

Does Endorsement of the Book of Concord Involve Endorsement of Every Statement in the Confessions?

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Dear Brethren:

A church without a confession is like an orchestra with no music. A church with an unclear confession is like a ship in a fog. A church with an otherwise good confession but including but one error is like a symphony where all is harmony but one part is out of tune. One false note or one singer out of pitch may mar the most beautiful chorus, just as one single glass in a window may change the effect of a most gorgeous work of art. When the Master Director, our Saviour, asks for a song of praise, thanksgiving, prayer, confession, from his Church, who are we to deny Him the harmony of Christian faith which He has planted in the hearts of His children, the clear notes of which He has recorded for us in Scripture?

We need to review the significance of our Confessions briefly in order that we may study the question before us in the proper perspective. Too many have begun to look upon them as a dead letter and as a more or less useless burden which the church carries around to slow its progress. And yet, each time we say "I believe," in confessing the Apostolic Creed, we might well consider our Christian prerogative. In the face of all the world we hurl that "I believe" as expressing the very victory of faith, and that, of my personal faith. We tremble with the responsibility of it; we are grateful for the privilege of it; we rejoice in the victory of it; we rise up ready to do battle for it—this God-given conviction that One, namely Christ, has redeemed my soul. This confession has become a very part of me, it is a personal thing, it characterizes me more than any description of my physical self or any enumeration of my natural attributes or characteristics.

Thus also in the case of a church. We do not, can not, must not, remove from the term Confession, the personal element and now of a sudden begin to think in terms of theology, dogmatics, theses and antitheses. No matter how many are along in the act of confessing, the central fact remains that a confession is a personal matter and a personal concern. But the content remains the same in the case of the one or the many, just as the content of the many voices and of the One Voice in Scripture is one, namely Christ. About that sacred name all voices blend of those who are members of the Christian Church from the beginning to the end of time, nay, into all eternity. That name above every name unites the voices of all the saints of God into one grand harmony, and that name thus becomes the distinguishing mark of every confession that is called Christian.

A confession, then, becomes a very simple thing. Its content is Christ. And whether this name is spoken in the babble of an infant or by the trembling mouth of the aged, by the learned or the unlearned, by the outcast or the respected, by the theologian or the layman, it is the earmark of a true Christian who owns the full riches of God's grace and holds in the hand of faith the inheritance of the saints. If it is as simple as that, there is no excuse for any Christian to fail in this self-evident activity of a believer. He will make known the name of Christ by his spoken word, by his Christian life—and there is that which unfailingly distinguishes a Christian in this—by his membership in a Christian church, by his aims and purposes and goals. Nay, we may say in deep earnestness that a Christian's whole being breathes a confession of Him who redeemed him by His blood.

When the question is asked, "Which Christ shall I confess?", or "How much of Christ shall I confess?", we may look up in surprise, as if the question is absurd and quite out of order. Yet it is Scripture which warns us that the time will come when men shall say, "Lo, here is Christ, or there," to deceive the hearts of many. So we ask deliberately, "Which Christ?" And the time has long been here when men are quite willing to confess the Man, Christ, though not the God-man, as if He can be divided and rent asunder.

When we ask the question, "Which Christ?", we find that this very question is anticipated in the Scriptures themselves. That the believers in the Old Testament period might not be confused, the Holy Spirit

