Word which was preached, you received it not as a human word but, as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you that believe." Here Paul testifies to his Thessalonians that they are truly believers because they received the Word, which he preached, not as a human word but as the Word of God. Had they received it as a human word, their faith would have been a pretended faith, with which they would have gone to hell. For when a man must step before God at God's [final] judgment, he must be able to say, "Lord, I have believed and hoped in Your Word; so now You also cannot deny me what Your Word has promised me."

1 Cor. 2:4-5: "And my word and my preaching

were not with the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith should not rest on human wisdom but on the power of God." Therefore only this is faith, when one can say, "My faith is built not on human wisdom, holiness, and prestige, but on the power of God."

For this reason the Formula of Concord, in its appended Catalog of Testimonies from the writings of the fathers, says, among other things, the following: "The true saving faith *is to be founded upon no church teacher, old or new*, but only and alone upon God's Word, which is comprised in the Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles, as *unquestionable* witnesses of divine truth. ... On this account the *Book of Concord* directs everyone to the Holy Scriptures and to the simple Catechism. For he who clings to this simple form with true, simple faith provides best for his soul and conscience, since it is built upon a firm and immovable rock." (Catalog of Testimonies, Conclusion [quoted with minor changes from *Triglot*, p. 1149; emphases Walther's])

It is indeed true that when a man whom I know to be an orthodox teacher says something, I do not view it with suspicion but, on the contrary, I have the favorable presupposition that it is probably true, although I have not yet tested it. That is particularly the case with regard to Luther, the Reformer on whom God has placed His seal. But I am then not yet divinely certain of my ground. For this I must first compare it with God's Word and then, setting Luther's authority aside, rely on Scripture itself, however thanking him that he has led me into Scripture. One should therefore note this well: My faith should not be built on the faith either of an ancient or of a modern church father; otherwise it is a faith in appearance only. But such faith is not a light matter, but very difficult. It is the proper skill of a true Christian that he believes something only because God places it before him in His Word. So then, there can also be Christians who accept many doctrines and not reject them, and yet not truly believe them. For I really believe only as much as I have recognized to be revealed by God in His written Word. A Christian has only so much trust in the doctrines of Scripture as he has acquired for himself in conflict against his own heart through God's grace. For only by struggle and affliction with flesh and blood is every inch of the land of faith gained. And that is also what God wants to teach us particularly in this controversy. One who believes rightly believes not even an apostle Paul himself because he is Paul, but rather because Paul has convinced him that the Holy Spirit speaks through him. In death and distress of conscience I must be able to say to God, "See, dear God, thus you have spoken and I have believed it." Then God will say, "Good! So should you have done."

Luther himself also had great distress, as he shows us in a writing from 1522. (Of course, one should not, for God's sake, misunderstand what we have said

above about Luther's writings before 1523, as if everything he wrote then is altogether wrong. No, one finds there only tiny crumbs of error. For example, before 1523 Luther was still in many things very tolerant toward what was in vogue in the papacy. But later he rejected and condemned it with a truly ardent zeal as false doctrine.)

This is what Luther says:

"I myself daily feel how very hard it is to lay aside scruples that are long standing and captive to human ordinances. Oh, with how much great effort and labor, even on the basis of Holy Scripture, was I barely able to clear my own conscience, that I, one man alone, have dared to rise against the pope [and] regard him as the Antichrist, the bishops as his apostles, and the universities as his brothels! How often did my heart quail, reprove me, and rebuke me with its single strongest argument: You alone are wise! Are all the others supposed to be in error and to have erred for so long a time? What if *you* are mistaken and lead so many people into error, who would all be eternally damned?—Finally Christ, with His—the only sure—Word, strengthened and confirmed me, so that my heart no longer quails but resists these arguments of the papists as a stony shore resists the waves and laughs at their threats and storms." (*The Misuse of the Mass*, 1522; XIX, 1305 [Cf. *LW* 36, 134])

Yes, that is how it is: If one has believed something for a long time with an erring conscience, and someone else comes and wants to take that from us, there will be at first a great conflict in the conscience, until God's Word, which stands higher than the conscience, puts an end to the conflict—and, for true Christians, not until then. For example, not only were the Jews accustomed from childhood on to consider the ceremonial laws, which God Himself had given them in the Old Testament, equal to the moral laws in binding force—they held to this even after Christ had fulfilled and thereby put an end to all types. When Paul then comes and shows them that those commands no longer have any binding force, they are troubled and worried whether they would do the right thing by following the apostle. Therefore also the apostle deals so carefully with them. Also some in our controversy now experience the same. One has perhaps formerly heard and believed nothing more about the election of grace than that God has chosen those of whom He has foreseen that they would be converted and would remain faithful until death. And now, suddenly, he hears that this is not right, that is, the election is an election of grace alone, while on the other side the opponents cry, "That is Calvinistic!" Then it happens to true Christians that they become very disturbed and that a voice in them says, "What is this? Are our teachers really supposed to have fallen away and [do they] perhaps, after all, want to make us Calvinists?" Then it is time, dear brothers, to take your Bible in hand and diligently test our doctrine thereby. You see, you should not believe

even a word from us, your teachers, until you know that also Holy Scripture teaches it. But if you have found our doctrine in the Bible, then you will confidently and cheerfully say yes and amen to it and also remain with it, however horribly others—whether out of malice or in blindness—speak ill of this doctrine as Calvinism. If, in this mysterious doctrine, you stand on God's Word, then the craftiest objections of reason will make no impression on you. How did Luther fare? Even when he had a Bible passage and had to say, "You see, there it stands," he still could not always grasp it immediately. The thought often came also to him, "Perhaps you are in error after all," until he finally through God's Word was so enlightened that he then was divinely certain: "Thus it must be and not otherwise." Every Christian must go through such a conflict, and he will become divinely certain only when he remains standing solely on the Word.

The strongest argument of the papists against Luther was: "You alone are wise. Look at the fathers; they are all against you. It is devilish arrogance that you alone want to be right, over against them." With such thoughts, at the beginning, the devil greatly plagued Luther.

For this reason, Luther wrote also against the Zwinglians:

"Your (the Zwinglians') assertion (namely that the words of the Lord's Supper, 'This is My body,' must mean, 'This represents My body') has a certain luster, and it also has a great following among all who are considered learned in all of Germany, for reasons that I know. *But they lack one thing: They do not yet know how hard it is to stand before God without God's Word.* Impertinence and wickedness cannot behave any other way than they behave." (*Thoughts on the Colloquy [of Marburg]*, 1529; XVII, 2355)

Just so it is now too. The teaching of our opponents has a grand appearance; therefore it also has a large following. For all the fashionable believers in Germany, although they themselves have another, entirely different teaching than our opponents, nevertheless cry to them, "You are right! That is, right in this, that it is more reasonable." From this also we know where the general approval comes from.

These, however, are the stern words of Luther: "They do not know how hard it is to stand before God without God's Word." So long as one does not seriously think of this: "I must defend this doctrine at the final judgment of the whole world on the Last Day," so long will he also not earnestly consider whether he stands with it on the right foundation. But you can die at any moment. How [now]? [What] if your conscience then cries out to you, "Are you also now ready to defend before God what you have said yes to?" Therefore take good care how you stand. Can you say, "Lord, Your Word has taught me this"? Or is this what you say, "There was a great controversy, so I joined those who teach like a Hunnius, Polycarp Leyser, Gerhard, Quen-

stedt, and other pious men, and I think it will probably be right"? If this is the case, then you are lost at the last hour. Then the devil will say, "So are these your gods? Look, then you are lost now; you come with me." One will stand against the evil foe only if he says, "What are all human beings to me? This is what Scripture says, and so I believe it."

Luther therefore writes:

"If I am to be deceived, I would rather be deceived by God (if it were possible) than by human beings. For if God deceives me, He will take the responsibility and make amends to me, but human beings cannot make amends to me if they have deceived me and led me into hell. Such *defiant confidence* the Enthusiasts cannot have, for they cannot say, 'I will rather stand on the text that Zwingli and Oecolampadius discordantly express than on the one that Christ Himself concordantly proclaims.' Accordingly you can gladly say to Christ *both at your death and [at the] Last Judgment*: 'My dear Lord Jesus Christ, a controversy has arisen over Your words in the Supper. Some want them to be understood differently than they read. But since they also teach nothing certain, but only confuse and lead to uncertainty, and since they are in no way willing or able to *prove* their text, I have remained on *Your* text as the words read. *If something is obscure in it, You wanted to have it thus obscure*: for You have given no other explanation of it nor commanded any to be given. Behold, no Enthusiast will be allowed to speak thus with Christ, as I know for sure; for they are uncertain and at odds regarding this text." (*Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, 1528; XX, 1300 f. [cf. *LW* 37, 305 <•>])

Luther called the teaching of the Reformed on the Lord's Supper a discordant text. For Zwingli said, "This represents My body," and Oecolampadius, his brother in the faith, [said,] "This is the sign of My body." Luther, on the contrary, says, "I have only *one* text, which God's Word gives: 'This is My body.' You cannot then say to God, 'I will rather hold to the discordant text, for it is not in the Bible.'"

