

The Confession of an American Lutheran:

Samuel S. Schmucker's View of Confessions of Faith

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Outline

I. Why this issue of confessions?

- A. It is the nature of a Christian to confess his faith.
 - 1. Scripture says so. ALY (Def. Plat.) 171; Romans 10:10
 - 2. Schmucker's appraisal of confessions in general.
 - a. Schmucker agrees that there is a certain need to confess and vaguely define one's faith. FA 133, ALC 60; ALY 19,20
 - b. However, Schmucker would agree to the anti-confessional axiom of 'deeds not creeds.' ALY 141
- B. American confessionalism.
 - 1. Americanization of religion. ALC 250; Gustafson
 - 2. Schmucker reflects this inclusivism/pluralism.

II. The Lutheran Confessions.

- A. As a body Schmucker rejected the Lutheran Confessions.
 - 1. Schmucker says that the historical background proves them to be of limited use.
 - a. Even blames the Lutherans for never outgrowing their papistic upbringing. ALY 37.
 - b. Also says the AC was written unfreely and thus is erroneous. ALY 55.
 - c. They do not spend enough time speaking of church unity, but are rather negative.
 - d. Would generally accept the AC (although this is conditional), but hates most of the other symbols. ALC 50, 59
 - e. They were not part of early Lutheranism.
 - 1) They were not normative in the beginning. ALC 196-97; ALY 163-164
 - 2) Not even Luther was a 'confessional' Lutheran. ALC 254
 - 2. They are a peculiar abuse of Lutheranism.
 - a. The Lutheran Confessions focus too much attention on Luther.
 - 1) People take the name Lutheran because they follow Luther. They should not so name themselves. ALC 164
 - 2) Schmucker's definition of a Lutheran. EZ 5
 - b. Schmucker sees them as being stressed to the point of holding equal ground with the Bible. FA 163; ALC 168,191-93
 - 1) He raises a good point, to a point. ALY 168
 - a) After all, confessional subscription is an adiaphoron (but SSS would say doctrine is adiaphora). ALC 160
 - b) Creeds are uninspired. ALY 23
 - 2) But goes to far when he says every minister and layman should decide doctrine in non-fundamentals. ALC 232
 - c. The Lutheran Confessions contain many errors. (List them. ALC 174; ALY 135)
 - 1) Much of what they teach are answers to questions not answered in the Bible. FA 87
 - 2) They were beliefs of the day no longer to be believed. ALY 147
 - 3) In short, they are plain old false doctrine. ALY 161-62
 - d. The Lutheran Confessions cause schisms if containing more than the fundamentals. FA 121+125; ALC 118
 - 3. Schmucker sees them as almost completely useless on the American church scene. ALC 92
 - a. In America, more than any place else, confessions breed ecumenical strife. ALC 94; Paper for the Evangelical Alliance 743
 - 1) Peace (civil and ecclesiastical) is the most desirable circumstance for the Church. EZ 12+17
 - 2) Confessions do not do this.
 - b. Confessions divide not only the body, but also the work of the church.
 - 1) Personal piety affected. EPT 42
 - 2) Mission efforts. FA 71. PZ 19
 - 3) The Catholics were making great gains in the religious scene.
 - c. No sensible people accept the Lutheran Confessions.
 - 1) No one had historically taken them seriously in America. ALC 173,205,174-76,183,187
 - 2) Schmucker broadly states than no one in America takes them seriously as a whole. ALC (61)162,167,183,187
 - 3) Although he did see Confessionalism as waxing in America. ALY 166
 - 4) Those who do are 'bigots'. ALC 245-6
- B. The extent to which Schmucker did see some use in them.
 - 1. In general there is a need to "repel heresies." [Is this not what the confessions do?] ALY 20; FA 138; ALC 260

2. The continual refrain of "subscribing to the fundamentals of the Augsburg Confession." ALC 272
 - a. Lists the 9-fold fundamentals of Protestantism. ALC 247
 - b. Felt it his right to subscribe to and disagree with whatever he wanted in the AC and yet say he was faithful to it. (Reviewer Reviewed 467-68); as Melancthon had done. ALV 23,45
3. What this meant in the General Synod which was lead by Schmucker.
 - a. What did the General Synod constitution say about them? EPT 41; ALC 162; LM 277(Const.)
 - b. Confessional subscriptions of pastors.
 - 1) Of those students graduating from the seminaries. EPT 41
 - 2) Of pastors coming in from other church bodies. EPT 396
 - Pastors of other church bodies could serve as advisory members in a convention. EPT 383
 - c. What the seminary professors were to teach. Const. 14, ALC 270

III. Schmucker's principals for an American Protestant Confession.

A. Where Schmucker stood theologically.

1. Wanted to remain a Lutheran, but a loose Lutheran. ALC 69,213; ALV 34
 - definition of American Lutheranism. ALC 172
2. Thus he had a conspicuous affinity for the non-Lutheran Protestant bodies in America. ALC 41,42,58,59,69,167
 - a. prohibitionist ALC 111
 - b. revivalist ALC 117-18
 - c. Says that the union should have been made when it was available to 16th century Lutherans. ALC 239-60

B. The issue of unity.

1. The Bible teaches that Christ desires no divisions. EA 54
2. The appeal to unity in church history.
 - a. Says the early believers agreed on fundamentals but disagreed on particulars. EA 62+101
 - says that the only exclusions from fellowship they made were for those "who were excommunicated for immorality or denounced as fundamentally corrupt in the faith." TUCC 20
 - b. Spener and other Pietists agreed to disagree. ALC 158
 - c. Early American Lutheranism's unionistic practice. ALC 40
3. His views on fellowship.
 - a. Was very happy to let church government be decided by the individual church body. PZ 34
 - b. Recognizing each other's discipline. TUCC 19-20 (as in early church)
 - c. In worship and communion. EA 56+164+201; TUCC 28
 - interesting Donatistic? view of communion. ALC 56
 - d. Unity in "religious and benevolent societies." TUCC 31-2
 - e. In doctrine.
 - 1) Appeals to Romans 14 several times, but does a poor job in exegesis in order to advocate his sort of ecumenism. EA 59+60; TUCC 19-20
 - 2) Schmucker's practical views of this. EA 121, PZ 31; TUCC 21,24
 - a) Holds forth example of Scandinavian churches. EA 149 and Calvin's signing of the AC. EA 154
 - b) He would even hold this out to the Old Lutherans as long as they didn't view their beliefs as essential. ALV 29
 - c) All denominations should feel free to hold to their own beliefs, thus some rather major doctrines become adiaphora: PZ 32-3, 36 (example of Episcopal Church, LM 123)

IV. Designing an American Confession.

A. Schmucker's first attempt at an ecumenical confession in the Fraternal Appeal: the "Apostolic, Protestant Confession."

1. Pan-Protestant.
 - a. List the confessions contained in it.
 - b. Yet not one, not even the AC was quoted in it. EA 177-183
2. Meant to be a fellowship and not an amalgamation. EA 204
3. It was meant to be completely ecumenical of all Protestants.
 - a. He felt that it could not help but be accepted.
 - 1) He could see no possible obstacles to this. EA 185; TUCC 26
 - 2) Theologians to whom he sent this agreed. TUCC 26
 - b. If anyone objected, they could delete a portion. cf EA [3a. I could find problems with this.]
 4. He stood by this to his death. He reprinted it as a model in TUCC. TUCC 25

B. The Definite Synodical Platform

1. Pan-Lutheran

2. Important not for what it contained, but for what it did not contain. ALY 15
 - a. From historical observation, others were critical of this.
 - b. Schmucker was proud of this. ALY 61
 3. It made no attempts to hide what it had done and Schmucker viewed himself as faithful to it. ALY 44
 4. Its reception among Lutherans. Senior Church History Notes
- C. The World Evangelical Alliance and its American branch.
1. A brief history.
 - a. Schmucker's 'Modified Plan Proposed.' EA 213
 - b. The founding of the World's Evangelical Alliance and The American Branch Alliance. TUCC 22+24
 2. Schmucker's wholly commended this organization. Present at the The American Branch Alliance first convention. TUCC 34
 3. The Council of Evangelical Denominations in American. TUCC 41-44
 - a. Its confessional stance as an example of these bodies stances. TUCC 41 quote, 47
 - b. Schmucker's appraisal and involvement which is then succeeded by a reprinting of the Ecumenical Appeal and the "Apostolic, Protestant Confession."
- IV. An appraisal.