has, by prophecy, by types, even in the whole sacrificial system described Him so clearly and definitely that He would be known in advance as if He were already there, and that He at His coming would be recognized and accepted for what He was. In the New Testament again He is carefully described, negatively and positively, so that no one in the future or in the present would be led astray or eventually have the excuse that they could not know. We would do well to study this more earnestly than we do, and to note that it is to a great extent concern for the enemies of the Church that has made this necessary. For faith is the opposite of doubt, and God does not want His Christians to be in doubt when the question is raised, "Which Christ?" When Peter says, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," we note at once the added description. Similarly Stephen in his confession, Peter in his sermon on Pentecost, Paul in his address before Festus and Agrippa, the Epistles, the Book of Revelation, the introduction to the Gospel of John. The early Christians in their baptismal formula included a description of this Christ which defined Him and identified Him apart from every other Christ or any false description of Him. And from the Apostolic Creed down to the present this has, after all, been a chief concern of the individual Christian and of the Christian Church, to define and describe the Christ in Whom they had put their faith, that there would be no question of identification, no mistake, no doubt, as if the Church with one voice declared: Here, in this Christ and none other, is the Rock of my salvation, my hope of salvation, my life and light and crown. "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Similarly, then, also in the case of that other question, "How much of Christ shall we confess?" The answer is given again in Scripture: the whole Christ, His whole person, His whole work, His whole word. Here, too, we may say that it is a matter of identification. But the question concerns our missionary activity also, so that when the Church goes out to declare this Christ, it is ready to tell the world, This is what He has done, This is what He has said, that your hope and confidence may be sure. Let us note well, we can not separate Christ from His work or His word. He is identified with both, as he is identified by both. One may say, I believe that Christ died; but if he does not believe in the Christ Who died **for us**, in our behalf, he simply does not have the true Christ, and his faith is vain. Another says, I believe that Christ said, "For God so loved the world" but if he can not with the same confidence continue the quotation to the end, he in plain words has a wrong Christ and not the true. In this way the confession of the individual Christian and the confession of the Church can not be satisfied with a half-Christ or a quarter-Christ, as if there were such a thing. Souls are at stake. The glory of Christ is at stake. We must be able to tell the world **Which Christ** and **How much of Christ**.

A salesman stepped into my office the other day. He had a good education. He had taught advanced work at two large universities. For some reason or another he let the conversation drift into the religious field, and soon let it become clear that his opinion was that of so many others that religion and religions were all the same. Let each believe what he saw fit, be sincere in this belief, and all would be well. I urged him as kindly as I could to consider that there was, after all, the matter of identification to consider and that the question of "Which Christ?" would have to be answered. Was it Christ Who taught, let us say, infant baptism? The Christ Who is true God or only true man? The Christ Who rose again from the dead? And we may go on from there to more pertinent questions that may trouble us: Is it the Christ who permits Himself to be identified with the Christ of the lodge? Who condones unionistic services with errorists? Who teaches prayer-fellowship with those of another faith or who cling persistently to certain errors against that Bible with which the true Christ has identified Himself? My salesman friend was quick to see the significance of all this, appearing even grateful for the suggestion that he think this over—and his assurance that he wanted to think this over and talk to me again seemed sincere.

Studying our confessions in this light we will soon learn that the Church down through the centuries has been conscious of its responsibility in this very thing. Confronted by the continual attacks against the person, work and word of Christ, and the repeated questionings "Which Christ?", "How much of Christ?", the Church has found it necessary to study the Scriptures ever more thoroughly and intensely to find the answer and to be able to ward off the errors which would point the way to another Christ. In all of this confessional activity, as we may call it, the Church has had but one aim, to identify itself with the one, holy, Christian Church of all ages and of all climes apart from which there is no salvation and no hope. It has ever been busy making sure, as it

were, that the true Christ dwelt in her midst for the comfort of the believers. It is true, words have been added to words, definitions to definitions, there are these and antitheses, and a whole, to some involved, system of doctrine has arisen about the person and word of Christ which seems utterly confusing and even unnecessary—for are we not urged to let our faith be as simple as that of a mere child, where a single-minded trust is the chief characteristic?