And when Luther says, "If something is obscure in it, You wanted to have it thus obscure," we should note this well, especially now in the doctrine of the election of grace. There too, you see, there is something obscure. God clearly says that He wants all people to be saved, and then we hear again in the doctrine of election: "Whereas millions are lost because of their unbelief, the others are saved without their cooperation, through faith, which God alone, after all, works in them." We simply cannot make sense out of this with our reason. What then should we do? We should just let both stand [and] believe both. Both, you see, are taught in Scripture. The grace of God extends over all people; that is crystal clear and evident in Scripture and is our greatest comfort day and night, in good and bad days, and in the hour of death. We also teach this in all seriousness. And when our opponents deny that we have

this doctrine, they are dishonorable slanderers. Our alleged sin consists only in this, that we also believe what is as well taught in Scripture about election. What is obscure in it, only God will reveal in the light of eternal life. We have only a harmonious text on election. Our opponents, on the contrary, have a discordant one. For the chief passages on election—Romans 8; Ephesians 1; John 15; and Acts 13—are explained by them in entirely different ways. One teaches one thing and another something else.

We see in Heb. 11:1 how Holy Scripture defines faith: "Now faith is a confident certainty of what one hopes for and not doubting what one does not see." Here the apostle points out what belongs to the essence of faith, namely a solid and confident certainty (*hypostasis*, in the Greek, i.e., a solid foundation on which one can rest secure). Therefore one who wavers to and fro in a doctrine, or indeed wants to hold fast to a doctrine but bases it on human authority, has no faith.

In Rom. 4:20-22 the apostle describes the father of all believers, Abraham, thus: "For he did not doubt the promise of God through unbelief, but grew strong in faith and gave glory to God and knew most certainly that what God promises, He is also able to do. Therefore it was also reckoned to him for righteousness." Therefore that is true faith, when one knows something most certainly. But this is possible only when our faith is founded on God's Word and promise, as Abraham's faith [was]. Even the most simple Christian must not depend on his pastor in matters of faith. No Christian is free to say, "If my pastor misleads me, he must answer for it." The latter is indeed true, but one who wants to be saved must live by his own faith. Therefore, dear Christians, consider well that as dear as your salvation is to you, so necessary is it for you that you yourselves study God's Word, so that you become of age and stand firm as pillars, although you need not all have the gift to prove your teaching to others and to refute error. For not only do many laypeople not have this gift, but even some preachers have it only to a small degree. But every individual Christian should come to the point at which he can say, "I do not believe the preacher because he says it, but because I have found this doctrine in God's Word." And since a Christian should above all things seek the kingdom of God, let no one say that he has no time to sit [and read] the Bible [*Buchern*]. You must take this time for yourselves, because you must come to the point at which you become so certain of your faith on the basis of God's Word that you can say, "Even if all our pastors fell away from this doctrine, we will remain with it."

Luther also describes faith thus: "Faith is a living, considered confidence in God's grace, so certain that one would die for it a thousand times." (Introduction to Paul's Letter to the Romans; XIV, 115 [cf. *LW* 35, 370])

For this reason, everyone should thoroughly examine himself, whether he stands in his doctrine and faith in such a way that he would die a thousand times

for it. The dear martyrs had such a faith. If it were only a conjecture, they would certainly not have let themselves be thrown to the wild beasts and torn to pieces by them. But they were certain: "If I die now, I come to God in heaven and see His glory." Indeed, today there is no persecution, but each one should see whether, if a persecution should break out now, his faith would pass this test.

Furthermore, Luther writes:

"The Holy Spirit is no skeptic." ([Skeptics] were a philosophical sect among the heathen; their principle was to doubt all things.) "He has not written an uncertain delusion in our hearts but a *strong, great certainty*, which does not let us waver and (God willing) *will* not let us waver, but (praise God!) makes us as certain as we are certain that we are physically alive now or that two plus three equals five." (*Bondage of the Will*; XIII, 2066 [Cf. *LW* 33, 24])

If anyone wanted to prove to me that I am not alive at all [and] that I am only imagining it, could he perhaps confuse me? Certainly not! You see, I feel that I am alive. Likewise no one could make a 10-year-old schoolboy believe that two plus three equals six. So should it be also with our faith. I should be just as certain that my teaching is correct as I am certain that I am alive.

Therefore Quenstedt writes:

"Divine revelation is the first and last principle of sacred theology; to advance beyond it is not allowed among Christians in a theological discussion. For all doubt regarding religion is laid to rest in the mind of a truly Christian person, and his faith finally so overcomes, rests, and is founded in it [divine revelation], that it frees the mind of an assenting person from all fear and all suspicion of deception and makes it confident." (*Theologia didactico-polemica*, Part 1, ch. 3, sec. 2, fol. 25)

When we have come up to Scripture in a teaching, then we should say, "Now the matter is settled, and no one may come to me any longer with a 'but' or 'nevertheless.' I have finished." Scripture is the Alpha and the Omega of all saving truth. There is no appeal from Scripture to a higher court. Therefore, if someone's doubts are not removed by Scripture, he is an infidel. But as soon as he goes into Scripture, his doubts are removed if he is a Christian. Only through the Word are the very last splinters of doubt drawn out. And only then will we also, as honest folk, defend a doctrine to the end, when we have divine assurance, that is, truly believe it.

It is very comforting that it is said of Abraham that he "*grew strong*," not that he was strong in faith from the beginning. So he too first had to fight against doubt. Therefore if we too are not immediately totally certain of a doctrine, let us simply hold fast to the Word of Scripture. Then everyone will surely succeed in becoming sure of his ground. But we should also let ourselves be moved to hold fast to the Word by the warning

of God that He gave in Isaiah: "If they will not say that, then it will not dawn on them." That is, they cannot be saved but move along in the night of doubt and finally plunge into damnation.

Any doctrine not drawn from God's Word necessarily engenders doubt. Only God's Word gives certainty. Whatever comes from reason can also be challenged by reason. There is therefore no certainty in human doctrines, but doubt. In fact, one of our opponents said openly, "I do not know whether I am elect in the strict sense." "Fear and hope," another writes, "are the two millstones between which a Christian finds himself." Therefore let us by all means condemn all human doctrine, for it leads to doubt. A Danish theologian once explained it in a booklet thus: "A person first becomes certain from the Bible, for the Holy Spirit is in Scripture and takes him prisoner, compels him to be bound to the text. Then the Holy Spirit drives him to confess this doctrine—first through the command in Scripture, 'You should confess,' and then through inner trials. If, e.g., a Luther sees terror, hatred, opposition, and struggle before him and he wants to withdraw, the Holy Spirit says, 'Go forward!' For the temptation and distress he has when he does not want to go on are much stronger than all fear and terror from without. God's Word stands behind him like a giant and drives him forward, so that he also does not care what would come of the confession. Indeed, even Luther could not know what kind of church he would organize or whether he would not be burned very soon."

Therefore, as far as God's Word goes, that far true faith has [its] place. Where that [God's Word] stops, there is no faith but a delusion that can build itself up even to fanaticism. Therefore no papist has ever really believed that justification is based also on our works or that the pope is the head of the Christian church, for there is nothing in Scripture about it. The fathers of the 17th century have written thousands of pages about *intuitu fidei*. But none actually believed it, because *intuitu fidei* is not in Scripture. They perhaps thought they believed it, but it was only a delusion, an illusion. And those who have fought so bitterly against us in this doctrine could not have any faith in it, but it is pure fanaticism. Therefore Luther writes: "The essence and nature of faith is that it depends and relies on God's Word. Where there is no Word of God, there no faith may or should be." (On the Day of the Holy Three Kings, Erlangen Ed. X, 380)

In our thesis, one should also note the word "**divinely certain.**" For the Turks are also so sure of their faith that they would be willing to be killed for it or go into a pesthouse and carry out the bodies on their shoulders. For the faith of the Turks is: What God wills, will surely be done, regardless of what a person may do.

Therefore it is also certainly possible that our opponents are also sure of their ground, but they cannot be *divinely* certain of it, for one becomes so only through the Word.

In this connection a member of the conference told the following from his earlier experiences: "I too have experienced in many ways how dreadful it is to rely on the fathers. I came to the university as an unbeliever. But I had brought along this much from my father's house, that the Bible is God's Word. Then I came at last among believers, was awakened, and now everything was immediately certain to me. But I could not believe that Christ's body and blood are in the Lord's Supper. Then I thought, 'If you only knew how the ancient early Christians understood these words, "This is My body," then you would also believe it.' For I thought, 'Yes, this Zwingli also has significant arguments for his view.' I thought, 'Oh, if you only had a book from the time of the apostles!' Then, through a Jew, I found the New Testament in five translations and bound with it at the end the writings of the students of the apostles.

