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## LUTHERANISM AND PURITANISM.<sup>1)</sup>

Four hundred years have elapsed since Dr. Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. Through this chosen vessel of His the Lord brought about the reformation of His Church. We heartily thank Him, especially during this year of jubilee, for the deliverance He has thus granted us from the slavery of the Bishop of Rome. This is the great theme of innumerable sermons preached, of countless discussions carried on, and of numberless books and pamphlets written within the folds of the Protestant Church during these months of rejoicing. But we Lutherans are just as grateful to our God for having kept us in the faith again restored to His flock by the great Reformer, and for having guarded us against the deceit of the many false prophets that have gone out into the world since the days of Luther.

Among the many pernicious sects which sprang up in the countries blessed of God through the Reformation, the Puritan is one of the most conspicuous. A comparison of Lutheranism with Puritanism would therefore not be out of place nor without value to us at this time.

“Puritans” was the name given to such in England as were opposed to the Established Church of that country during

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1) This article and the next one were prepared for a new edition of the commemorative volume of essays on the Reformation, *Four Hundred Years*. Since the new edition will not be forthcoming soon, we publish them here.

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## THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS.—ABSOLUTION.

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### THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS.

Rome to-day as stoutly as ever boasts of being the sole possessor of the power of the keys. She maintains as arrogantly as ever that the so-called "Holy Father" is the visible head of the Church, from whom, as Christ's vicar on earth, all power in the Church emanates. Again and again Rome declaims: Christ said to Peter: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven"; Peter was thus made the head of the Church, the Pope is his successor, *ergo*, the Pope possesses the keys of heaven exclusively; the Roman Catholic Church is the only saving Church. *In ecclesia salus; extra ecclesiam nulla salus!* All other Churches are synagogs of Satan; with but few exceptions all non-Catholics are forever lost. Such are the exalted, but vain claims of Antichrist.

Again, *Absolution*, based on the Scriptural doctrine of the Office of the Keys, is anathematized by Rome, grossly misunderstood and severely criticized by non-Lutherans. Both doctrines, however, that of *absolution* as well as that of the Office of the Keys being a "peculiar Church-power," are founded on the impregnable Rock of Scriptures; both are noble heritages of the Reformation; both are distinctive doctrines of the Lutheran Church. Hence it behooves us in this, the four-hundredth anniversary of the glorious Reformation, to pass both in review, albeit briefly.

Now, what answer does our Church make over against the vaunting pretensions of Antichrist? To whom do the keys of the kingdom originally and immediately belong? Clear and unmistakable are the words of the *Smalcald Articles*: “But over and above all this we are to confess that the keys belong and have been given not to one man alone, but to *the whole Church*, as this can be clearly and satisfactorily proved. For just as the promise of the Gospel belongs to the whole Church, originally and immediately, so also do the keys belong to the whole Church immediately; for the keys are nothing else than the office through which those promises are communicated to every one who desires them. It is evident, then, that the Church, in effect, has the power to appoint her ministers. And Christ in these words: ‘Whatsoever ye shall bind,’ etc., clearly indicates to whom He has given the keys, namely, to the whole Church, when He says: ‘Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.’”

So our Church teaches that Christ gave the power of the keys *immediately and originally*—not to Peter exclusively, much less to the Pope,—not to the ministers of the Gospel, through whom this power would then *mediately* pass into the possession of the Church; but, on the contrary, *immediately* this power is given to the Church, the believers, through whom the ministers receive this high office.

In complete harmony with the declaration of the *Smalcald Articles*, Luther puts this deep doctrine into these simple words: “The Office of the Keys is the peculiar Church-power which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of penitent sinners unto them, but to retain the sins of the impenitent, as long as they do not repent.”

Now the question arises: What say the Scriptures? The seats of doctrine are: Matt. 16, 19; 18, 18; John 20, 23.

In Matt. 16, 19, the Lord, addressing Peter, says: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in

heaven." This is the Pòpe's stronghold. We do not intend to investigate his threadbare arguments. The Pope was never known to care for a text of Scripture, except as a pretext *ad majorem papae gloriam*. Be it said, however, that this very text, like a thunderbolt from heaven, demolishes all his preposterous pretensions. Briefly, what is the import of this passage?