And yet, if we should analyze the simple faith of a child, say in the relation of this child to its mother, it has by that one act of trust cut through a rather intricate process, after all. It has chosen positively this mother and in the face of many an obstacle and danger thrown itself into its mother's arms. Negatively it rejected every other and singled out this one woman unerringly, though many arms may be raised to tempt him. In the case of a sheep the process seems even simpler, but given to analyzing as we are we might make the whole very intricate by describing the temptations of a sheep to choose another voice than that of the true shepherd, particularly if these voices became many and deceitful. The fact that an adult Christian has been endowed by God with a reason and a will and an emotional life which the enemy of our soul can approach from innumerable different angles to cause him to stray, as is proved by the history of the Church also in doctrinal matters, this fact will help us to realize how the Church has been obliged to define its Christ more and more definitely and, if you will, more discriminatingly with a wealth of detail regarding person, work and word that seems to leave many a humble Christian at least wondering if not confused and disturbed. And yet, in the end, in its confessions the true Church has succeeded in doing that one all-important thing of keeping the eyes of the souls committed to her care directed on the one Christ to the exclusion of every others, of defending these souls against the deceits of Satan, of giving voice to the deep conviction of the believer in the face of friend and foe, the happy response to the gracious invitation of Jesus Himself: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 10:32). In this confession the believer joins in the song of heaven, as it is written: "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul" (Ps. 103:20-22). And finally, by its confessions the Church is at work fulfilling the command of her Lord: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mat. 28:20). That word "all things" is there to remind us that our confession has the responsibility of stating definitely and clearly Who Christ is, and bringing to men the whole Christ.

Would it then not be wiser and better for the Church to point to the Bible as God's own revelation and statement to men and as a perfect reply to both questions? That would do away with much strife, bickering about words, even doubt as to whether or not our confession is correct in every way. To this we must answer that such a course would undoubtedly be the best, for that Word is clear and authoritative. And still God wants **our** confession; He wants my personal reply to the question, "Who is Christ?" It is only natural that human speech serve in this: the babbling of the infant or the more mature phraseology of the enlightened Christian. But what is more important: consider what men make of the Bible, its meaning and in particular its testimony regarding Christ, His person, work and word. What a confusion we see because of the insistence on putting reason above the Word (as in the case of the Reformed and Modernistic churches) or the tradition and authority of the church as a human institution above that Word; as in the Catholic Church. And the spirit of man so permeates the reading and interpretation of Scripture to the hurt of the true Church and its members, that it again has become necessary for the Church, because of the enemy, to state in its own words what the Scriptures actually say in reply to the questions above. And after these centuries of battle, of testing and proving, of examination and re-examination, of re-study in the light of the sacred Word, our Lutheran confessions still stand on the field of battle with the challenge of faith and holy assurance:

Only those who have despaired of finding the truth, only skeptics who are ever busy at learning and never reaching the knowledge of the truth can assert: this **men** have written, therefore it must contain error. If error could be proved in our symbols, then the rod would be broken over our symbols also; then they would not be symbols of the true, pure, orthodox church, but of a false,

impure, erroristic church, and no honest man could subscribe to them. But we challenge the whole world and all unbelievers and errorists, to discover one single doctrinal error in our Concordia. All the enemies of our church have spent themselves in vain in this pursuit for 300 years; but they have been put to shame in their attempt. They have shown that our symbols contain that which opposes their blind reason, and that we gladly grant; but they have failed in proving that they contradict the holy Scriptures in the smallest letter. Any similar attempt will now prove just as vain and shameful on the part of those who nevertheless want to be considered as the most faithful sons of our church. In their attempt to show that the voice of their pretended spiritual mother in her public confessions in part is the voice of error, they will prove nothing else than that they are bastards, who, because they do not believe the divine Word, deride that church as a liar, which confesses what she has found in the Scriptures as the faith of her heart. (Walther, *Syn. Ber. d. westl. Distr.*, 1858, p.19).

Our Lutheran confessions, going back to the ecumenical creeds and down to and including the Formula of Concord, one and all are torn in pain and anguish, even as the confession of a Job; they are singed with the flame of fire and sword, stained with the blood of martyrs, surrounded by the prayers of the believers, bedewed by their tears, and yet wafted on from one generation to the next, borne aloft as the standard of victory, of hope, of triumphant happiness, proclaiming His Name Who rules among His saints, world without end. This is its noble content, this also its aim and goal.