I bought it for six groschen. Then I found at last a passage that said, in simple translation, 'The Eucharist (*Danksagung*) is the flesh and blood of Christ, and one who denies this should be avoided like a wild beast.' Now, I had no idea at all what the word *Eucharist* means, but I found in Gerhard that the early church had called Holy Communion 'Eucharist' [Thanksgiving] as we call it Communion. Now my heart was full of joy that the ancient Ignatius, a student of Paul, gave me such a witness, and I believed that I was now completely sure of my ground and now also regarded it as right that one should stand up in earnest against Zwingli. But that did not last very long before doubts came to me yet again, namely whether the book was not spurious; I also heard at the university: 'The matter in the case of Ignatius's letters is not entirely clean!' Then I went into Luther. There I finally became certain, not because Luther said it, but because he proved it to me so clearly from God's Word that every doubt had to become silent. Then I became divinely certain."

And finally, it is unscriptural to base matters of faith on the writings of the fathers and to try to bind consciences to their doctrinal decisions also because it is **"contrary to the warnings contained in Scripture against trust in human beings in matters of faith, and against all human doctrines, as well as contrary to the admonitions of Scripture to test all things."**

So the first point is: **"It is contrary to the warnings contained in Scripture against trust in human beings in matters of faith."**

We read in Ps. 62:9: "But human beings, you see, are really nothing; great people also fail." It is no great feat not to rely on so-called small people, but it is hard to disregard human beings when so-called "great people," eminent above all others in regard to knowledge, enlightenment, and saintliness, advocate a particular teaching. We then follow them only too easily and quickly. But a Christian never attains certainty that the teaching is true in this way. Human authority gives his conscience no reassurance, even when such highly

gifted men teach this or that doctrine. A true Christian must rather know that God Himself says, "Great people also fail." Therefore it is highly unchristian to seek reassurance in the fact that a great, famous man teaches this or that, even though he may have rendered ever so extraordinary services to the church. For no human being is immune to error. Only the prophets and apostles had the immunity that they could not err when, in their calling, they taught, whether orally or in writing. Now, if they had wanted to write down some error, God would doubtless either have struck them down with thunderbolts or at least kept them from it, as [He did] Balaam when he wanted to curse the people of God. God not only enlightened the holy writers but also sanctified them, so that they not only *could* not err but also did not *want* to err and corrupt the Word of God. Therefore Paul writes, 2 Cor. 4:2: "We do not use guile nor corrupt the Word of God, but with revelation of the truth," etc. The word of the holy writers therefore remains the only norm of all teachings until the Last Day. This is true of no other human writer. Therefore we should also note the word of the prophet Jeremiah as a parallel: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm" (Jer. 17:5). One should tremble at this word also in this our controversy. One who follows the fathers as his authority in a teaching regards a poor man, who is nothing but frail flesh, as his arm, his strength, [and] thus makes him his god. Furthermore, they are not even always "great people" to whom one attaches oneself. Often the most miserable wretches dazzle the poor folk, and one accepts their teaching as if it had been spoken from heaven, as the most pure Gospel. Oh, how really perverted man is! Even in matters of faith he often follows the most miserable fellows.

Further, we read in John 2:23-25: "Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many believed in His name, for they saw the miracles that He did. But Jesus did not trust Himself to them, because He knew them all and did not need that someone testify about man; for he well knew what was in man." Now, here it is indeed not stated directly that one should also not trust in any believer. But we are told that many believed in the Lord Jesus, but Christ still did not trust them, "because" it says, "He knew them all." And with this the Lord says indirectly that in matters of faith one should not depend even on believers. One should, indeed, in love think the best of everyone who professes loyalty to the Word but yet not trust him without question in matters of faith. And why not? He can err. Nothing in the world should move us to follow a human being in doctrine for his own sake, be he ever so certainly a believer.

For this reason Luther writes [on John 2:23-24]:

"Now this is indeed a necessary precept, that we should always expect the best of people, especially of believers, and yet know that they can err and go astray. If this precept had been observed more strictly in Chris-

tendom, we would have had neither the pope nor all his filth and stench of antichristian doctrine by which the Christian church was later led astray. For in the papacy one soon concluded and said, 'Oh, he is a holy man; therefore all he says is true.' Take, by way of examples of this, Saints Ambrose, Gregory, Augustine, and Jerome, and later, farther on down the line, Bernard, Benedict, Dominic, and Francis—until one has finally gathered all that absolutely everyone who was ever regarded as a holy man said and taught. I should let myself be warned here against that and say: 'I will gladly believe that the above-mentioned people—such as Saints Gregory, Ambrose, and Augustine—were holy people; *but I do not trust them*. For even though they are holy, you must not say therefore that they could not go astray and err and that one should depend and rely on all that the fathers said and accept as true and believe what they allegedly taught. *On the contrary, take the touchstone and standard, namely the divine Word, in hand* and test, try, and judge according to it all that the fathers have written, preached, and said, as well as the precepts, human ordinances, and other things that they have made. For if one does not do that, one is miserably misled and deceived. And because this grinding mill was not applied to the pope in times past, he had an easy time of it and swamped the church with errors as with a deluge and succeeded to the point that all that was said and taught, yes, even the nocturnal dreams of monks and clerics, were accepted and believed as holy and precious. ... Now, one should be diligently on guard against this. For there is no immaculate and sinless saint in this life. Flesh and blood still cling to him, and [he has] at his side the devil, who can indeed confuse him, so that he stumbles and falls." (*Sermons on the Gospel of John*, 1537; VII, 1785 ff. [cf. LW 22, 254])

Because the greatest hero of faith can err, a person should—while indeed not hearing him with suspicion, and in fact expecting the best from him—not forget that he is capable of error. We are therefore not despising our dear old theological fathers (*Lehn/ater*) when we say: "They were great men, but they have erred." Only concerning the apostles and prophets dare we not say this. Indeed also they were not gods, but Christ expressly says of them: "He that hears you hears Me." Therefore when we follow them without question, we are not putting our faith in human beings but in God Himself.

In our thesis it also says: "**and against all human doctrines**" (we are warned in Scripture).

Here belongs Matt. 5:21-22: "You have heard that it was said to those of old: 'You shall not kill, and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you: 'Whoever is angry with his brother is liable to judgment; whoever says "Raca" to his brother is liable to the council; but whoever says "You fool" is liable to the fire of hell.' "

Most noteworthy! When the Lord for the first time

went public with a long sermon, what did He teach? Against what did He first speak? Against the *traditions of the elders*, on which also at that time the Jews based their faith. For when Christ says: "You have heard that it was said to *those of old*," etc., He thereby did not mean the Ten Commandments contained in the Old Testament. For the Lord does not say: "You have *read*," so that one would have to refer it to the writings of Moses; rather: "You have *heard*." Christ is therefore speaking of the so-called oral traditions of the elders. Therefore when Christ says: "You shall not kill," He is thereby not quoting the words of Moses as such, even though they sound exactly the same. Christ quotes these in such a stark fashion in order to show that the elders had misunderstood and interpreted them only in their literal (*grobem*) meaning. For they said: "If you do not kill a person with your [own] hand, you have kept the Fifth Commandment. If you do not live in shame with a strange woman, you have kept the Sixth Commandment. If you do not actually swear falsely, that is, swear to a lie, you have kept the Eighth Commandment; nothing more is forbidden in it." In short, the Lord is dealing with the distortions made by tradition regarding the Ten Commandments. [He does so] in order to remove them from the doctrine of the Law.

Chemnitz calls attention to this when he writes:

"This entire passage: 'You have heard that it was said to those of old,' etc., is obscured, yes, dreadfully distorted by those who have held that Christ is opposing this explanation of His to the Mosaic law itself.... But the words of which Christ says that they were 'said to those of old' are not to be seen as being taken from Moses; rather they are those which the Scripture scholars used in speaking to the people or to their hearers regarding their traditions concerning the Law. Therefore He says: 'You have *heard*.' The Pharisees, you see, in promoting righteousness by works, presented the keeping of the Law as not only possible but as so easy that by following their traditions they could do much more (Luke 18:11-12); thus they distorted the knowledge of sin from the Law in various ways. Christ abolishes these distortions and again throws light on the true interpretation of the Law." (*Harmony of the Gospels*, on this passage)

The papists are those who say that Christ is here speaking of the law of Moses and that when He then continues: "But I say to you," etc., He is thereby giving a more severe law than [that of] Moses. [They say] that in the Old Testament, God was satisfied if one did not crassly violate the Ten Commandments, but that in the New Testament a more severe law has been set up—so severe that for an ordinary person it is not possible to observe it. Basically, [they say,] those difficult demands are only suggestions, which need to be observed only by a person who wants to be perfect. For to love one's enemies, to live in complete chastity, etc., can be done only by a monk or one who has otherwise

received special grace, one who does more than the Ten Commandments demand of him.