The Confession of an American Lutheran

"WHEREAS it is the duty of the followers of Christ to profess his [sic] religion before the world (Matt. x. 32), not only by their holy walk and conversation, but also by "walking in the apostles' doctrines" (1 Cor. xiv. 32), and bearing testimony "to the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), Christians have, from the earlier ages, avowed some brief summary of their doctrines or a Confession of their faith."¹

Thus Samuel Schmucker begins his "Definite Platform" -- the publication in which he altered the Augsburg Confession as he felt appropriate for the American religious scene. He states that it is important, even necessary for Christians to have confessions. Not just that they confess their faith in words, but that they also write it down to bear testimony of that faith.

So Schmucker understood this need for a confession and even stated it in the "Definite Platform." He knew that the Christian Church needs confessions for its own health.

We are instructed "earnestly to contend for the faith (doctrines) once delivered to the saints," and "not to bid God speed," to him who preaches another Gospel, or denies that Jesus is the Christ. In order to obey these injunctions we must demand, of applicants for church membership or ordination, their views of the prominent doctrines of the Bible, and judge whether they accord with ours...[therefore] we have a creed, and for obvious reasons it is preferable for us to prepare a carefully written statement of the Bible truth.²

He expresses the need for a certain confessional unity both among the laity and the clergy.

However, this same Samuel Schmucker could in no way be labeled a *confessional* Lutheran. His convictions regarding the *Lutheran* Confessions did not coincide with the above convictions regarding a general confession. After speaking of the brief Apostles' and Nicene Creeds he says:

But whilst the above named considerations [i.e. keeping fundamental errors and errorists out of the church] justify these brief summaries of faith, and a moderate extension of them so as to exclude all subsequent fundamental errorists; they by no

¹ Schmucker, American Lutheranism Vindicated, 171.

² *ibid.* 19.

means establish the propriety of that vastly extended collection of symbols adopted by the Lutheran princes some time after Luther's death.³

So while a certain use for creeds exists, the Lutheran Confessions held a very limited usefulness for Schmucker.

This view of confessions in general and the Lutheran Confessions in specific, can be found around the world, but it seemed to mold the American religious scene from the start. David Gustafson attributes this to the process of 'Americanization.' Americanization proceeded from the defining element of American society: democracy. Gustafson sees Benjamin Franklin as purporting the paradigm of the Americanization of religion. Benjamin Franklin's ideal religion was one of a "happy mediocrity" which could encompass immigrants from all different Protestant religions. "The stress was on the commonalities rather than the differences between the various religious groups." The Lutheran/Reformed relationship in the early years of America bore this out well.⁴ To Schmucker, one of the primary struggles in American religion was "to throw off the shackles of traditionary, patristic, and symbolic servitude."⁵ This liberation from "symbolic servitude" carries implications far greater than merely refusing to sign certain documents. The results will be seen later in this paper in the context of Schmucker's inclusivism. Schmucker's refusal to give a confessional subscription is a sign of his refusal to draw lines in the sand for American Lutheranism.

In order to understand Schmucker's vein of confessionalism and its implications, this paper will first analyze his views of the Lutheran Confessions. Secondly it will look at his principles for American Protestant unity. Finally Schmucker's own attempts at a

³ Schmucker, *The American Lutheran Church*, 260.

⁴ Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis*, 26-27.

⁵ *American Lutheran Church*, 250.

Pan-Lutheran and Pan-Protestant confession will be considered to find out to what sort of confession Samuel Schmucker might subscribe.

Schmucker and the Lutheran Confessions

As a body, Schmucker rejected the Lutheran Confessions. Perhaps this seems to be a remarkable inconsistency since he was the first professor in the seminary for the largest body of Lutherans in America for nearly forty years. More than that, he is regarded as one of the most influential of all American Lutherans by many. Yet he continually and aggressively opposed any movement toward adopting the Lutheran Confessions. He found fault with them in their historical background, in their content, in their affect upon Lutheranism and Christianity as a whole, and even in their authors.

The Lutheran Confessions ^{consist} ~~are made up~~ of the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Large and Small Catechism, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord. These are all assembled in the Book of Concord to make up the Lutheran Confessions. Again and again, however, Schmucker approved only the Augsburg Confession, and there he subscribed only to the fundamentals within that one symbol.

This Augsburg Confession, this lone palatable Lutheran confession for Samuel Schmucker, had its own problems in his eyes. He states that the causes of the composition of the Augsburg Confession corrupted it from the start, giving it a somewhat Catholic inclination. He favors the opinion of Dr. Hazellius who said that it was written "in language the *least offensive* to their opponents, but also to GIVE WAY AS FAR AS CONSCIENCE

4

WOULD PERMIT.” (emphases always his unless otherwise noted)⁶ In other words, Schmucker understood that the Reformers had designed the Augsburg Confession to be conciliatory to the Catholics.

Not only did coercion from Catholic quarters corrupt this inceptive document of the Lutheran church, but Schmucker also asserts that the authors themselves were tainted. Of course, they were sinful men, but more than that Schmucker would say that they were never able to outgrow their papistic upbringing. “But the principal difficulty which prevented the full and clear appreciation of divine truth in the earlier Reformers, was the fact that *they were educated till adult age, in all the superstitious rites and ceremonies of the Romish Church.*”⁷ Thus, Schmucker said that much of their work (yes, even that of Luther) smacks of Papism.

This Papistic upbringing also reflected itself in an intolerant inclination toward other Protestants -- a decidedly negative view toward church unity.

The polemical sprit generated in the conflicts with the Papists, and the Romish intolerance still adhering to many Protestant theologians, induced them to engage in unprofitable controversies among themselves on non-essential doctrines, which often disturbed the Church.⁸

Finally, the Lutheran Confessions are deficient in one more historical element. The Lutheran Confessions were never part of the very early Lutheran Church. There is a blatantly obvious side to this: the Book of Concord was not assembled until after the deaths of most of the first generation of Lutherans. Additionally, *none* of the confessions was generally given binding authority until 50 years after the Augsburg Confession’s writ-

⁶ American Lutheranism Vindicated, 55.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.37.

⁸ Schmucker, “Fraternal Appeal to the Friends of the Evangelical Alliance and of Christian Unity Generally” from Appendix II of the proceedings of the 6th Conference of the Evangelical Alliance, p. 743. It was address which Schmucker was scheduled to give, but before the conference he died.

ing.⁹ ~~But~~ Schmucker maintained that there are deep ramifications in this. If Luther himself was no Confessional Lutheran, how can any other Lutheran be expected to make such a subscription. Schmucker would only ascribe this to the symbols: "The symbolical books...were first merely an expression of what *was* believed; afterwards they became the rule of what *must* be believed."¹⁰ In Schmucker's opinion, not only was this the decision of some people looking back in time to the early Lutheran church, but "Luther repeatedly expressed his opposition to having his works regarded as binding upon the consciences of other."¹¹ Schmucker felt it a violation of the will of the Reformer to bind people to such long confessions as those of the Book of Concord.

Now these were the problems Samuel Schmucker saw in the history behind the Lutheran Confessions. He would not stop at this point, however. In the succeeding centuries many had applied the Lutheran Confessions to the detriment of the church. He ~~would~~ point^{ed} out that the Lutherans of the 19th century had continued and magnified the problems within these documents.