Jesus had asked His *disciples*, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" The question was directed to *all* His disciples. "And *they* said, Some say Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." So there were various opinions afloat. "He saith unto them" (to His disciples), "But who say ye that I am?" What is your belief? "And Simon Peter answered and said," in the name of those addressed "*ye*," in the name of all *disciples*: "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" That was Peter's faith, that was the *disciples'* faith. This is plain from the words of Jesus, v. 20, where He charged His *disciples*, not Peter alone, "that *they* should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ." Hence what follows applies to *all* His disciples, though naturally Christ addresses Peter, the spokesman: "*Blessed* art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." To know and to believe the mystery of mysteries which he confessed: the *Son of Man*, Mary's son, is at the same time "the Christ," the promised Messiah, "*the Son of the living God*," is divine, not human knowledge. Peter had made a great *confession* in his own name and that of the disciples. The Lord shows him the origin of that faith, and then proceeds: "And I say also unto thee that *thou art Peter*." Peter means rock-man; "Thou art Peter" = thou art a rock-man. You have based your faith upon rock—solid, safe, unshakable. This rock is expressed in your confession: "*The Son of Man is the Christ, the Son of the living God*"; and "*on this Rock*," on *Myself*, "I will build My Church."

Now, what does it mean when Christ, continuing, says

to Peter: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven"? Beyond the shadow of a doubt this: You are *blessed* on account of *your faith*; you are a rock-man on account of *your faith*; on account of *your faith* I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Peter possesses the keys because he is a *believer*, and all who confess with Peter: Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God, are founded on the Rock, Christ, are His disciples, belong to the Church, possess the keys of the kingdom. Luther correctly declares: "We are all Peters if we believe like Peter." This is the only admissible meaning according to text and context, and Matt. 18, 18, the parallel passage, emphasizes this truth. Having spoken of excommunication by the *Church*, Christ adds: "Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever *ye* shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever *ye* shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Not Peter alone, but all the disciples of Christ, "*ye*," the Church, and if there be but "two or three gathered together in His name," possess the power of the keys. "O that this passage were not in the Gospel!" Luther exclaims ironically. "What a fine thing that would be for the Pope! For here Christ gives the keys to the *whole Church* and not to St. Peter. And here belongs also the same saying, Matt. 16, 18, 19, where He gives the keys to Peter on behalf of the *whole Church*. For in this 18th chapter the Lord makes a gloss upon His own words, showing to whom He had previously (Matt. 16) given the keys in the person of St. Peter. They are given to *all Christians*, and not to the person, St. Peter." (*Buechlein von der Beichte*, Erl. 27, 363.)

Again, after His resurrection, Christ repeated, corroborated, this authority given to His disciples: "Whosoever sins *ye* remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins *ye* retain, they are retained." But before doing so, He says: "Peace be unto you; as My Father hath sent Me, so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them and saith, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." John 20, 23. Thus He manifested unmistakably that the keys of the kingdom are a gift to

such as have *received the Holy Ghost*, to true believers, to the Church. "The keys are not the Pope's (as he falsely claims)," says Luther, "but the Church's; that is, they belong to the people of Christ, the people of God, or the holy Christian people all the world over, or wherever there are Christians. . . . Just as Baptism, the Sacraments, God's Word, are not the Pope's, but belong to the people of Christ, so the keys are, and are called, *claves ecclesiae*, not *claves papae*." (*Schrift von Konzilien und Kirchen*, St. Louis Ed. XVI, 2279.)

Wherein does this peculiar Church-power consist? According to Matt. 16 in "to bind" and "to loose"; Matt. 18 speaks of "trespasses," "faults," that are to be bound or to be loosed, and John 20 says in plain words that this binding and loosing is "to remit sins" and "to retain sins." *Luther*: "Christ, our Lord, has said to His *disciples* and to the *whole Church*: I command you to forgive and to retain sin." (St. Louis Ed. XI, 763.)

Hence, Peter, extolling the high dignity of Christians, writes: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal *priesthood*, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." 1 Pet. 2, 9. "To show forth the praises of God," to preach the Gospel is the duty, the privilege, of all Christians. This is the Office of the Keys in the wider sense. From it flows the power to forgive and to retain sins. "There is no difference here, except that the same Word which in the preaching of the Gospel is usually everywhere publicly and generally proclaimed to every one is in private absolution declared privately to one or more who desire it." (*Luther*, St. Louis Ed. XI, 721.)

Since, then, all believing Christians have the power of the keys, who is to exercise this office *publicly*? All? Luther having been charged by Emser with teaching that the general priesthood made all to be preachers, he replied: "You lie when you say I have made all laymen bishops, priests, and ecclesiastics, so that they may at once, *uncalled*, assume the office; you

do not add, pious as you are, that I also wrote: *Only extreme necessity* can justify one in doing that to which he has not been regularly called." (Waleh XVII, 1597.)