It is to this confession you and I as pastors have added our signature, and by this act we stand before the very God and in the company of a host of God's own. Does our signature imply an unconditional acceptance or a conditional one? Do we subscribe to the whole confession or only a part of the same? Are we Lutherans (i.e. Christians, believers) in part, in name, or in deed and altogether? Or is this manner of putting the question before us unfair? **Does endorsement of the Book of Concord involve endorsement of every statement in the confessions?** This is the wording of the question that has been submitted to me to answer. Much that pertains to this answer is contained in the foregoing, and on this background any further discussion may become quite brief. We shall try to make the answer as clear and definite as we can, without seeming to avoid such difficulties as the question presents.

If by the expression "**every statement in the confessions**" is meant every word, every phrase, every historical reference or statement, even every interpretation of Scripture, then we answer with a definite **no**. (The following pages lean heavily on Dr. Walther in *Syn. Ber. d. westl. Distr.*, 1858.) The confessions are not there to teach grammar, language, or history; nor do they pretend to do this. On this point we make a clear distinction between the Scriptures as the verbally inspired Word of God, where every statement is God's Own, whether it be in matters that pertain to human affairs or the spiritual things of God. There that word stand and shall stand: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" and again: "The scriptures can not be broken." The symbols are the confession of faith, i.e. a statement of what the church believes and holds. It is therefore a declaration pertaining to doctrine, the doctrine of the church. They symbols claim to be nothing else or more than this. Thus an endorsement of the symbols can mean nothing else, and at the same time nothing less, than an endorsement of the doctrinal content of the confessions. An unconditional endorsement means an endorsement of the whole doctrinal content without exception and with the whole hart. A conditional endorsement means an endorsement that either does not include the whole doctrinal content or is not sincere.

We may put it thus: where the writers of the confessions have been obliged to depend on their human knowledge of science, history, or things that do not pertain to doctrine, they may have erred. For this reason we may make an object of further investigation, and eventually reach another conclusion regarding the quotations ascribed to Ambrose and Augustine in articles 6, 18, and 20 of the Augsburg Confession. We may doubt an historical reference here or there which is not founded on Scripture. We may even question the interpretation of this or that passage of Scripture, remembering that the rule Scripture itself lays down for such interpretation as a requirement for orthodoxy is this that it must be according to the analogy of faith—Rom. 12:6. John Gerhard is quoted as follows: "Even though we may not always discover the real and special meaning of every passage, it

is sufficient in the interpretation of these passages that we present nothing that is contrary to the analogy of faith (*Aehnlichkeit des Glaubens*).” Furthermore we may disagree with or try to improve upon the manner of presentation of the building-up of an argument, so long as we do not disagree with the doctrine itself which is being presented, either as the main concern in the presentation or as a minor, necessary or apparently unnecessary part of the presentation. In the matter of adiaphora, we may disagree in judgment with regard to their use or non-use, but not in the doctrine or the principles regarding adiaphora taken from the Scriptures. Not one or all of these considerations affect the question of unconditional or conditional acceptance of the symbols of the church.