Schmucker abhorred the "Old" Lutherans' view (which had continued to his own time) that a good Lutheran must subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions.¹² His concept of a "good Lutheran's" view of the confessions was quite different.

Whilst we claim the right, as Luther did, to search the Scripture for ourselves, and to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience; we most freely concede the same right to others, and regard them as good Lutherans, so long as they find in Scripture the *essential features*...of doctrine and practice, which Luther found there, and which are contained in the Augsburg Confession.¹³

Giving the name Lutheran only to one who subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions was a

⁹ The American Lutheran Church, 197.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 196.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 197.

¹² *ibid.*, 163-164.

¹³ Schmucker, The Peace of Zion, 5.

travesty in Schmucker's eyes.

The 'Old Lutherans' stressed the Lutheran Confessions to the point of binding in order to discern who truly agreed in their doctrinal stance. When the 'Old Lutherans' stressed the Confessions of the Lutheran Church to this point, they certainly never intended them to supplant the Holy Scriptures. Yet this is apparently how Schmucker perceived their stance on the Confessions. While at times Schmucker almost seems to set this argument up as a straw man, he seems to have earnestly believed that such a thing had happened to the 'Old Lutherans.' Or if they had not done it intentionally, by their subscription, they had hindered people from studying the Bible for themselves:

We cannot believe it justifiable in any church, to adopt such extended creeds as include numerous articles of doctrine not necessary to the harmonious co-operation among acknowledged christians [sic], and as rob the members and ministers of the church of that individual liberty in searching the scriptures, which is our inalienable right.¹⁴

If such a circumstance had in fact evolved, Schmucker's point would have been needed.

Yet no Lutheran (and for that matter precious few Protestants) of Schmucker's day would want any human writing to be placed on the same plane as the Holy Scriptures.

Samuel Schmucker may not have had much respect for the Lutheran Confessions, but he certainly did have a high view of Scripture; that is certain. He prescribed the Bible as the *norma normans* for any creed written by fallible human beings. "It is equally the duty of the church, in every generation, to test her existing creed by the word of God, and to correct and improve it, if found unscriptural in any of its teachings."¹⁵

Since then confessions are merely statements of belief about Bible truths, it follows that whether or not one chooses to subscribe to a particular confession is an adiaphoron.

¹⁴ The American Lutheran Church, 193.

¹⁵ American Lutheranism Vindicated, 23.

Schmucker understood this. When defending his actions of not subscribing to the Luther Confessions as a whole he said, "In matters not prescribed by the word of God, I am bound by no other obligations than those which I personally assumed."¹⁶ However, when one further examines Schmucker's reasons for not subscribing to the Lutheran Confession, it becomes obvious that it is more than a matter of adiaphoron, it is a matter of conscience. The issue is not that of being compelled to sign a document. The real issue is whether or not to the beliefs contained in that document.

Take for example his view of baptismal regeneration: "Whilst the doctrine of baptismal regeneration certainly did prevail in our European churches, and is taught in the former symbolical books, it is proper to remark, that the greater part of the passages in the symbols relating to this subject, are explained by many in the present day...as not teaching baptismal regeneration."¹⁷

In Schmucker's eyes, the Lutheran confessions contained much that was once believed but could no longer be believed. But it wasn't just baptismal regeneration he condemned. His list of offensive doctrines within the symbols gets to be rather lengthy: "auricular confession, exorcism, the imputation of Adam's sin (or rather of the depraved nature inherited from him,) to his posterity as personal guilt, and we may add, at least in regard to some of them, the lax notions of the Augsburg Confession on the Christian Sabbath."¹⁸ He also denied the real presence in the Lord's Supper.¹⁹ In the conclusion of his introduction to the "Definite Platform" in the appendix of American Lutheranism Vindicated, he becomes more venomous, "The Augsburg Confession, and other symbols, do

¹⁶ The American Lutheran Church, 159-190.

¹⁷ American Lutheranism Vindicated, 147.

¹⁸ The American Lutheran Church, 174.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 120ff.

teach the tenets ascribed to them in the [Definite] Platform, and, in the judgment of the great mass of American Lutherans, the Word of God rejects them, and inculcates the contrary.”²⁰

How could anyone still hold to symbols full of such disagreeable doctrines? Indeed, it is easy to see why Schmucker became queasy at the thought of subscribing to the confessions. He disagreed with a considerable number of the doctrines taught in them. Yet if pressed to reject the Confessions he would reply, “Is it our duty to renounce the Augsburg Confession altogether? This would be the case, *if its errors were fundamental*. But as they are few in number, and all relate to non-fundamental points, this does not necessarily follow.”²¹

Additionally, it was not a personal belief on Schmucker’s part that all of these things were necessarily reasons to terminate fellowship. Of the General Synod he wrote

“whilst we will not admit into our Synod any one who believes in Exorcism, Private Confession, and Absolution, or the Ceremonies of the Mass”...the Platform “grants liberty in regard to all the other topics, omitted from the Augsburg Confession in the American Recension of it...We are willing...to admit ministers who receive these views, provided they regard them as *non-essential*...and are willing to co-operate in peace with those who reject them.”²²

Schmucker could be so loose on so many points of doctrine because he honestly did not think that Scripture spoke definitively on many of these subjects. He demonstrates this quite openly in the next quotation from his Fraternal Appeal. While the quote speaks directly to the point of doctrinal unity of the early Christian Church, it has the obvious implication that confessions ought to be non-specific in their doctrinal stance:

that the unity of the primitive church did not consist in absolute unanimity in religious sentiments...is rendered highly probable by the fact that the Scriptures contain no provision to preserve absolute unity of sentiment on all points of religious doctrine and worship if it ever had existed. Many points of doctrine and forms which men at pres-

²⁰ American Lutheranism Vindicated, 161.

²¹ *ibid.*, 163.

²² Quote from the ‘Definite Platform’ in American Lutheranism Vindicated, 28-29.

ent regard as important are not decided at all in the sacred volume. Other points are inculcated in indefinite language which admits of several constructions.²³

Thus, it was the *insisting* that the Lutheran Confessions be binding that Schmucker found to be so offensive. People could believe them and be in fellowship with those who did not -- just do not insist on it.

When Samuel Schmucker looked upon the Protestant world, he saw a fractured front. Schmucker blamed the strident confessionalism of Lutheranism for this disunity. He saw the Lutheran Confessions as "wedges of dissension," forming "bulwarks of schism" between denominations.²⁴ He blamed them almost single-handedly for separating the Lutherans and Reformed in Germany.

The infelicity of this Procrustean [sic]²⁵ symbolic system,...is demonstrated from its having *cost the Lutheran church a large portion of her ecclesiastical territory...about one-fourth of all her churches in Germany!*...

Had the civil rulers and their theologians been satisfied with the Augsburg Confession, and conceded liberty on all points, left undecided [by?] that symbol, the Reformed church would probably never have gained a foothold in Germany²⁶

As the successive confessions became more and more particular in their belief, they became more detrimental.

Since Confessions carried this kind of baggage within the historical Lutheran Church, there would certainly be little room for them in the Lutheranism of America which Schmucker favored. In The American Lutheran Church, Schmucker spent an entire chapter deliberating on the "Patriarchs of American Lutheranism." (pp. 91-119) Beginning with Muhlenberg to his own day Schmucker praises the efforts of early the

²³ Fraternal Appeal, 87.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 125.

²⁵ Apparently referring to Procrustes who was "in Greek mythology, a giant of Attica who seized travelers and tied them to an iron bedstead, after which he either cut off their legs or stretched his victims till they fitted it." Thus something Procrustean is "designed to secure strict conformity by violent measures." (Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary)

²⁶ The American Lutheran Church, 262.