Unfortunately, also in our church the Law has not always been interpreted in all its severity, but especially in one point has been much weakened. When, for example, the principle has been set up: "Love begins with oneself," that finally turns the whole Law around. No, love begins with the *neighbor*. Our dear Luther, on the other hand, followed in the footsteps of his Savior. When [Luther] stepped up, he preached not only the Gospel in [its] purity but also the Law in its true spiritual meaning. It is therefore surprising that in our Lutheran church such a lax view in regard to the Second Table of the Law could appear, yes, even become a tradition.

That the Savior in the verse under discussion means human traditions can be seen also by comparison with other sayings of His. When He wants to speak of the Old Testament, He says: "How do you *read*?" "How is it *written* in the Law?" But here He says: "You have *heard*."

Furthermore we read in Matt. 15:9: "In vain they serve Me while teaching doctrines that are nothing but human commands." A great word! So if something is a human command and I do it in order to please God, it is entirely in vain. If I let my blood run, as the priests of Baal cut themselves with knives and thought their Baal would then hear them more readily, yes, if I would fast to death, whip myself to death, in order thereby to please God, it is all lost, for God did not command it to me. Certain monks may, in order to gain merit for themselves, get up in the middle of the night, throw themselves down on their knees in a cold room, and pray for an hour. The people think, "If they don't get to heaven, who will?" But it is all lost. Their praying, their fasting, their vigils, their hard bed—all of it counts for nothing before God. Why? Because He has not commanded it. For God is God, and He alone wants to tell us what we are to do so that it will please Him.

The example of King Saul also belongs here. He had the command from God to ban (that is, to kill and bury) all the animals of the enemy. But Saul thought, "Oh, this herd of sleek, fat cattle would make a rich offering; we will sacrifice a hundred of them, and all the world will marvel at how much we offer our Jehovah." But there comes the prophet Samuel and says: "What is that lowing of cattle? You have rejected the Word of God; therefore I will also reject you. For obedience is better than sacrifice." A proverb among us Germans therefore says: "It is easier to earn heaven than hell."

Finally our thesis says: "**as well as contrary to the admonitions of Scripture to test all things.**" We have often dealt with this in detail, also in [our] opening remarks. Let us therefore hear only the [Bible] passages which contain such admonitions.

In 1 Thess. 5:20-21 it says, "Do not despise prophecy; but test everything and keep what is good." When the Holy Spirit at first says: "Do not despise people in the church when they teach," someone could

easily think that one should also have respect for pious teachers when they teach something erroneous. Therefore He immediately adds: "But test everything and keep what is good."

Further, we read in John 4:39-42: "But many Samaritans from the same city believed in Him, because of what the woman said when she testified, 'He told me everything I have done.' Now when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to remain with them; and He remained there two days. And many more believed because of His Word. And they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said; we ourselves have heard and recognized that this is truly the Christ, the Savior of the world.'"

Remarkable! First it says, "They believed because of what the woman said," and it is evident that the evangelist at first wants to emphasize this. You see, Christ came to the well of the Samaritan city Sychar as a complete stranger. When a woman came from the city, He had a conversation with her about the coming of the Messiah. The Lord told her everything she had done, which no one outside of Samaria could know, and He affirmed to her that He is the Promised One. Then she not only believed, but she immediately hurried into the city and related everything she had just experienced. Many of the inhabitants also immediately drew the conclusion: "That must be the Messiah." But when they had heard Jesus Himself, they said, "Now we believe, not because of what you said; we ourselves have heard and recognized that this is truly the Christ, the Savior of the world." So they had indeed with a human faith, through the woman's report; but when through Christ's own Word they came to a divine (*gottlichen*) faith, they completely dismissed the woman's report.

Why, do you think, are we told this? So that we learn not finally to build our faith on the sayings of any human being. Indeed we should be very thankful for the sayings and writings of pious men when they lead us into Scripture. But then we should not believe for their sake, but because we have found it in Scripture. Also among us the watchword should prevail: "We no longer believe because of Luther, because of Gerhard, because of Quenstedt, Hunnius, Heshusius, Calov, Dannhauer, and others, but because we have read it in Scripture."

In 1 Cor. 10:15 it says, "I speak as to the wise; you judge what I say." That's the climax! Paul was, as the Corinthians well knew, a directly enlightened servant of God. And yet he says to them, "You judge what I say." Thus he subjects even what *he* says to the judgment of the Corinthian Christians and wants them to agree with him in clear conviction. If an apostle does this, what are other teachers that they dare to demand blind agreement with everything they say?

In Acts 17:11 we are told about the Bereans: "They were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the Word willingly and searched daily in

Scripture [to see] if this were so." That we are here warned not to accept anything without testing it, is evident from the foregoing. At the same time we here have proof that we should not test anything by human writings. Why does the Holy Spirit give the Bereans this extraordinary praise that they, as the Greek says, were more noble than those at Thessalonica? As proof for this He says: "They searched daily in Scripture [to see] if this were so." Why did the apostle not say to them, "You must without question believe what I have preached to you today, for Christ Himself has appeared to me; otherwise you are fighting against God"? Because the Bereans could not yet know with divine faith whether the apostle was inspired. Therefore they first tested him and first *had* to test him. By what criteria? Only by the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and not by any human writings.

Luther writes:

"Is there any need to cite more passages? All the warnings St. Paul gives in Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 10:14; Gal. 3:4-5; Col. 2:8 and elsewhere, likewise all the sayings of the prophets where they teach [us] to avoid human doctrines—they do nothing else than *take from the teachers* the right and power to judge all doctrine, and with earnest command lay it *upon the hearers* at the risk of losing their soul. Thus [the hearers] not only have the *right and power* to judge everything that is preached, but are *duty-bound* to judge, *at the risk of the divine Majesty's disfavor.*" (*That a Christian Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Doctrine*, 1523; X, 1799 f.)

That truly makes a clean sweep! The papists say: "Priests alone have the right to test everything; laypeople are only to accept obediently what the priests lay before them." "The other way around!" says Luther; "God has taken this right from the priests and given it to the laypeople."

A preacher, of course, always thinks and says: "I have preached correctly." But now it is incumbent on the hearers to test whether this is so. Perhaps already on Monday a member of the congregation comes and says: "Pastor, what you preached on that passage yesterday doesn't seem right to me; therefore I cannot accept it." Now if he is a true pastor and sees that, out of human weakness, he really has said something erroneous, he will not become angry over the alleged presumption of a layperson but will say: "Good, you are right; I will retract it next Sunday." But if the hearer is in error, a true pastor will in friendly fashion not only prove (*nachweiseri*) this to him but will also praise him for not wanting to accept anything untested (*ungepruft*).

Luther writes further:

"To know and judge doctrine is incumbent on all Christians, each and every one, indeed in such a way that he is accursed who encroaches on such a right by even a hair's breadth.... Just as everyone at his [own] peril believes correctly or falsely, so everyone also has

to be concerned *that* he believe correctly. Also human common sense and the *necessity of salvation* show that judgment on doctrine must necessarily be with the hearer. Otherwise it has been written in vain: "Test everything and keep what is good." (*Answer to King Henry VIII of England*, 1522; XIX, 424, 426)

Luther here shows that it is even against reason, against human common sense, to give [the right of] judgment over sermons to teachers and not to listeners. For my preacher leads me either to heaven or to hell. And I am supposed to have no choice but blindly let him lead me to hell? God forbid! My salvation demands that I have the freedom to test my pastor's doctrine. That is a holy Christian obligation.

Think of this, too. In Ps. 62:9 in the original text it says with special emphasis, "Great men are a lie." So if they bring something they have not taken from Scripture, but have thought up themselves, one is to remember that the psalm says: "There is falsehood in what they have in themselves." Luther therefore writes the following marginal note at this verse: "Whoever relies on human beings, fails. No matter how big they are, there is nothing to them, and it must fail." What a great man the high priest Aaron was, and how greatly he deviated—so that with the golden calf he misled the Jews to shameful idolatry! Therefore one must test everything human beings teach, even the least [important], and must keep only what is good, that is, what has been taken from Scripture.

Two things should be found in every genuine Lutheran. First, in regard to God's Word he practices absolutely no criticism. For he knows that here God alone is speaking, and [the Christian] dare not ask: "Is it true, right, useful?" There he must accept everything without question. That was also Luther's stance over against the Enthusiasts. When they asked: "How is it possible that Christ's body and blood are [present] in the Lord's Supper? What is the necessity and use of it?" Luther answered them: "If God would command me to pick up a bit of straw and would bind my salvation to it, I should do it without question and not ask: 'Why that?'"

Therefore Luther writes:

"If the devil brings someone to the point where he says in the Creed: 'Is it right? Is it also good?' then God have mercy on him: he's already lost." (Erlangen Edition, second edition, vol. 15, p. 358)

This is especially important in our time. Many who pass for Lutherans lack the foremost characteristic of a true Lutheran. Many so-called Lutherans declare that they find errors in Holy Scripture. Although such men may teach rightly in individual doctrines, yet because they venture to be critics of Holy Scripture, they are no Lutherans. For the Lutheran Church recognizes the Bible to be the true, pure fountain of Israel.