It will be helpful to review the various forms in which this conditional acceptance of the confessions has appeared: In one case it would mean that I subscribe to the confession in so far as they do not oppose the Scriptures or in so far as they agree with the same. Thus the Pietists made use of the formula: In so far as they do not militate against the Holy Scriptures, or: In so far as they agree with the Holy Scriptures. The Rationalists later adopted these formulas, though in a far wider sense. – Another conditional subscription is found in the formula: In so far as I acknowledge that the fundamental doctrines of the Bible are taught correctly or essentially correctly in the confessions. Thus the General Synod in its time. – A third: I subscribe to the symbols as they are rightly interpreted or understood according to the Scriptures. Thus even the Reformed could subscribe. – In this connection we remember the conditional acceptance of the symbols in their “historical meaning” by the Iowa Synod, which urged that the symbols should be understood as they referred to specific conditions existing at the time. – A fourth would say that he accepts that, and only that, which is of a strictly confessional nature in the symbols. Thus Löhe said: “I distinguish between that which is stated confessionally and that which is not so stated,—and I distinguish still more. I should never dream of clinging to the letter and becoming guilty of symbololatry...I accept what is said confessionally in the confessions.” Thus a great part of the doctrinal content of the symbols would be lost. – (Ad 4: Walther adds a footnote regarding the Iowa Synod: “The Iowa Synod says the same of Löhe, cf. above, in these words: “As a real confession, a norm of teaching that binds the consciences, only the thetical and anti-thetical decisions can be considered which each article states and establishes against the lie and the error. Not every system of proof, every explanation, etc., which really is a side-issue (*accidens*) in a confessional writing, can be made a doctrinal statement which binds the conscience. What the symbols want to establish as symbolic, that has symbolic authority.”) – A fifth would say: I subscribe to certain symbols both of the Lutheran and of the Reformed church, in so far as these agree with one another. Thus the church of the Prussian Union. – A sixth: I subscribe to the symbols, but with the understanding that even such doctrines as are clearly stated and established in the symbols are to be considered open questions and treated as such as soon as a difference of opinion arises concerning them among the confessors. Thus the Buffalo Synod in the doctrines of the Church and the office of the keys. – Finally, a seventh conditional acceptance is that proposed by the rationalists of accepting the spirit, but not the letter, of the confessions.

All of this shows how dangerous a conditional subscription to the confessions is and can become. As for an unconditional acceptance let us consider again that this implies an endorsement of all doctrinal statements in the symbolical books of our church, whether these statements appear in the form of these and antitheses, as side-remarks or as a part of the line of proof regarding other doctrines. Everything of doctrinal import is included and without any exception. Does the church have a right to demand this of its pastors?

Here it is well to bear in mind what the purpose of a symbol is. In general this purpose is a) that the church by means of its symbols clearly and definitely confess its faith and teaching before the whole world; b) that she thereby separate herself from all erring communions and sects; and c) that she possess one common, sure and unanimously accepted form and norm of doctrine for her teachers, out of and in accordance with which all other writings and doctrines may and must be judged and regulated, when they are to be examined for acceptance. If the church demands only a conditional endorsement from her servants, then she has a) retracted before the whole world the claim that she really has the faith and the doctrine which she has laid down in the symbols; her confession is therefore not really a confession, and she may consequently be justly accused of being double-tongued and of deceiving the world with her symbols. b) The church by demanding only a

conditional endorsement, does not by means of her symbols distinguished herself from the erring sects, but puts herself on a common level with them since by her own admission her symbols contain errors. As a result the church is c) without a unanimously accepted, sure and common form and norm of doctrine according to which each individual may judge his own doctrine and at the same time judge all other writings and teachings.

The **specific** purpose of the symbols is this that the church may a) assure herself that those who desire to undertake the office of teaching in the church really have the orthodox understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the pure and unadulterated faith which she herself owns; b) that the church may bind these by a holy promise to preach this faith pure and unmixed (lauter). If they can not make this promise, it follows that the church must ask them to withdraw from the office of teaching in the church either by not accepting the office or by leaving the office if they already are there, and not disturb the church by false doctrine and deceive her members into these false teachings. This special purpose of a subscription to the symbols will be forfeited altogether, so far as the servants of the church are concerned, if they accept the symbols only conditionally. For as soon as the church herself has permitted her servants to adopt the opinion that doctrines may be contained in the symbols which are contrary to the Holy Scriptures, she has a) lost the assurance with regard to the faith of the subscriber which an unconditional subscription would give her; and b) she has thereby cancelled her own demand that her teachers teach the Word of God pure and unadulterated in accordance with the symbols as the doctrinal norm. And again, in the same moment as a congregation, through its pastor's subscription to the symbols, is seeking a guaranty of this that neither a teacher who is uncertain in his conscience nor a deliberate errorist may preach to her all sorts of errors as though she had a right to do this, this guaranty is lost to the congregation by his demand for a merely conditional subscription; nay the congregation thereby puts in to the hands of the false teacher a weapon against itself and robs itself of the right to depose from office the one who teaches contrary to her symbols. By her public confessions, adopted in so many cases after serious discord, the church has finally brought to a close and settled doctrinal controversies and established peace in the church. A conditional endorsement will in such cases only serve to lay a foundation for a renewal of strife and for continual unrest.