Lutherans in excluding the Confessions from American Lutheranism. He praised them for continuing the efforts of Spener and the Pietists in releasing Lutheranism from the "dead formality" which had preceded them.²⁷

Pietism was a victory against the early sectarianism of Europe. In Schmucker's mind, a similar movement in America was an essential. To him, the United States was merely repeating the sectarian convictions of Europe's previous three centuries. "In the United States the evils of sectarianism -- that is, of opposing creeds and denominations, on the same ground -- have been exemplified in the highest degree, which has naturally arisen from the peculiarity of our history and situation."²⁸ He knew the nature of American religion. As America was a melting pot culturally, it was also a melting pot religiously. Churches not to be found in the same country in the Old World could be across the street from each other in any American town. If each of these churches were to maintain its own confessional integrity, there would never be a chance to de-fragment Protestantism in America. Sectarian quarrels would continue indefinitely. Schmucker's Americanized Lutheranism and Protestantism could never be actualized.

Schmucker aimed for peace between all Protestant denominations. His brief treatise The Peace of Zion discussed this at some length. While typically arguing that confessions divided believers, he also argued the case of peace. He drew a parallel to the secular world. Any theologian worth his salt would agree that political wars are most disruptive to the advancement of religion. Beginning with this generally acknowledged truth, Schmucker drew the parallel conclusion that disagreements within the church were likewise detrimental to the church's work.²⁹ Given what we have seen in the preceding por-

²⁷ *ibid.*, 94.

²⁸ "Fraternal Appeal to the Friends of the Evangelical Alliance and of Christian Unity Generally," 743.

²⁹ Schmucker, The Peace of Zion, 17.

tions of this paper, the obvious target of Schmucker's conclusion was the Lutheran Confessions. They were the source of nearly all denominational strife between Lutherans and other Protestants.

These conflicts over the confessions not only divided the body of the church, they also spiritually hurt the members of Protestant churches. The doctrinal strife warred against sanctification and "piety was in a great degree destroyed."³⁰

As the church strove to work among others, this particularism hindered mission work. People could not help but notice the great schisms between Christian denominations over seemingly insignificant points of doctrine. The Christians who preached a message based on God's love seemed to be quite belligerent toward their own brothers in other denominations. Thus the mission work of the church would also be hurt by tenaciously holding to the Lutheran or any other confessions.³¹

With such hostilities between the Protestants, Schmucker exhibits a typically American fear: This infighting was not only causing Protestant^{is'm} to lose favor with the unchurched populace, those same people were turning to Catholicism.

"Thousands," says the excellent Baxter, "have already been drawn to Popery, and confirmed in it by the divisions of Protestants. And I am persuaded that all the arguments in Bellarmine, and all their other treatises, have not been so effectual to make Papists, as the multitude of sects among ourselves."³²

Since the Lutheran Confessions^{in his opinion} impacted the Protestant Church so negatively, Schmucker could not understand how anyone could assent to them. The many detriments listed above are by no means complete. The negatives were not fluff injected to his arguments to add mass. These were Schmucker's convictions. He sincerely believed this. And

³⁰ Schmucker, Elements of Popular Theology, 42.

³¹ The Peace of Zion, 19.

³² Fraternal Appeal, 71-72.

while I have documented each of these objections with single references, all of them can be found in several of his works. He stated them again and again. Confessions cause schisms.

Schmucker would point out that his concerns had been proven by the history of the Lutheran church in Europe. Thus the best thing that ever happened was a general abandonment of the Confessional system in America. In The American Lutheran Church he went through the history of the American Lutheran Church. He praised the Lutheran Church for leaving the Confessions in Europe. Beginning with Muhlenberg, Schmucker adduced proof that none of the early Americans had ever agreed to conform to the Lutheran symbols as a whole. None of the Lutherans in the Pennsylvania had done so.³³ None of the Lutherans in the Dutch colonies or among the Saltzburger colony had done so either.³⁴ In short, no sensible person in America had conformed to the Lutheran Confessions.

What is more, he most deliberately states that no sensible Lutheran *could* hold to these Confessions.

By this we mean that no considerable or respectable Lutheran Synod or convention of Lutheran ministers in this country ever passed a resolution and published it, acknowledging the authority of the former symbolical books of our church in Germany, or of any of them as binding on them and on all who would unite with their body, until it was done within the last few years by several German Synods of the West.³⁵

Considering that The American Lutheran Church was written in 1851, his last line most likely refers to the Saxons in Missouri among others. For these 'Old Lutherans,' he reserved the most scornful language:

Now if all the world, with the exception of a few bigoted ultra-Lutherans, freely concede the name Lutheran to these millions who bear it; it is rather too late

³³ The American Lutheran Church, 162, 173 ff.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 183.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 182-183.

in the day for a few individuals in the country to set up the doctrine, that no Lutheran is entitled to the name, who does not believe and profess the whole catalogue of the former symbolic books.³⁶

Schmucker was rather confident that they would soon give up their "intolerance and bigotry" and then "be worthy members of our *American Lutheran Church*." (underlining mine)³⁷

While he may have presumptuously overstepped his bounds in speaking for the whole body of Lutherans at that time in 1851, by the publication of American Lutheranism Vindicated in 1856 he was taking note of these new confessional synods in the West. Indeed, Schmucker was becoming somewhat alarmed that they seemed to have effected the dawning of a confessional renewal in his own backyard.

Shall we remain satisfied with *the General Synod's doctrinal basis*, of absolute assent to the *Bible*, and agreement with the *Augsburg Confession* as far as the *fundamentals* of God's Word are concerned?

This pledge we always regarded as accordant with the principles of God's Word...Amid the recent progress of more rigid symbolism, and symbolic sympathies, it has, however, been disparaged by some connected with the General Synod.³⁸

Contrary to his earlier experiences, American Lutherans were beginning to take notice of the Lutheran Confessions. The Lutherans in America were beginning to appraise the Confessions as valuable symbols of the original Lutheran Church.

In spite of all his opposition to them, Schmucker did attach *some* value to the Confessions. Granted, he ascribed a very limited importance to them. Yet they did fit into his vision for American Lutheranism.

As was recorded in the opening paragraphs of this paper, Schmucker knew that confessions of faith fulfill the Christian's "duty to exclude fundamental errorists."³⁹ Yet

³⁶ *ibid.*, 167.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 246.

³⁸ American Lutheranism Vindicated, 166-167.

³⁹ The American Lutheran Church, 260.

a truly Christian church ought "to employ a human creed specifying the cardinal truths of the Scriptures, but not to include in it minor doctrines, which would divide the great mass of true disciples."⁴⁰ The marks of an acceptable confession were the fundamental Christian teachings ascribed to by the World Evangelical Alliance in their first meeting in 1846, namely:

1, The divine inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures; 2, the right and duty of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures; 3, the unity of the Godhead and the Trinity of Persons therein; 4, the utter depravity of human nature in consequence of the fall; 5, the incarnation of the Son of God, his work of atonement for sinners of mankind, and his mediatorial intercession and reign; 6, the justification of the sinner by faith alone; 7, the work of the Holy Spirit, in the conversion and sanctification of the sinner; 8, the divine institution of the Christian ministry, and the obligation and perpetuity of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and 9, the immortality of the soul, and the judgment of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the eternal blessedness of the righteous, and eternal punishment of the wicked.⁴¹

Schmucker was more than willing to incorporate the Lutheran Confessions in so far as they adhered to the above standards. Well then, what did that mean to Schmucker? He would frequently phrase it like this: "the *fundamental* doctrines of the word of God, are taught in a manner *substantially* correct, in the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession."⁴² The result was that most of the Book of Concord was removed from any consideration.

If it is deemed advisable to gratify this yearning after human creeds, we would propose the adoption of the following system:

1. *The so-called Apostles' Creed.*
2. *The Nicene Creed.*

3. *The Augsburg Confession*, so far as its doctrinal articles are concerned: with the one single clause annexed, stating that its teachings on the following doctrines shall not be regarded as binding, but belief or rejection of them be left to the conscience of each individual, viz.: the real presence, baptismal regeneration, private confession and absolution, "Ceremonies of the mass," the personal and condemning guilt of natural depravity, prior to moral action.⁴³

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 20.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 247-248.