*Chemnitz* (*Examen Conc. Trid.*, cap. 85, p. 1687) relates that at his time the Jesuits ridiculed the Lutherans thus: "Then cobblers and tailors, cooks and day-laborers, have the power of the keys, and thus you build your own Babel and introduce endless confusions." He replied: "Who will deny that '*in case of need every believer may baptize,*' etc.? And this case of extreme necessity the Church has always made an exception, as Jerome testified against the Luciferians, and Augustine against Fortunatus. But, except in case of necessity, this is allowed to no one, unless he be a regularly called and appointed servant of the Church. For this would be to violate the divine rule: 'How can they preach except they be sent?' Rom. 10, 15. Again, 'They ran, and I did not send them.'" —

Who is to exercise the office *publicly*? Luther says, if every one would preach, who would constitute the hearers? If all would preach, there would be utter confusion and babble like that of frogs in a pond. — God is a God of order. In the Church there is a special office of the ministry. The incumbents called by the congregations are delegated to perform this Office of the Keys publicly. In Acts 20, 28 they are designated "overseers," and their duty is "to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." In 1 Cor. 4, 1 they are styled "stewards of the mysteries of God" and "ministers of Christ." In 2 Cor. 2, 5 Paul speaks of them as "your servants for Jesus' sake." So there is a "flock," and there are "overseers"; there are "servants" who preach, and people to whom they preach; there are "ministers of Christ," and such as they minister unto. The Bible and Luther teach that every congregation possesses the power of the keys, and that all believing Christians are priests and called to show forth the praises of God; but this priesthood does not involve the right of every Christian to preach and teach *publicly*. Hence the *Augsburg Confession* declares: "No one dare publicly teach or preach,

or administer the Sacraments, unless he be rightly called.” (Art. XIV.)

Nor does this establish a superiority of the ministry over the laity. “One is your Master, even Christ; but ye are all brethren.” *Luther*: “There is in reality no difference between the bishops, elders, and priests, and the laity, no one being distinguished from other Christians, *except that he has an office*, which is committed to him to preach the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments; just as a mayor or a judge is in no wise distinguished from other citizens, except that the government of the city is entrusted to him.” (Walch XIX, 1340.)

The congregation of *believers*—not the Pope, not the bishops, not the ministry—originally and immediately possesses the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16, 19; 18, 18; John 20, 23); the congregation of believers is originally and immediately commissioned to preach the Gospel to every creature and to administer the Sacraments; the congregation of believers is the body to whom all spiritual power originally and immediately belongs; the congregation of believers is entrusted with the power of appointing “overseers over the flock,” “stewards of the mysteries of God,” pastors, ministers, who in their name preach, baptize, administer the Lord’s Supper, absolve; the congregation of believers constitutes a true spiritual democracy.

#### ABSOLUTION.

The power of the keys as involved in this whole discussion refers principally to the power to forgive sins, commonly called Absolution.

In perfect agreement with the doctrine briefly stated in the foregoing pages the Lutheran pastor, after a short confessional service, says to penitent sinners:—

“Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins, in the



name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The minister says to penitent sinners: "I forgive you all your sins." Does he forgive sins by virtue of a peculiar power dwelling in him? No. He does it "by virtue of his office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word." The power is not in him, but in the *Word*. Does he forgive sin of his own authority? No, but "in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ." Who is it, then, that forgives sin? The Lord Jesus Christ through His servant. Is there anything wrong about this? No; St. Paul did the very same thing. As a minister of Christ he forgave the sins of the man who on account of the sin of incest had been expelled from the Church at Corinth, but who had repented of his error. In reference hereto Paul writes: "If I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes *for gave I it in the person of Christ.*" 2 Cor. 2, 10.

The words of Jesus, spoken to His disciples, are plain as plain can be: "Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." John 20, 21—23. Again: "Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matt. 18, 18.

But, still, notwithstanding Scripture is so clear regarding absolution, this ministerial absolution is a stumbling-block for many, and the doctrine, so full of comfort for terrified consciences, is viewed with suspicion even by some Lutherans.

All objections to this doctrine, however, find their cause in the ignorance of the Gospel of Christ, in the ignorance of the atonement of Christ, which the Gospel proclaims; in the ignorance of the means of grace, which impart the atonement to the sinner.

Absolution is firmly based on two indisputable facts:

1. God is perfectly reconciled through Christ to every sinner;
2. God has commanded this reconciliation to be preached to every sinner, to every penitent sinner, who longs for the sweet consolation of the Gospel.

When the truth of that wonderful Pauline passage, "The just shall live by faith," flashed upon Luther's mind, the cardinal principle of Christianity had been rediscovered. It was in defense of this doctrine—justification, forgiveness of sins, by faith alone, "the principal article of the Christian faith," "the only key to the whole Bible," "the article with which the Church stands and falls"—that Luther nailed the Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg on that ever memorable October 31, 1517.