The second mark of a true Lutheran is that he always subjects human writing to critical appraisal. He does not accept writings dealing with spiritual matters simply because this or that distinguished person has

written them. He who subjects God's Word to critical appraisal is a rationalist and a heathen; but he who does *not* subject human writings to critical appraisal is a papist. People are naturally inclined to look to [other] people. In order to cure us in this matter and to satisfy our inclination in the right way. God has—says Luther—let His Son Himself become man.

Luther writes:

"Therefore I do not speak much about it, except to remain simply with the words and to let myself catch them. We have it sufficiently in the Creed, where we say: 'I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.' Now one is to believe in no one except God alone. Therefore He also wished to become man, so that the heart would not have allegiance to any angel or [any] person, but only to Him." (Ibid., p. 357)

II

Our second thesis reads:

It is therefore so objectionable to try to base matters of faith on the writings of the fathers and bind consciences to their doctrinal decisions, because it is a relapse into the antichristian papacy.

The abomination of the papacy and of the papists consists above all things in that they assert another source of spiritual knowledge in addition to the Holy Scriptures, and in fact something which has no limits, namely the so-called "traditions." These are teachings which are not found in the Bible but of which they nevertheless maintain that Christ taught them, the Holy Spirit delivered them to the apostles, and the apostles preached them, although they did not write them down; but their disciples, with whom they shared them, delivered them in turn orally to later teachers, and so they were handed down from hand to hand, from mouth to mouth, and thus, in particular through the writings of the church fathers, were transmitted down to our times.

For this reason the pope is able boldly to come forward with utterly new articles of faith, as for example in our times with the dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary [proclaimed by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1854], and later on with the dogma of the infallibility of the pope [promulgated by Vatican Council I on July 18, 1870], by virtue of which he is the highest judge in matters of faith, no one dares contradict him, and he alone can validly decide every controversy in matters of faith and life. Of these and similar dogmas the pope says that they are not new teachings, but old ones that have only now really come to light, that they have been taken from tradition.

Luther therefore rightly calls these traditions the pope's magic bag (*Gaukelsack*). A magic bag, as is well known, is a sack with which a sleight-of-hand artist or magician frequently comes on the stage. The magician asks, "What shall I bring out of my sack for you?" Quickly someone in the audience says, "A rabbit!" So the magician reaches into the sack, and behold! a live rabbit can be seen. The sleight-of-hand artist continues, "What else do you want from the sack?" "A snake" is

the answer. And behold! he brings that out too. Of course, he himself first put it all in, and his helpers "planted" in the audience give the answers. The pope's traditions are such a magic bag. From them he can bring out whatever is demanded, or rather whatever he himself wants to have.

Let us now hear what the Council of Trent, which was ready to ratify the errors of the papacy, resolved about these traditions in its Fourth Session, on April 18, 1546, shortly after Luther's death:

"[The council] also clearly perceives that these truths and rules are contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions, which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand. Following, then, the examples of the orthodox Fathers, it receives and venerates with a feeling of piety and reverence all the books both of the Old and New Testaments, since one God is the author of both; also the traditions, whether they relate to faith or to morals, as having been dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Ghost, and presented in the Catholic Church in unbroken succession." (Quoted from *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* [by Rev. H. J. Schroeder, P- 17])⁵

By the expression "unwritten traditions" they do not want to say that these have not been written at all, but only that they were not written by the apostles and cannot be found in holy Scripture. Now since the papists call the traditions the unwritten Word of God, a papist can, for appearances' sake, concede that everything must be judged only according to God's Word—and yet this admission is only fraud. Tradition, therefore, is above all the most dreadful instrument of the Antichrist; through it he seeks to bolster all his abominations and to overthrow the Gospel.

Of course, we have no intention of charging that our opponents [in the predestination controversy] subscribe to this decree of the Council of Trent; together with us, they hate and condemn this shameful teaching. But unfortunately they have started on a path which leads to that popish teaching. For it is one and the same, whether I am compelled to believe what Augustine, Jerome, and other church fathers have taught, or what Hunnius, Pfeiffer, Hollaz-Baier, and other theologians have taught. For these were fallible men just as they were. Only the difference is, certainly, that the fathers of the Lutheran church have written almost throughout pure-as-gold truth, while in the writings of the ancient church fathers one finds a whole mass of errors, although they were not on this account heretics. Their errors were only *naevi*, blemishes.

But woe to him who declares that just these blemishes are the most precious in [the writings of] the old

fathers! What if someone gave me a "blank book," but put a large ink spot into it and then said to me: "That is the most beautiful thing in the book"? That is what our opponents in the doctrine of election do. They ignore many correct and beautiful things in the writings of the dogmatians, but the following teaching shines for them like a star in the sky of the theologian: "God has seen that this one and that one will act (*sich verhalten*) so and so; therefore He has chosen him ahead of others, while He has rejected the others because of their evil actions." The latter we concede, but we cannot concede the former, for the sake of our salvation.

A member of the Conference [most likely Walther himself] relates [this story]:

"When I, together with my sainted brother, was at the university, we both came to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Now at that time there were young men studying with us who were of such strictly moral and attractive character that we thought, 'If only they would get to know the Gospel, they too would certainly soon follow us.' But what happened? Just these attractive young men became our bitterest enemies, just because of the Gospel. They made fun of us because we could still believe the old, long-discarded doctrine of salvation through the wounds and blood of Christ; they considered us fools. Then we often asked ourselves, 'How is it possible that we have recognized the blessed Gospel and not they?' We had to admit, 'The only reason for our conversion is nothing else than God's unfathomable mercy.'"

This assumption, however, is the very thing that now offends our opponents. They ask their reason for advice, and it tells them, "No, you have to look for the difference in people's better behavior (*Verhalten*)."

But that is contrary to all of Scripture. Whatever reasons God may have had for choosing me and you, He did not have the reason that we have behaved better than other people. There can be no doubt about this, even if a thousand old or newer theologians taught otherwise.

By the way, we do not say of our opponents that they operate in papistic fashion, but in this point, that they want to construct the doctrine of election according to the dogmatians without, yes against, Scripture, they are acting papistically. They make fun of us because, considering our position toward the dogmatians, we nevertheless recommend the latter's books. For we indeed, as always, recommend to our hearers the *Weimarsche Bibelwerk*,⁶ for instance, as a golden book, as a German annotated Bible that is without peer. But also in this case we say: "Test it; for also in it, as in all human writings, there are some *naevi*, some faults (*Flecken*)."

The Council of Trent further determined that no one can *interpret* the Bible correctly except the church,

⁵ St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1941, fourth printing 1960.

⁶ German annotated Bible, first published in 1640. A new edition was prefaced by Walther.

by which they mean the fathers and councils, yes, basically just the pope. There you see clearly that the pope is the Antichrist. More than anything else, he fears the written Word of God, for it contradicts all his errors. But now, since (in order not to betray himself) he cannot simply reject and curse the written Word, he helps himself by saying that he alone can interpret it. Thus he first turns human word into God's Word, and then he discovers a way whereby he can lay aside the true Word of God.

For thus it says in the resolutions of the Council of Trent:

"Furthermore, to check unbridled spirits, it decrees that no one relying on his own judgment shall, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers...." [Quoted from Schroeder, pp. 18-19]

Oh, that our opponents would recognize from this where they will get if they set up as a necessary mark of the Scripturalness of a doctrine that the interpretation of the Scripture passages in question must agree with the interpretation of the teachers of the 17th and 18th centuries, while they exhibit a true horror of the interpretation of Luther, Urbanus Rhegius, Brenz, Kirchner, and other theologians of the 16th century! [In their opinion] everything depends on being in agreement with the teachers who came *after* the Formula of Concord. We indeed also follow these dear men in almost all teachings, but not in the few in which they depart from God's Word—above all, not in the doctrines of the election of grace, of the Sabbath, and of the power of the government in churchly affairs. They should rather say to us: "As for the fathers, we will not make it a matter of conscience for you, but that's the way it reads in God's Word." Then we could examine as to whose doctrine is grounded in Scripture and whose is not.

Or is it perhaps already a bad sign if someone says: "Here I do not go along with Gerhard and others; I'll go with him only if he proves his teaching to me from God's Word"? Only then does this word of God apply: "Obey your teachers and follow them" [Heb. 13:17], namely when they bring us the Gospel. Only obvious papists with the Lutheran name could declare this to be a bad sign.

We gladly admit that our opponents have never with bare words set up as a *proposition* (*Theorie*) that matters of faith should be proved from the writings of the fathers and that consciences should be bound to their doctrinal decisions. They have done that as little as the Calvinists have set up the principle (*Grundsatz*) that Holy Scripture is to be interpreted according to reason. But the latter have openly practiced this principle and still practice it; therefore it has rightly been

attributed to them by our theologians. Similarly our opponents have always practiced the above-mentioned proposition and still practice it today; therefore it has rightly been attributed to them by us. We know quite well that leaders among our opponents have held up the fathers against us and have publicly and solemnly pledged their poor, deluded people to the writings of the same, because they knew of no other way to arouse suspicion against us as obviously false teachers. It is all the more terrible that they put into practice a proposition with which on every other occasion they want to have nothing to do. Thereby they not only sacrifice the truth for wretched church politics, but also in practice impress on their people a papistic principle which they will never be able to eradicate from them but which will spread like a cancer among them and have its effect on all sides. You see, you cannot play with God's Word.