⁴² *Elements of Popular Theology*, 41.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 272.

Thus it is obvious that Schmucker categorically rejects most of the Book of Concord and gives a rather half-hearted subscription to the Augsburg Confession alone. It is this emasculated version of the Lutheran Confessions which fulfill his definition of an acceptable confession of faith. Quite intentionally, any distinctively Lutheran doctrine is removed from the Lutheran Confessions and they become generic confessions to which nearly any evangelical Protestant could agree. This was the Americanization of Lutheranism to the "happy mediocrity" of Benjamin Franklin.

Schmucker remained convinced that he had the right to reject and delete any portion of the Lutheran Confessions. Thus when Schmucker found that there was no adequate dogmatics text for the Gettysburg Seminary, he wrote his own Elements of Popular Theology which was patterned after the *acceptable* parts of the Augsburg Confession. He omitted the doctrines he opposed and the condemnatory sections of the Confession.⁴⁴ Elements of Popular Theology was subsequently reviewed in the Baltimore Literacy and Religious Magazine. The author took Schmucker to task for claiming to be faithful to the Augsburg Confession and yet being so selective in his agreement to the confession. In replying to this in the article "The Reviewer Reviewed" Schmucker bristles, "The *right* of the Lutheran church to occupy this ground, in common with the majority of Protestants in this land, we shall not stop to argue with the reviewer or any other man."⁴⁵ In order to justify his picking and choosing, Schmucker asserted a right to believe what other Protestants believed. He also appealed to the example of Melancthon, who continually altered the Augsburg Confession which he had authored. Schmucker said he simply followed

⁴⁴ Lutherans In Crisis, 63.

⁴⁵ Baltimore Literacy and Religious Magazine, "The Reviewer Reviewed, or Schmucker's Theology Again," October 1839, p.464-478.

Melanchthon's method of adapting the confession to the historical occasion.⁴⁶

Schmucker's reservations were both reflections of and reflected in the General Synod and eastern Lutheranism as a whole. As a reflection of the General Synod, Schmucker was brought up in a Lutheranism which was non-confessional and unionistic. But the General Synod itself reflected Schmucker's views. Schmucker's office as the chief theologian of eastern Lutheranism influenced all of American Lutheranism. He was the first and foremost professor in the largest Lutheran seminary in America at Gettysburg for nearly forty years. His Elements of Popular Theology was the dogmatics text for most of the General Synod's pastors. His voluminous writings were widely read -- a great many of which dealt with the timely issue of uniting Protestantism. He wrote the Constitution of the General Synod -- the largest Lutheran body of its time.

We have already seen what Schmucker's Elements of Popular Theology said about the confessions. (p.13) The Constitution of the General Synod mirrored these same convictions. Originally the constitution demanded no agreement on the Augsburg Confession or any other. The original stipulations for bodies to become members of the General Synod was no more than this: "All regularly constituted Lutheran Synods, holding the fundamental doctrines of the Bible as taught by our Church, not now in connection with the General Synod, may, at any time become associated with it, by adopting the Constitution, and sending Delegates to its Convention, according to the ratio specified in Art. II."⁴⁷ In fact, the constitution which Schmucker authored originally neglected *any* reference to the Augsburg Confession.

To be fair, it must be said that Schmucker, in 1851 in The American Lutheran

⁴⁶ American Lutheranism Vindicated, 23.

⁴⁷ Schmucker, Lutheran Manual on Scriptural Principles, The General Synod Constitution, Art. III Sec. 3, p.277.

Church, did state of the founding fathers of the synod that “Their real doctrinal position, at the formation of the General Synod, was that of fundamental agreement with the Augsburg Confession, and acknowledged dissent from it on some minor or non-fundamental points.”⁴⁸ This point is largely justified by the fact that “This doctrinal position of substantial agreement with the Augsburg Confession, with acknowledged privilege of difference on non-fundamental or minor points, was *subsequently* made symbolic or binding by the General Synod, in her Constitution for Synods.” [emphasis mine]⁴⁹ Eventually the General Synod adopted a limited confessional subscription, but the complete absence of it from the original constitution of the General Synod speaks volumes. Apparently few if any of the early members of the General Synod had a high regard for the Lutheran Confessions. By the later addition of a subscriptional phrase, however, one can surmise that if there was any change, the General Synod itself was influenced to a nominally more confessional stand.

The key word in that last phrase is “nominally.” “The devotion sworn to the Augsburg Confession was at best nebulous. To put it in today’s jargon, the mission statement of the Gettysburg Seminary was “to provide our churches with pastors who sincerely believe, and cordially approve of, the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures, as they are fundamentally taught in the Augsburg Confession.”⁵⁰ The trainers of the synod’s pastorate, the Seminary professors, were asked to swear to no more than those “fundamental” teachings of the Augsburg Confession.⁵¹ Schmucker defended the professors’ (of whom he was one) deviations from the Lutheran Confessions by saying:

⁴⁸ The American Lutheran Church, 161.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁰ Schmucker, Constitution of the Theological Seminary of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Gettysburg, PA), p.7.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 14.

The Professors [sic] believe and teach the same doctrines now which they have taught for thirty years....For them to inculcate on their students the obsolete views of the old Lutherans, contained in the former symbols of the church...would be to betray the confidence of those who elected them to office, and to defeat the design of the Institution...Nor is it correct, if our institution be intended that the views of individuals and not of the church are taught in it.⁵²

The pastors of the General Synod, in the same general manner, agreed to the fundamentals of the Augsburg Confession -- even if it was not so stated in their Constitution. In 1834, Schmucker quoted the usual oath of ordination as "Do you believe that the *fundamental* doctrines of the word of God, are taught in a manner *substantially* correct, in the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession?"⁵³ Likewise, pastors wishing to join the General Synod from the outside would be examined by a committee. Afterwards they would be asked to swear the same oath as the graduate pastors would swear.⁵⁴ Thus every pastor of the General Synod swore a certain loyalty at least to the fundamentals of the Augsburg Confession. Yet one can not ignore the fact that these were lukewarm oaths of allegiance. If the Japanese had sworn such a tentative oath on September 2, 1945, a third atomic bomb would have been dropped. The spirit of this oath materializes when one learns that they allowed ministers of non-Lutheran church bodies ~~to~~ not only observe, ^{also} but ^{to} serve as advisory members to their annual synod conventions.⁵⁵

In summary, Schmucker had little room for the Lutheran Confessions. He viewed them, for the most part, as schismatic documents which had been rightly left at the last wayside in Lutheranism's trip through history. A certain subscription to the Augsburg could be agreed to -- but only on the fundamentals. It too was blighted as the rest of the Lutheran Confessions were.

⁵² The American Lutheran Church, 270.

⁵³ Elements of Popular Theology, 41.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, Appendix II, "Formula for the government and discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Published by the General Synod of said church," p.396.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 383.

Principals for an American Protestant Confession

After seeing Schmucker's views on the Augsburg Confession, one must almost wonder why he bothered to include them in his church body in any way at all. If all Protestants held the same theological convictions as Schmucker regarding confessional subscriptions, any one of them could certainly give a similar subscription to anyone else's Protestant creed or confession. That was exactly his point. Schmucker dreamed of the day Protestantism could present a united front under a unified Protestant Confession, a day when Protestantism would become fully Americanized.

In order to understand his endeavors to this end, we must understand Schmucker's personal beliefs. First we will pinpoint where he viewed himself on the theological spectrum. Then we will study his views on the unity of the Christian Church. These are important considerations since they define the limits of what he would allow, incorporate, and tolerate in order to achieve this unified Protestant confession.