Let it be said in all earnestness that every conditional endorsement of the symbols is a backdoor by which dishonesty enters to deride the church and bring to naught the whole purpose of the symbols and of subscription to the same. In the case of honest men who simply can not test the whole book of Concord according to the Word of God and finally can not say with certainty that the whole doctrinal content of the confessions agrees fully with the Scriptures, or who are in anxious doubt concerning certain points—such men most certainly, at least in the state in which they find themselves, are not capable of assuming the office of teaching in the church; for “a bishop must be...apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2). He must be one who holds “fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Tit. 1:9).

On this whole matter of subscription to the confessions Müller, in his classic introduction to the *Concordia* (Gütersloh, 1876) p. 30-32, says (translated by Y.):

We hold that the church is altogether within its rights when she demands of her servants that they recognize the authority of the church symbols and declare themselves unequivocally in their favor. In itself it is of no importance whether this is done through a formal oath or through a promise accompanied by the giving of the hand, through a written statement or by the simple promise by word of mouth; for the Church may surely presuppose on the part of those who desire to become her servants, i.e. heralds for the Truth, that she has to do with honest men. The form of this declaration may thus be irrelevant, but the content is not; for this must declare definitely and clearly that with which the Church is really concerned, namely the acknowledgment of the scripturalness of her symbols in all that concerns doctrine, and the promise—because of the scripturalness of the same, and therefore not *quatenus* but *quia*—to conform faithfully in doctrine to these symbols. It is self-evident that only he can make this declaration who in his heart is convinced that the symbols of the Church are the adequate expression of Scripture teaching, that this teaching has sprung up from the soil of the divine

Word and agrees with this Word. If this conviction is there, then subscription to the symbols is not a bond for the spirit, nor a burden on a person's conscience; if this conviction is not there, then there can be no talk of a subscription, and therefore not either of the acceptance of an office in the Church. For the Church not only has the right but also the obligation to inquire into the religious conviction of those who desire to be her servants; she must, in so far as this is possible, obtain the assurance that her servants are for her, not against her, that they gather with her and do not scatter. It is, in fact, more than naive to seek an office in the Church and at the same time expect the liberty and convenience of not only preaching another doctrine than that of the Church, and that with the same power and authorization, but also—and that is the necessary consequence—to attack the doctrine of the Church, declare it to be false, and reject it. Whoever seeks an office, either in the State or in the Church, undertakes duties, the performance of which necessarily is associated with the forfeiting of a part of his personal liberty; he enters upon a relation of self-restriction, nay, an unrestricted personal (subjective) liberty is impossible even in living together with other people, even apart from the restraints imposed by the office itself.

From the introduction to the Book of Concord as edited by special resolution of the Missouri Synod in the year 1917, I quote the following, p. 7ff.:

The position accorded the symbols in the Lutheran Church is clearly defined by the Book of Concord itself. According to it Holy Scripture alone is to be regarded as the sole rule and norm by which absolutely all doctrines and teachers are to be judged. The object of the Augustana, as stated in its Preface, was to show “what manner of doctrine has been set forth, in our lands and churches, from the Holy Scriptures and the pure Word of God.” And in its Conclusion the Lutheran confessors declare: “Nothing has been received on our part against Scripture or the Church Catholic,” and “we are ready, God willing, to present ampler information according to the Scriptures.” “*Iuxta Scripturam*”—such are the closing words of the Augsburg Confession. The Lutheran Church knows no other principle. The Lutheran symbols, therefore, are not intended to supplant the Scriptures, nor do they do so. They do, however, set forth what has been at all times the unanimous understanding of the pure Christian doctrine adhered to by sincere and loyal Lutherans everywhere; and, at the same time, they show convincingly from the Scriptures that our forefathers did indeed manfully confess nothing but God's eternal truth, which every Christian is in duty bound to, and consistently always will believe, teach, and confess... After its adoption by the Lutheran electors, princes, and estates, the Formula of Concord, and with it the entire Book of Concord, was, as stated, solemnly subscribed to by about 8,000 theologians, pastors, and teachers, the pledge reading as follows: “Since now, in the sight of God and all Christendom, we wish to testify to those now living and those who shall come after us that this declaration herewith presented concerning all the controverted articles aforementioned and explained, and no other, is our faith, doctrine, and confession, in which we are also willing, by God's grace, to appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, and give an account of it; and that we will neither privately nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to it, but, by the help of God's grace, intend to abide thereby: therefore, after mature deliberation, we have, in God's fear and with the invocation of His name, attached our signatures with our own hands.” ... They declare: “This Confession also, by the help of God, we will retain to our last breath, when we shall go forth from this life to the heavenly fatherland, to appear with joyful and undaunted mind and with a pure conscience before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Therefore we also have determined not to depart even a finger's breadth either from the subjects themselves or from the phrases which are found in them, but the Spirit of the Lord aiding us, to persevere constantly, with the greatest harmony, in this godly agreement, and we intend to examine all controversies according to this true norm and declaration of the pure doctrine.”

The following section on “Pledging of Ministers to the Confessions” shows that the pastors and teachers were asked to pledge then as now.

Our Confessions belong to us personally in so far as we make them our own by a faith which conforms in all things to these Confessions. They are not our own, as if we can do with them as we please. They belong to the Church as the standard of this Church in war and in peace. These Confessions are based on the Word; they proclaim that Word; and they shall abide because the doctrines they proclaim are God’s own. He who subscribes to them, let him do it without any reservation, fear or doubting, for they are the voice of the bride, the Church, as she hails her Lord, acknowledges His grace and love, glories in His truth and wonders at the divine mystery of His Presence. Though these Confessions list many teachings, they breathe the same spirit and point to but one object, the Christ of Calvary. Because they describe Him, it is not for us to change them on any point, for fear such change will point us to another Christ, even as two individuals may be exactly alike except in a single feature, the color of the eyes. Our Confessions are supported by two main pillars, the two principles upon which our Lutheran Church is built, the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures and the doctrine of justification by faith alone. By means of these two principles all teaching of the Confessions are knit together into one whole, they permeate every teaching, give meaning to them all. Those who deny wholehearted endorsement to one teaching, no matter how minor it may seem to be, in reality deny the very heart of our Lutheran faith, for no doctrine of Scripture can be separated from these two main principles. To deny endorsement to a single doctrine of the Confessions is to deny both the clearness and the authority of Scripture Itself, which teaches these doctrines.

Let us look to ourselves in these perilous times when so many are wavering and even rebuke ourselves into a more earnest attitude over toward our Confessions, remembering

- that it is an ignorant Christianity which does not see,
- an indifferent Christianity which does not care,
- a lazy Christianity which does not study and search the Scriptures and the Confessions,
- a proud Christianity which demands to know rather than to believe,
- a naive Christianity which refuses to recognize its enemies,
- an unthankful Christianity which does not recognize its treasures,
- a disloyal Christianity which will not confess that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

And though we, as the fathers of old, by confessing, may have to become confessors in the sense of martyrs, being misunderstood, derided, persecuted, pray God that He may grant us grace to remain faithful to that eternal Truth which He revealed to us in Christ and which is confessed so nobly in our glorious Confessions.