Highly noteworthy—let it be said here only in passing—is the ancient tradition from the third century that Peter had a motto. Clement of Alexandria (died after 212) related [the story]. He reports that Peter always repeated the Greek words *Ouden ater graphon*, that is, nothing without Scripture." (*Stromata*, Book VI, fol. 678)

Here we can say to the pope: "That is a good tradition; that we will accept. It also overturns all your traditions." Yes, we admit: In a book some things may be preserved which the apostles actually said but which are not recorded in the Bible. If they agree with the Bible, we accept them, but we cannot and do not wish to prove anything from them. Since the Holy Spirit did not put such sayings into Scripture, we are certain that the Holy Spirit did not put them into the Bible because we do not need them. For the Bible is complete, as the apostle expressly affirms in 2 Timothy 3.

Our second thesis is largely a historical question. According to it we must prove that in the papacy the principle is taught and followed that matters of faith are to be proved from the writings of the fathers and that consciences are to be bound to their doctrinal decisions. In this connection we have already heard that in the decrees of the Council of Trent traditions are publicly and solemnly declared before all Christendom to be just as holy and binding as that which is taught in holy Scripture. But there are two kinds of tradition, the written and the so-called unwritten ones. They accept both kinds equally. Yes, even the interpretation of holy Scripture, according to the Council of Trent, may be no other than that found in the writings of the fathers and determined and approved by the pope.

Now we want to prove by a number of witnesses that the ancient church before the papacy had an entirely different stance, so that the traditionalism of the papacy is a falling away from [that ancient church].

From the writings of the most ancient church fathers it is evident that they in particular witnessed against calling upon any human authorities in matters of faith.

Cyprian, the greatest church father before Augustine, a martyr who died in 258, wrote when Bishop Stephen of Rome had called upon the tradition of the fathers against him:

"Whence is that tradition? Does it descend from the authority of the Lord and of the Gospel, or does it come from the commands and the epistles of the apostles? For that those things which are written must be done, God witnesses and admonishes, saying to Joshua the son of Nun: The book of this law shall not depart from out of your mouth; but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.' Also the Lord, sending His apostles, commands that the nations should be baptized, and taught to observe all things which He commanded. If, therefore, it is either prescribed in the Gospel, or contained in the epistles or Acts of the Apostles, that those who come from any heresy should not be baptized, but only hands laid upon them to repentance, let this divine and holy tradition be observed_____

"What obstinacy is that, or what presumption, to prefer human tradition to divine ordinance, and not to observe that God is indignant and angry as often as human tradition relaxes and passes by the divine precepts!" (Epistle LXXIII, "To Pompey Against the Epistle of Stephen" [quoted with slight changes from *The Antenicene Fathers*,⁷ vol. V, pp. 786-87])

Thus we see that St. Cyprian also speaks of a tradition, but thereby he understands what has been handed down in the gospels, in Acts, and in the letters of the apostles. To these he is ready to subject himself; but he calls it hardheadedness and arrogance to want to bind him to human traditions. We therefore must not let ourselves be confused when the Jesuits say that already the earliest church fathers recognized tradition. We see here that when [the church fathers] speak of traditions which are to be received they mean Scripture, for tradition, you see, means something that is passed on. The papists today, however, mean something entirely different by "traditions"; they do not mean the written word of the apostles and prophets, but that which, as coming from Christ or the apostles, has been passed on from mouth to mouth alongside of Scripture and was set down by the church fathers in their writings. But it is just in regard to these that Cyprian says that one should not submit to them, but only to what has been passed on in Holy Scripture. The doctrine of the papists regarding tradition is therefore a new teaching adopted by the Antichrist, who thereby wants to escape the judgment of holy Scripture.

Augustine was without doubt the greatest teacher of the ancient church. Luther also studied him the most, since, of course, he was an Augustinian monk. Among all the church fathers, this man [Augustine] had the most light of understanding in regard to the Gospel.

Concerning him Chemnitz writes:

"In the judgment of all, the learned Augustine is given first place, but we must note why and in which respects. He lived in times when there were many controversies concerning the chief articles of faith, and since all the churches respected him he was compelled to develop refutations and to seek Biblical foundations of the correct understanding." ([Quoted from] *Loci Theologici* [trans. J. A. O. Preus⁸], vol. I, [p. 32])

As soon as Augustine appeared, Christendom noticed that in him a great light had dawned; his writings shone brightly. People soon said, "That's the right man; he will sweep all heretics out of the church."—We have 10 large volumes (*Folianten*) of his glorious writings.

[Chemnitz continues:]

"Thus it came about that he not only had long arguments concerning many articles of faith but also set forth and explained the true position of the church more properly and clearly than the other fathers, who spoke rather carelessly before the controversies had arisen, as Augustine himself admits." [Ibid., pp. 32-33]

So also the very earliest church fathers spoke somewhat too rashly, *securius*, somewhat too self-assured, too carelessly, in a way that makes it easy to get false ideas. We, too, are now involved in a dreadful controversy, such as has never before been fought in the Lutheran church regarding the election of grace. So we must not be surprised if we similarly find that many misleading expressions concerning this doctrine were chosen and written down by the dogmaticians, since they were not involved in such a battle concerning this doctrine. But now let us not also proceed to say something rash, and not call those teachers heretics, but simply say: "Here these dear men often spoke rashly."

[Chemnitz again:]

"And because he tried to correct many imprecise statements of the ancients by giving them a correct interpretation, he often rejected and condemned on the basis of Scripture statements in the writings of the heretics which had been used many times by the fathers." [Ibid, p. 33]

This is extremely important. Augustine condemned statements by the heretics of his time that can already be found in the writings of orthodox teachers perhaps a century before. According to this, we should not let it disturb us if someone now calls out to us: "How can you condemn that? Doesn't it say so in that and that book?" No! It is very different if you now say: "We are elected in view of faith," than when those dogmaticians said it, since there was not yet such a controversy and everyone put the best interpretation on it. Now one must not put the best interpretation on [such a statement made by] any of our teachers. The church got into such deep corruption exactly through this, that

⁷ Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957 (American reprint of the Edinburgh Edition).

⁸ St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989.

people considered just what was wrong in the writings of the fathers to be something very precious.

[Again, Chemnitz:]

“He not only was a censor of this kind with regard to the writings of others, but he also wrote two books of retractions of things which he had written himself.” [Ibid.]

There we see what an honest man Augustine was. For years he had been putting out glorious writings which made their way throughout all of Christendom; they were copied and went from country to country. Every bishop wanted to have them immediately, as soon as they appeared. But Augustine did not let himself be intoxicated (*beweihrauchen*) by great praise. Rather, he wrote two whole books that bore the title *Two Books of Retractions*. These are generally placed at the very beginning of editions of his complete works. In them he goes through all his writings and retracts what is simply false; and whatever can be misinterpreted he puts right. Those are good teachers who do this. He himself saw with horror what wrong things he had written, and he did not want to leave the world before he had retracted them. So he taught us by his own example that one should not simply, without examination, accept the writings of the fathers. He would not allow that people would cite his words in order to bolster false doctrine.

[Again, Chemnitz:]

“Thus from Augustine we can learn with what judgment and openness we ought to read the writings of the fathers. For he first sought out the true meaning from Scripture, and then if the fathers held to the foundation, he would clarify their statements according to the analogy of faith, even when they said something that was not quite correct. But he did not allow such ideas to be put in opposition to the foundation. Rather, when there was an error in a fundamental doctrine as in Cyprian on Baptism, he does not attempt to interpret it but simply follows the meaning of Scripture.” [Ibid.]

St. Cyprian had erred in this, that he taught that all who had been baptized in a sect and later wanted to be received into the orthodox church had to be re-baptized. That was an obvious error. Augustine said: “That I will not accept; but I will not for that reason call him a heretic, for he still stands on the right foundation of the saving faith.”

[Chemnitz:]

“It is worth noting that before the days of Augustine many people attributed too much to the authority of the fathers.” [Ibid.]

That is very important. Already before Augustine’s time, people began to cite the church fathers instead of Scripture—and especially those points in which the fathers had erred. And what a mass of errors didn’t Origen already have! But, says Augustine, away with it, even if a holy martyr said it!—Oh, how much we have to thank this man for! One sees from this that it is hypocrisy when people in the papacy call him [as

witness]: Particularly through him the papal tradition-theory is refuted.

[Once more, Chemnitz:]

“But whenever heretics tried to establish their errors without Scripture and only on the basis of some less-than-felicitous statements from the fathers, they ran into Augustine who often in his writings repeats the axiom which is absolutely necessary to the church, namely, ‘Articles of faith must be proved only on the basis of the canonical books, and the writings of other people must be read in such a way that one can disapprove of them or reject them when they do not agree with canonical truth.’” [Ibid.]