In spite of Schmucker's deprecation of so much of historical Lutheranism, he wanted to be known as a Lutheran. "Has the American church then ceased to be Lutheran because she does not subscribe to the Augsburg Confession and other symbolical books? God forbid!"⁵⁶ Regardless of what he said about Lutheran history, Schmucker felt that he had upheld the basic principles of the Lutheran Reformation. His Lutheranism was the true Lutheranism in his own mind

so long as the Lutheran church, in this or any other country, adheres to the fundamental principle of Lutheranism, that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and believes the great, the cardinal doctrines of Luther's system, together with so many of his peculiarities, as to agree more fully with them as a whole, than with the peculiarities of any other denomination, she may justly retain the Lutheran

⁵⁶ The American Lutheran Church, 213.

name.⁵⁷

Evidently, none of the rejected points of the Augsburg Confession like the real presence, baptismal regeneration, the real guilt of original sin or any of the others constituted any part of the essence of Lutheranism.⁵⁸ And what is more, Schmucker's Lutheranism openly incorporated the "best" of other Protestant denominations into Lutheranism such as the revivalism of Methodism.⁵⁹

This brand of Lutheranism assumed the appellation "American Lutheranism." As has been described above, Schmucker properly defining it says that "it adheres to the fundamentals of the gospel as taught in the Augsburg Confession, whilst it refuses to acknowledge as binding, the other books [of the Lutheran Confessions]."⁶⁰

This definition allows a multitude of "minor, non-fundamental" beliefs to continue their existence within the Lutheran pale. Schmucker himself took full advantage of this open door. He frequently displayed his affinity with non-Lutheran doctrine and practice. He favored the practice of revivalism.⁶¹ He had prohibitionist leanings.⁶² He was legalistic in insisting that dancing, card playing, etc. were wrong and that there was no such thing as adiapheron.⁶³ More than anything else, Schmucker lamented the fact that the sixteenth century Lutherans had not unified with the Reformed when the opportunity presented itself.⁶⁴ He never seems to care that Luther himself understood exactly what he was doing when he refused to join with Calvin and Zwingli. Luther and his early compatriots intentionally withheld the hand of fellowship from these fellow Protestants be-

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁸ *American Lutheranism Vindicated*, 34.

⁵⁹ *The American Lutheran Church*, 69.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 172.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 117-118.

⁶² *ibid.*, 111.

⁶³ *The American Lutheran Church*, 95.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 259.

cause of their principled beliefs. This naturally leads one to speculate concerning

Schmucker's beliefs about unity among Christians.

When looking at the fractured Protestant Church, Samuel Schmucker would immediately turn to Scripture. Scripture itself forbade differences to be based on trivial matters. For proof, Schmucker turned to I Corinthians 1. In those passages the Apostle Paul censured the Corinthians for the schisms which had arisen out ^{of} attachments to certain ministers of the ~~G~~^gospel rather than the ~~G~~^gospel itself. Schmucker made the practical application to post-Reformation Protestantism by saying of Paul:

He would have them Christians and nothing but Christians; not Pauline Christians, nor Apolline, nor Cephine, nor Lutheran, nor Calvinistic, nor Wesleyan Christians; not because he had any antipathy to Apollos or Peter, but because any such divisions based on difference of opinions or personal attachments naturally tended to rend asunder the body of Christ.⁶⁵

In so far as Schmucker says that no division in Christ's body ought to be based on "opinions or personal attachments" I think that no mainstream Christian could disagree with Schmucker's statement. However, it is obvious that people who insist on differentiating between Calvinists, Baptists, and Lutherans do not make this distinction merely on opinions or personal attachments. These distinctions are based on beliefs and convictions. Even this, however, was insufficient defense of division in Schmucker's eyes.

In the passage, 'A man that is a heretic...after the first and second admonition reject,' the apostle himself limits the application of the principles above urged on the Corinthians by showing that although he forbade the formation of sects or divisions among Christians on the ground of difference, yet there were occasionally persons in the church who, if incorrigible, deserved to be cast out of it altogether.⁶⁶

Thus, Schmucker makes it clear that in his eyes no separation could be justified except a separation between Christians and non-Christians. In his argumentation, we see that he did in fact have a very high view of the Bible. Schmucker felt that his conclusions had

⁶⁵ Fraternal Appeal, 54-55.

⁶⁶ ibid., 55.

weight not because they were based on his own reasoning, but because they built on the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

In seeking advocates of his understanding of the Bible's teaching, Schmucker turned to history: first of all to the early Christian church. He turned to the apostolic times and the church shortly thereafter. In those times, a unity existed from which no Christian was excluded.⁶⁷ Only those "who were excommunicated for immorality or denounced as fundamentally corrupt in the faith" could be excluded.⁶⁸ Also, the early church's councils were ecumenical councils which all churches regarded as Christian attended.⁶⁹

In more recent times, Schmucker observed similar practices among Spener and the Pietists. He saw these men as releasing Lutheranism from its intolerant, polemic spirit.⁷⁰ Likewise, Schmucker praises the early American Lutherans for continuing this liberal spirit. In The American Lutheran Church Schmucker cites any number of examples of Lutherans, Episcopalians, Wesleyan Revivalists, German Reformed, and others worshipping together.⁷¹ They seem to have never restricted their worship activities to those of the same denomination. Thus Schmucker perceived the Bible as teaching and the historical Christian church as practicing an external unity passing over denominational lines.

Thus we go from the teaching of unity among Christians, to the practical implications of Schmucker's views in church fellowship. Regarding the issue of church polity, he believed each body should be able to choose its own form of government. He realized that

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 62.

⁶⁸ Schmucker, The True Unity of Christ's Church, 20.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁰ The American Lutheran Church, 94.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 97ff.

the differing church governments would hinder an organic union; but such an organic union was not his aim. His aimed only for full fellowship. Therefore while different bodies would have different structures, these differing structures should not prevent people from joining in worship. No system of church government should be divisive of church fellowship.⁷²

Related to this, Schmucker understood that the discipline of one church needed to be respected by other church bodies. He looked to the Bible (II Cor. 3:1-3)⁷³ and apostolic times. Without a recognition of the church discipline of another body, the church would lack the necessary order to function properly.⁷⁴

Schmucker realized that this fellowship would, of course, affect the worship life of every individual. A true fellowship between church bodies would be most fully recognized in pulpit fellowship, joint worship, and joint communion. We have already heard a couple examples of the joint worship and pulpit fellowship. Regarding joint communion he says "Sacramental...intercommunion was a highly important and influential feature [of the apostolic age]. 'For we being many, are one bread and *one body*, because we are all partakers of that one bread' {I Cor. 10:17}. The practice of sacramental communion extended indiscriminately to all whom they acknowledged as true disciples of Christ."^{75 76}

Schmucker hoped that Christians would display unity in their worship lives.

⁷² The Peace of Zion, 21.

⁷³ II Corinthians 3:1-3: "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly -- mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?"

⁷⁴ The True Unity of Christ's Church, 19-20.

⁷⁵ Fraternal Appeal, Appendix 1, "Overture For Christian Union," 201.

⁷⁶ It is interesting that Schmucker's view of an "unconverted ministry's" effects becomes semi-Donatistic when speaking of the Lord's Supper. For when speaking of the partaking of the Lord's Supper, he says, "in the hands of an unconverted minister this duty, like all other, will be mere formality, and attended with little profit." The American Lutheran Church, 56.

However, he hoped that it would go beyond that. He hoped that their non-worship endeavors would mirror this same unity. He wanted an ecumenical backing to all "religious and benevolent societies."⁷⁷

While Schmucker advocated this fellowship in practice, the more important underlying issue was a fellowship in doctrine. Now it must be generally recognized that if different denominations existed, they almost always existed because of doctrinal differences. Then did Schmucker suggest that all denominations to give up their doctrinal peculiarities? Far from it. Instead, he urged all denominations to tolerate their differences in doctrine. For this, he again appealed to the Holy Scriptures -- more specifically to Romans 14:5-6,10:

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God...You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.⁷⁸

From this Schmucker deduces that all non-fundamental doctrines are more or less optional. Practically speaking this impacted any efforts toward Protestant union.

Schmucker cites the commissioning of the Committee of Conference on Christian Union assigned by a "recent" (in reference to 1870) General Synod convention. The committee was not to seek an amalgamation, but a greater unity and respect between Protestant bodies. The first guiding principle for this committee was that "it must require of no one the renunciation of any doctrine or opinion believed in by him to be true, nor the pro-

⁷⁷ The True Unity of Christ's Church, 31-32.

⁷⁸ Of course, this passage which Schmucker frequently (The True Unity of Christ's Church, 19; Fraternal Appeal, 60ff; The Peace of Zion, 33; among others) adduces is speaking of adiaphora: matters which are up to the Christian's individual discretion for judgment. Perhaps it is Schmucker's Sabbatarianism which makes this obvious reference to the adiaphoron of a holy day into a mandate of converting all non-fundamental doctrines into adiaphora.

fession of any thing he regards as erroneous. The accession of any one denomination to this union, does not imply any sanction of the peculiarities of any other."⁷⁹ Having read this, one must ask what sort of unity Schmucker saw in this. He thought it wise that everyone stay in the body which they thought to be right, thus these same people must have been convinced that others were wrong. What sort of unity could such a discordant union be? It would seem that Schmucker's paragon of unity was based on nothing more and nothing less than a tolerant disagreement.

Whatever Schmucker thought about the theoretical unity of antithetical denominations, he wanted to prove that such disagreements in doctrine could be tolerated within fellowshiping bodies. He again looked to the history of the Lutheran church. He went back to the earliest years when John Calvin "subscribed to the Augsburg or Lutheran Confession of faith, and declares the points of difference between the Protestant churches of his day an insufficient cause for division."⁸⁰ Also, not much later, differences in opinion developed in the Scandinavian *Lutheran* churches. Yet here too, the varying doctrinal stances stood side by side within the same church bodies.⁸¹ Also the whole spectrum of Christian doctrine had shown itself within other churches -- particularly the British churches -- yet they had survived the centuries quite well.⁸² Thus Schmucker even invited the 'Old-Lutherans' to join in this union "unless they are so rigid as to regard their own views on these disputed points as essential."⁸³

In asserting this freedom of doctrine over 'non-essential' and 'non-fundamental' doctrines, some rather major doctrines (at least in the estimate of this author) become

⁷⁹ The True Unity of Christ's Church, 24.

⁸⁰ Fraternal Appeal, 154.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 149.

⁸² *ibid.*, 149-150.

⁸³ American Lutheranism Vindicated, 29.

adiaphora:

Could not any one of you my brethren, in a space not larger than one of the minor epistles of Paul or John, compose a statement of our faith, which should settle forever the question, whether you believed in *conditional or unconditional election*, in *limited or general atonement*,...in short a statement exhibiting beyond controversy, your faith in regard to all the points of difference between the several evangelical denominations? Now, if any intelligent divine could do this, could not Paul himself have done it? And would he not, if inspiration had so directed him. As however, neither, he, nor any other inspired writer has presented us such a statement, we justly infer that God designed liberty and charity on these points, and we also are bound to exercise them.⁸⁴ (emphasis mine)

Such was Schmucker's answer to some of the longest and most vehemently disputed points of doctrine in Christianity.

While Schmucker viewed himself as a Lutheran, he seems to have done so not so much out of doctrinal commitment as out of emotional attachment. He was opposed -- and knew he was opposed -- to several of the doctrines purported in the Lutheran Confessions. Yet he viewed himself as ~~none~~^{no} the less Lutheran than any other person. He was able to do this because agreement on doctrine in "non-fundamental" points was not a necessary ingredient to union among Christians. Thus, he invited all the Protestant denominations to band together in full pulpit and prayer fellowship as they spread the ^gospel.

Now while Schmucker may have scorned the idea of uniting under the Lutheran Confessions, he knew that an ecumenical confession would be needed. Thus Schmucker felt it incumbent upon himself to draw up this inceptive creed. With a creed written to begin the coalescing process, all denominations could join freely without qualms of conscience. They would feel that they had not compromised their commitment to the Bible. Thus Schmucker spent much time throughout his life in...

Efforts Toward an American Ecumenical Alliance

⁸⁴ The Peace of Zion, 32-33.

Schmucker felt it necessary to begin discussions of an ecumenical association with discussions of an ecumenical creed. His first endeavor toward this object appeared in his Fraternal Appeal. There is an added significance in that it was published in 1834, near the beginning of Schmucker's nearly forty year tenure at Gettysburg Theological Seminary. Schmucker had these ideas from his earliest days.

In the Fraternal Appeal, Schmucker appealed to the Protestant bodies to unite. This book, perhaps more than any other, states Schmucker's reasoning behind his push for ecumenism. After exhorting this union he published at the end of this work "The Apostolic, Protestant Confession." Schmucker hoped that this creed would provide the impetus to get an alliance of American Protestants. Above all else Schmucker intended the document to be Pan-Protestant:

The Apostolic, Protestant Confession for which the reader is now prepared, is nothing more than a selection of such articles or parts of articles on the topics determined by the several confessions as are believed by all the so-called orthodox churches...The entire creed is in truth the common work of the Protestant family, every part having been composed by one or other of its members...in order that the whole might be, and be regarded as, the *common property* of the Protestant church. The *authority* of this confession is based on the fact that every sentence, every idea of it, has been sanctioned by one or the other of the Protestant conventions that adopted the creeds from which the articles are selected.⁸⁶

Since Schmucker generously included documentation of the confession, we can see just how pan-Protestant it is. It includes portions from Congregational, Episcopal, Presbyterian, a Lutheran and Moravian (United Brethren), Baptist, and Methodist confessions. Yet conspicuously absent were the Lutheran Confessions of the Book of Concord. They were cited not even once.⁸⁶

From the beginning, Schmucker hoped that an alliance would form around this confession or some modification thereof. While he did want an alliance, Schmucker dis-

⁸⁶ Fraternal Appeal, 176.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, cf. footnotes of 177-183.

tinctly pointed out that the members of this group should maintain their identity and not amalgamate. An amalgamated body, he feared, would become bureaucratic and authoritarian.⁸⁷ But “so soon as any two denominations or ecclesiastical bodies adopt the plan they constitute the nucleus of the Apostolic, Protestant Church *in America*, to which one denomination after the other can be added.”⁸⁸

Schmucker confidently asserted that no one could find a single objectionable statement in this confession. The reason for this was that he felt he had tip-toed around all the sectarian doctrines and left only what every Christian could accept. Yet, “if any orthodox denomination find in this Confession a single article or sentence or idea which *positively* (not by inference) teaches what they regard as error, let them strike it out and adopt the residue. The writer is however not aware that such a clause is found in it.”⁸⁹

After some thirty-five years, Schmucker was proud to announce that none of the theologians to whom he had submitted this confession had found a problem with it either.⁹⁰ This would most truly become a least common denominator alliance. Only what everyone could agree to would be a confession of faith. When this would become reality, then American Protestantism would truly have become Americanized.

It seems likely, however, that he never did submit this confession to any confessional Lutherans for scrutiny. While the one proviso in Schmucker’s claim for this confession was that no error could be found to directly, “not by inference,” vitiate against one’s own beliefs, there are many places which would be objectionable by inference to confessional Lutherans. In virtually every article there are numerous weasel words and

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 175.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 185.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 185-186.