But let us hear Augustine himself. He had a good friend in Jerome. The latter was more learned than Augustine who knew neither Hebrew nor Greek but read holy Scripture only in Latin translation. Nevertheless, he wasn’t worthy of giving Augustine [a drink of] water. Now Jerome was more than a little conceited. Therefore when Augustine had on a certain occasion contradicted him, Jerome felt hurt and therefore wrote rather excitedly to Augustine. The latter answered, among other things:

“I have learned to yield this respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. ... As to all other writings, in reading them, however great the superiority of the authors to myself in sanctity and leaning, I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion being held by them; but only because they have succeeded in convincing my judgment of its truth either by means of these canonical writings themselves, or by arguments addressed to my reason. I believe, my brother, that this is your own opinion as well as mine.

I do not need to say that I do not suppose you to wish your books to be read like those of prophets or of apostles, concerning which it would be wrong to doubt that they are free from error.” (Epistle LXXXII [par. 3; quoted from *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series I, vol. I, p. 350])⁹

Luther, who repeatedly cites these words, in commenting on them makes the following highly characteristic remark:

“Just so a pious, fine man doesn’t write *me* such letters and ask me not to consider my books as equal to the books of the apostles and prophets; I would be embarrassed to death!” (*On the Councils and the Church*; XVI, 2636 [cf. LW 41, 26])

Where are there people now who would be embarrassed to death if one must tell them: “You are placing human books on the same level as the books of the apostles and prophets”? Instead they become furious about such a remonstrance.

⁹ Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956.

How Augustine stood in regard to Cyprian is shown by the following words:

"We are doing Cyprian no injustice when we distinguish between all his writings and the canonical authority of the divine Scriptures." (*Contra Crescorianum Grammaticum partis donati*, Book II, chs. 31, 32)

Noteworthy! The books inspired by the Holy Spirit are already (*gleich*) called *canonical*, but canon means "rule, plumbline." Thereby the ancient church indicated that other books are not canonical, that one therefore should not go by them as a rule of faith. The ancient church says expressly: "We have only one canon." But our opponents [in the election controversy], with their appeal to the fathers, are actually saying, "The writings of the dogmaticians are also a bit canonical." But no! They are indeed witnesses, but not rules (*Kanones*), rather they are regulated (*geregelt*) by Scripture.

[Augustine continues:]

"For it was not without [good] reason that the church's canon was determined with such salutary consideration. To it certain books of the prophets and apostles belong; these we must by no means judge, and according to them we are freely to judge the remaining writings both of believers and of unbelievers.... In your writing you cite words of Cyprian from his letter to Jubaianus, in order to prove that it was his opinion that those who had been baptized in a sect or schism must be [re]baptized in the orthodox church. *I do not consider myself bound by the authority of this letter*, because I do not consider Cyprian's writings to be canonical; rather I judge them by the canonical ones. Whatever in them agrees with the authority of the divine writings, that I accept with praise to [Cyprian]; whatever does not agree, that I reject, although without deprecating him." [Ibid.; emphasis Walther's]

As high as Augustine's respect for Cyprian, and as great as his love and reverence for him was—if the latter deviated from Scripture, Augustine did not allow Cyprian's authority to move him to blind agreement, but placed him under Scripture, yet without calling him a heretic for the sake of his error. So we also do. We do not want to deprive ourselves of the dogmaticians for any amount of money or goods—so dear and precious are they to us. But where they deviate from Scripture, there we part company with them. For God's sake, let no one believe that we are doing this from wretched conceit (*Eigendunkel*), as though we considered ourselves more enlightened than the dogmaticians. No, it is happening only because for us Scripture stands on a higher level.

[Augustine again:]

"Therefore if you would cite from a canonical writing of the apostles and prophets that which you have cited from Cyprian's letter to Jubaianus, I would raise absolutely no objection to it. But since what you cite is not canonical, I will not (according to the freedom to which the Lord has called us) accept even what, departing from [the canon], has been accepted by a man

whose reputation I [will] not reach, with whose writings I do not compare mine, whose genius I hold in highest respect, whose speech I enjoy, at whose love I marvel, whose martyr death I hold in reverence." [Ibid.]

A truly brilliant example of a humble Christian, but one who in matters of faith is subject to God alone!

That Luther took the exact same stance is, next to God, due to Augustine. Luther writes:

"At the moment I shall ignore how and why Origen, Jerome, and some other fathers have stretched and misused this passage. Certainly they stretched more passages in the same way to fend off Jews and heretics, as everyone well knows or is able to know. They should be excused for this, but we should not follow them in this as these unclean animals are doing who have no judgment with regard to the work and teaching of the fathers; they gobble up everything they find until they obey the fathers only in those things in which the dear fathers slipped as men. And they drop them when they did well, as I could easily prove with regard to all the teachings and lives now held to be the very best." (*Answer to the Hyperchristian Book by Goat Emser*, 1521; XVIII, 1606 [quoted from LW39, 181])

But Luther judges so modestly not only concerning the church fathers, one after another into the sixth century, but he even evaluates the teachers of the so-called Middle Ages, who are no longer called church fathers, but scholastics (that is, professors at universities), in the same way. One such scholastic was St. Bernard, a pious monk, a man of deep experience in his walk with the Savior, a truly godly, holy man who shines like a star in the darkest time, in the 12th century (died 1153).

Of him Luther writes:

"St. Bernard declares that ... he would rather drink from the spring itself than from the brook, as do all men, who once they have a chance to drink from the spring forget about the brook, unless they use the brook to lead them to the spring. Thus Scripture, too, must remain master and judge, for when we follow the brooks too far, they lead us too far away from the spring and lose both their taste and nourishment, until they lose themselves in the salty sea, as happened under the papacy." (*On the Councils and the Church*, 1539; XVI, 2629 f. [quoted from LW41, 20])

Thus also St. Bernard wished to know nothing about unwritten traditions. For truly, if I stand at the spring, I will not climb down to the brook in order to drink; for at the spring the water is cleanest and freshest. Conversely, if I am standing at a murky brook, I will use the brook as a guide, following it up to the spring. Thus the Bible is the spring from which we are to draw in copious draughts, but we are to look upon human writings as little brooks which are to lead us up to Scripture. Only then have we used them correctly, when we have used them only as little brooks in order to get to the spring. This is, then, to be our concern in our sad time, that it does not happen to us as in the

papacy and we do not, following the little brooks downward, finally allow our little ship of faith to get into the salty sea of human opinions.

Finally we want to hear a witness from Gerhard, one specifically concerning our controversy, namely how Augustine stood on the doctrine of election.

Gerhard writes:

"As far as the opinion of the ancients is concerned, we know that Augustine in his book *Concerning the Predestination of the Saints* writes in ch. 17: 'God chose the *believers*, but so that they might be such, not because they already were; people do not believe so that they might be chosen, but rather they are chosen so that they might believe.' And in ch. 19: 'He chose us not because we have believed but so that we believe, lest we say that we first chose Him' " [cf. John 15:16]. ("Locus on Election," par. 166 [emphases Walther's])

Notice these contrasts. Gerhard cites this as an objection to his own teaching.

[Gerhard continues:]

"But this and similar [statements] were spoken in opposition to the *semipelagians*, or what remains of the Pelagians." [Ibid.]

Pelagians are the crass heretics who said: "By his own power man can do everything he should." The semipelagians, on the other hand, taught that God must indeed make a beginning but man must bring it to completion; or vice versa, that man must make the beginning but the completion is a matter for God.

[Gerhard once more:]

"For they were of the opinion that the beginning of faith [has its origin in] us, and that therefore faith is the meritorious cause of election. And that this was their actual meaning is evident from the letters of Prosper and Hilary to Augustine, which can be found in vol. VII. *Augustine therefore rightly opposed them and denied that faith is the cause of election*; yes, he also retracted what he had written in his own *Explanation of Certain Statements in the Letter to the Romans*: 'that God chose in His foreknowledge so that He chose the one of whom He knew that he would believe.' See Book I of his *Retractions*, ch. 23, and the book *Concerning the Predestination of the Saints*, ch. 3."

Gerhard indeed did not want to speak as Augustine had; he liked the *Intuitu fidei* better; but still he says that Augustine spoke thus because of the semipelagians or synergists, and that that was *right*. How little justification (*Recht*) do our opponents therefore have when they call upon Gerhard!

As Gerhard mentioned above, Augustine had written *Explanation of Certain Statements in the Letter to the Romans*. In this writing he had erroneously said the following: "God chose in [His] foreknowledge, so that He chose the one of whom He knew that he would believe." This he later retracted.