⁹⁰ *The True Unity of Christ’s Church*, 26.

phrases which intentionally avoid the decisive points on all the issues, but especially on universal atonement (Part II, Art. III), human depravity (P.II, A. IV), the Holy Christian Church (P.II, A.VI), and baptismal regeneration and Christ's presence in Holy Communion (P.II, A.VII).⁹¹

Schmucker would stand by this confession for the rest of his life. His plans for a Protestant union remained unchanged throughout his life. Just three years before his death, thirty-six years after first printing "The Apostolic, Protestant Confession," he published The True Unity of Christ's Church. In this book he again published the Fraternal Appeal in its entirety and its "The Apostolic, Protestant Confession."

Twenty-one years after publishing the Fraternal Appeal, Schmucker made another attempt at a inter-denominational union. It was published in the form of "The Definite Synodical Platform." Now this attempt to unify Protestants was really not intended for the Protestants as a group but specifically for Lutherans. Yet its approach was approximately the same as that of his "The Apostolic, Protestant Confession." It meant to Americanize Lutheranism. In this publication Schmucker included the "American Recension of the Augsburg Confession." It was Schmucker's own work. In it he attempted to alter the Augsburg Confession in such a way that it would become as blasé as possible. Schmucker made much ado about the fact that "The general principle, on which this Recension was constructed, is to present the doctrinal articles entire, without the change of a single word, merely omitting the several sentences generally regarded as erroneous, together with nearly the entire condemnatory clauses, and *adding nothing* in their stead."⁹²

Its stated intent was to serve "as a more definite expression of the doctrinal pledge

⁹¹ Fraternal Appeal, 176-183.

⁹² *ibid.*, 61. For Schmucker's own compilation of the changes he made in the "American Recension of the Augsburg Confession," confer the list on pages 61-62 of American Lutheranism Vindicated.

prescribed by the General Synod's Constitution for District Synods..and that we regard agreement among the brethren on these subjects as a sufficient basis for harmonious co-operation in the same church."⁹³ This may have been its stated intent, but it is obvious that Schmucker aimed to reconstruct this symbol of the Lutheran church with other reasons in mind as well. Doubtlessly he wrote it so that non-Lutherans could feel more comfortable with those holding to this creed, and conversely so that Lutherans themselves would not feel obligated to any "sectarian" theology.

Perhaps thirty years earlier Schmucker could have succeeded with "The Definite Platform," but the strength of confessional Lutheranism had been waxing for the last couple preceding decades. Even within his own synod, Schmucker's proposal for adopting "The Definite Synodical Platform" was roundly rejected. Only two of the General Synod's member synods adopted this platform.⁹⁴ Afterwards, Schmucker became embroiled in a pamphlet war with W. J. Mann and others over this publication. After this fiasco it would be another ten years before serious headway could be made toward a Protestant union with the Lutheran church.

Yet it would succeed. First we must go back in history a little way. Schmucker had submitted an "Overture for Christian Union" in 1846. It was a plan to unite the various Christian denominations of the United States,⁹⁵ but unlike the Fraternal Appeal, it did not submit a confession to be adopted. Some forty-five pastors of various denominations signed this document. This document was signed, yet did not result in anything substantial. Yet it did suggest that real interest in a united American Protestantism existed.

⁹³ American Lutheranism Vindicated, Appendix, "Definite Platform," 172.

⁹⁴ Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Notes for Church History 331, 1996. Period 13, page 2.

⁹⁵ Fraternal Appeal, Appendix, "Overture for Christian Union," 199-200.

In the same year the World's Evangelical Alliance was founded in England. This alliance declared an open fellowship between most (if not all) of the major Protestant bodies within England. They adopted a nine statement confession entitled "Doctrinal Basis of the Alliance."⁹⁶ Schmucker's "Apostolic, Protestant Confession" seemed rather exhaustive compared to this statement.

Just a year after the Civil War, several of the Protestant denominations formed The American Branch Alliance as a chapter of the World's Evangelical Alliance. Schmucker participated in this event.⁹⁷ Three years later Schmucker penned his "Modified Plan Proposed" (1869) to propose restructuring possibilities for the World's Evangelical Alliance and its member branches. In his suggestions Schmucker again demonstrates his penchant for the most generic confession of faith possible. He suggested the same "Doctrinal Basis of the Alliance" of the World's Evangelical Alliance as the confession of faith for all the branches.⁹⁸

Schmucker remained involved in this organization until his death. He was scheduled to speak at the Sixth Conference of the Evangelical Alliance in New York in 1873. He died before he could give his speech. He did however write a speech for this conference which was preserved and printed in an appendix of the proceedings of that conference. To his death, Schmucker lamented the exclusivistic creeds of the early Protestant movement.

In each country [of Europe] the doctrinal basis or confession naturally expressed the views of those who composed it, whether they were Lutheran or Reformed, Episcopalians or Presbyterians, and these were then established by law. Such were the Augsburg Confession, the Thirty-nine Articles of the Episcopal Church, the Westminster Confession, etc. The differences between these *principle* historic creeds were not, as is sometimes popularly supposed, the result of sectarian divisions among Protestants; for they were written and first published separately, by

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, Appendix, "Modified Plan Proposed," 214. Also found on p.13 of this paper.

⁹⁷ *The True Unity of Christ's Church*, 34.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, Appendix, "Modified Plan Proposed," 214.

different persons, in different countries, and without any special reference to each other. Unfortunately none of these different creeds gave sufficient prominence to the fundamental unity and agreement of the Church of Christ.⁹⁹

In spite of these long-standing differences between denominations, he never abandoned his dream of a unified Christian church under a mutually acceptable confession of faith. He hoped to be an instrumental worker in the reuniting of a long-fractured Protestantism.

A Brief Appraisal

My mother says that she can remember her great-grandmother living in their home when she was a young girl. At this time the radio was still a relatively new innovation. My mother tells me that her great-grandmother was convinced that the radio was the work of the devil. How else could anyone pull voices out of the thin air? she reasoned.

We are all products of our times to one degree or another. Who knows what my grand-children will say about my mannerisms and opinions sixty years from now.

Samuel Schmucker was a product of his times. He grew up in the early nineteenth century. Few American church bodies had enough pastors, thus many people learned at the feet of pastors of other denominations. Many of the pastors who came from Europe to serve in the United States at that time were rationalists or deists. Many of the Lutheran pastors who were trained in the United States were trained at non-Lutheran institutions. Also the new-found democratic liberties further strengthened the individualistic spirit of all aspects of American culture. These influences pulled the Lutherans in America away from the confessional moorings of the Lutheran church.¹⁰⁰ Likewise they influenced

⁹⁹ "Fraternal Appeal to the Friends of the Evangelical Alliance and of Christian Union Generally." 743.

¹⁰⁰ Mann, A Plea for the Augsburg Confession, 43-44.

Samuel Schmucker.

Samuel Schmucker was convinced that the ideal for the Christian church is that all Christians living in the same place worship together "agreeing to differ in peace on minor points and remembering that no Christian has a right to judge."¹⁰¹ This principle governed the ecumenical spirit of the Christian as a whole and the Lutheran church in particular in America in the early nineteenth century. But by turning to God's Word we can clearly distinguish the true and false teachers. (Is. 8:20) The Lutheran Confessions make no bones about doing so.

Schmucker could never advocate these or other confessions filled with specifics on doctrine. Through the last one hundred ~~fifty~~ years we have witnessed the practical result of such spineless doctrinal stands. The modern ELCA successor to his General Synod has ceased to be Christian in some quarters. May we learn that to be faithful with God's Word demands a struggle. We are going to state some ^bBiblical ^ddoctrines^{is} that are unpopular in our religiously pluralistic society. It would be much more palatable to avoid controversy and not stand by certain doctrines which truly portray the ^v'foolishness of God.'^u May God ever strengthen us to make a good confession of our hope before the world.

Let us be products of our times. ^uNot ~~in~~ that we adopt the mind-set of our times, but that we are known for our fierce ^lopposition toward our ages' devil-may-care attitude toward doctrine. Let us boldly confess our faith as it is clearly expressed in the Holy Scriptures.

¹⁰¹ Fraternal Appeal, 62.

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