For thus [Augustine] writes against the semipelagians in the year 428:

"Cyprian ... said 'that we must boast in nothing since nothing is our own.' And in order to show this, he appealed to the apostle as a witness, where he said: 'For what have you that you have not received? And if you have received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?' [1 Cor. 4:7], And it was chiefly by this testimony that I myself also was convinced when I was in a similar error, thinking that faith whereby we believe in God is not God's gift, but that it is in us from ourselves, and that by it we obtain the gifts of God, whereby we may live temperately and righteously and piously in this world." (*Concerning the Predestination of the Saints*, ch. 7 [quoted with slight changes from *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series I, vol V, p. 500])

Thus Augustine at first thought that man himself must by his own free will accept the faith; then God will help him and also sanctify him. He had indeed thought that if the Gospel had not been given to human beings, then man indeed would not have been able to believe by his own powers; but since He had given it, man can well do it. However, Augustine wrote this before he became bishop at Hippo in North Africa.

[Augustine continues:]

"For I did not think that faith was preceded by God's grace, so that through faith what we might profitably ask would be given to us, except that we could not believe if the proclamation of the truth did not precede; but that we should consent when the Gospel was preached to us I thought was our own doing and came to us from ourselves. And this my error is sufficiently indicted in some small works of mine written before my episcopate." [Ibid.]

Further down Augustine writes in the same book:

"The Lord says, 'You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you' (John 15:16)." (Ibid., ch. 34)

These words gave Augustine special clarity. There he saw that if man were elected in view of his faith, then he would have chosen God in advance, before God chose him. But that is exactly the doctrine of our opponents, who in a godless manner misuse the *Intuitu fidei* of the dogmatists [to promote] the doctrine that God elected us in view of our acting (*Verhalten*). May God graciously preserve us from such a demonic doctrine, for thereby we would rob the Lord Jesus of His glory and make ourselves into our own saviors and bearers of salvation (*Seligmacher*).

[Augustine continues:]

"For if they had been elected because they had believed, they themselves would certainly have first chosen Him by believing in Him, so that they should deserve to be elected. But He takes away this supposition altogether when He says, 'You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.' And yet they themselves, beyond a doubt, chose Him when they believed on Him. Whence it is not for any other reason that He says, 'You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you,' than because they did not choose Him that He should choose them, but He chose them that

they might choose Him; because His mercy preceded them according to grace, not according to debt." [Ibid.]

Finally Augustine writes in the same book:

"*Faith itself does not precede that calling* of which it is said, 'God does not regret His gifts and calling' [Rom. 11:29]; and of which it is said, 'Not of works, but of Him that calls' (Rom. 9:12; although He might have said 'of him that believes'); and *that election* which the Lord signified when He said, 'You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you' [John 15:16]. For *He chose us, not because we believed, but that we might believe.*" (Ibid., ch. [38])

Augustine writes in his book of *Retractions*, of the year 426:

"From the prophetic witness: 'Jacob I have loved but Esau I have hated' [Mai. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13], I drew the conclusion of reason, so that I said: 'God therefore chose no one's *works* in His foreknowledge, for He wants to grant these Himself; but *faith* He chose in foreknowledge, so that He chose to give the Holy Spirit to him of whom He knew ahead of time that he would believe Him, so that, doing good, he might come to eternal life.' For I had not searched with special diligence, and had not yet discovered the nature of the election of *grace*, of which the same apostle says: The remnant according to the election of *grace* were saved' [cf. Rom. 9:27]." (*Retractions*, Book I, par. 23)

So the reason for his error was that he had not recognized that faith is a pure work of divine grace. From this he came to the error that although election did not occur in view of our good works, it did occur in view of faith.

III

Finally, our third thesis reads:

It is therefore so objectionable to try to base articles of faith on the writings of the fathers and bind consciences to them because it is a falling away from the chief tenet of the church of the Reformation.

Unfortunately, time did not permit treating this thesis in detail. Yet in order to bring the matter somewhat to an end, the essayist presented at least the most important witnesses from our Confessions to show that it was a chief tenet of the church of the Reformation to base articles of faith, not on the writings of the fathers, but only on holy Scripture.

In the Smalcald Articles we read:

"The Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel." (Part II, Art. II [par. 15; quoted from Tappert, p. 295])

In the Formula of Concord it says:

"As we base our position on the Word of God as the eternal truth, so we introduce and cite these" (our first symbolical) "writings as a witness to the truth and as exhibiting the unanimous and correct understanding of our predecessors who remained steadfastly in the

pure doctrine." (Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm [par. 13; quoted from Tappert, p. 506])

Thus also the Confession is not to be placed on the same level as the Word of God, but is to be treated as a human writing, only that it is the Confession of the orthodox church, drawn from God's Word.

We read further in the Formula of Concord:

"We also pledge ourselves to the first, unaltered Augsburg Confession ... *not because it was written by our theologians*, but because it is taken from God's Word and is well and firmly grounded in it." (Ibid. [par. 5; cf. Tappert, p. 504])

That is an extremely important passage for us. We do not hold the Augsburg Confession, that foundational confession of our church, to be such an important document—which we subscribe with joy—because it was authored by such highly enlightened men, but because it is in such precise agreement with God's Word.

Finally, the Formula of Concord confesses:

"The pure churches and schools have everywhere recognized these publicly and generally accepted documents as the sum and pattern of the doctrine which Dr. Luther of blessed memory clearly set forth in his writings on the basis of God's Word and conclusively established against the papacy and other sects. We also wish to be regarded as appealing to further extensive statements in his doctrinal and polemical writings, but in the necessary and Christian terms and manner in which he himself refers to them in the Preface to the Latin edition of his collected works. Here he expressly asserts by way of distinction that the Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and that no human being's writings dare be put on a par with it, but that everything must be subjected to it." (Ibid. [par. 9; quoted from Tappert, p. 505])

Here the Confessions appeal to the "doctrinal and polemical writings" of Luther. But how? "In the necessary and Christian terms and manner in which he himself refers to them in the Preface to the Latin edition of his collected works." It is indeed important that we have all of Luther's writings. When these were being gathered for publication, it was rightly said: "Everything should be included, also what Luther wrote as a monk." This did not happen because his earlier writings were equal to the later ones, but so that it could be seen how he gradually was enlightened. Luther indeed would rather have seen all his writings put in the oven, as he said in his humility and in his zeal for God's written Word; but he finally relented and thought it well if everything were printed, so that people could later see by what path he became what he was and is. All the more important, however, is it that our Confessions do not adhere absolutely to everything that Luther ever wrote, but that, hereby following Luther himself, they adhere only to those writings in which he, finally free of all papistical leaven, as a true Reformer expounded

in all articles of faith the pure truth taken from Scripture. Yet also in regard to those writings, a true Lutheran should not follow Luther because Luther taught something, but because he so persuasively proved it from God's Word.

Therefore Luther himself writes, not only concerning his earliest writings:

"But above all else, I beg the sincere reader, and I beg for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, to read those things judiciously, yes, with great commiseration. May he be mindful of the fact that I was once a monk and a most enthusiastic papist when I began that cause. I was so drunk, yes submerged in the pope's dogmas, that I would have been ready to murder all if I could have, or to co-operate willingly with the murderers of all who would take but a syllable from obedience to the pope. So great a Saul was I, as are many to this day. I was not such a lump of frigid ice in defending the papacy as Eck and his like were, who appeared to me actually to defend the pope more for their own belly's sake than to pursue the matter seriously. To me, indeed, they seem to laugh at the pope to this day, like Epicureans! I pursued the matter with all seriousness, as one, who in dread of the last day, nevertheless from the depth of my heart wanted to be saved.

"So you will find how much and what important matters I humbly conceded to the pope in my earlier writings, which I later and now hold and execrate as the worst blasphemies and abomination. You will, therefore, sincere reader, ascribe this error, or, as they

slander, contradiction to the time and my inexperience. ...

"I relate these things, good reader, so that if you are a reader of my puny works, you may keep in mind, that I was ... one of those who, as Augustine says of himself, have become proficient by writing and teaching." ("Preface to the First Part of Luther's Latin Writings," 1545; XIV, 428 f., 463 [quoted from LW34, 328, 338])

Luther expresses himself regarding the correct attitude of a Lutheran toward him and his writings in the following manner:

"There are many of you who believe on my account, but the genuine ones (*die Rechtschaffenen*) are only those who remain in the teaching even if they should hear that I myself (which may God forbid) have apostatized and fallen away. Those are the ones who pay no attention to whatever wicked, horrible, shameful things they hear about me or any of us. For they do not believe in Luther but in Christ Himself. The Word has them, and they have the Word; they let Luther go, be he a knave or a saint. God can speak as well through Balaam as through Isaiah, through Caiaphas as through Peter, yes, through a donkey. I agree with them. For I myself do not know Luther, and I don't want to know him: I don't preach anything about him, but about Christ. The devil may take [Luther] *if he can*. But [he'd better] leave Christ in peace, so we also will remain." ("Letter to Hartmuth von Cronberg," 1522; XV, 1988 f. [Weimar Edition 15, 1988 f.]

God help us to be, and always to become, such Lutherans! Amen, in Jesus' name. Amen.