Forgiveness of sins! Three small words, and yet how much they imply!—"Sin is the transgression of the Law." 1 John 3,4. *All men are sinners.* "There is no difference; *all have sinned*, and come short of the glory of God." Rom. 3. And the result? "Your sins have *separated* between you and your God." Is. 59,2. God pronounces a *curse* upon every sinner: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all* things which are written in the book of the Law to *do* them." Gal. 3. To be a sinner means to be a "child of wrath," Eph. 2, a damned person. Is there a way of escape? None that man can devise. What man, however, could not do God in His mercy has done. What did He do? Beautifully this is set forth in 2 Cor. 5, 19—21: "*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*"

Here are the contents of the Gospel in small compass. The world was at enmity with God. A reconciliation must be effected. Man could not bring it about. God's love to the

world, lost in sin, prompted Him to do it. "God was *in Christ*, reconciling the world unto Himself." "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to *redeem* them that were under the Law." Gal. 4. His purpose of coming into the world "to *save* sinners," 1 Tim. 1, 15, Christ achieved: "Christ *hath redeemed* us from the curse of the Law." Gal. 3. How? He "who knew no sin was made sin for us." "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Is. 53, 6. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." When Christ, expiring on the cross, more than 1900 years ago, cried out, "It is finished!" *God reconciled the world* unto Himself for Christ's sake. And in proof of the fact that this redemptive work was complete, God raised Christ from the dead. So God *is* reconciled with the whole world. No one need do or suffer anything to appease the wrath of God on account of the trespasses committed. In Christ, God now looks upon man as though he had never offended Him. In plain words this truth is expressed thus: "not imputing their trespasses unto them," *i. e., to the world*. In corroboration of this glorious fact St. John writes: "Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of *the whole world*." 1 John 2, 2.

To summarize the truths unfolded thus far: 1. God is *angry* at the sin of man; sin separates between Him and man. Is. 59, 2; Gal. 3. — 2. "When we were enemies, we were *reconciled* to God by the death of His Son." Rom. 5, 10.

The fact is accomplished — God *is* reconciled. But God's love prompted Him to do still more. In order that the sinner should know of this fact, — reconciliation completed, — aye, that the sinner should come into actual possession of it, God committed unto His ambassadors "*the word of reconciliation*." They are to cry out to a rebellious world, "God *is* reconciled! God beseeches you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God." Believe this *word*; accept the reconciliation, and the deed is done. This is the Gospel-message. "Preach the *Gospel* to every creature," says Christ in His last Great Commission. What does that say? 1. Bring the Gospel,

*i. e.*, the glad tidings of the gracious forgiveness of sin, the glad tidings of pardon, to the world, and whosoever believes this Gospel is saved, his sins are forgiven.

But God's love even went beyond this. Knowing how slow of heart man is to believe, Christ not only commanded His disciples to publish these glad tidings in a general way, but He commissioned them to announce the reconciliation made by Him in particular to individuals. "Peace be unto you," Christ said after His resurrection to His disciples; "*as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.*" And breathing on them, He said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." Christ's whole work of redemption had but one purpose in view: to bring peace, forgiveness of sin, reconciliation, to a sin-stricken world. To the multitudes He preached the Gospel of the kingdom; to individuals He said, "Peace be unto you." "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." This power to forgive sins to penitent sinners Christ delegated to His disciples: "*As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.*" Thus Christ instituted the Office of the Keys, commonly called Absolution. What, then, is absolution? *It is the Gospel, the glad tidings of the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, the reconciliation with God, applied to individuals.*

True to their commission the apostles preached repentance and forgiveness of sins among all nations and forgave sins to individuals. The apostles possessed this power and exercised it—that is indisputable. The power was not granted to the apostles, however, in their capacity of *apostles*, but as *believers*, as disciples. It is a peculiar *Church-power*—the ambassadors of Christ acting in the name and by authority of the Church.

Now, what objections can be raised to absolution in view of the facts that God is reconciled with the world, and that God *commands* that this "word of reconciliation" be preached? What is there to prevent a Christian brother from saying to another, distressed on account of his sins: God is reconciled

with the *world* by His Son, you belong to the *world*, and therefore He is reconciled with *you*? What valid objection can be made to the called minister's saying to penitent sinners: Be assured, Christ is the Physician of the sick, the sin-sick; your sins are blotted out by His blood; "by His stripes ye were healed"?

Popery! A rag of popery! cry some. — These people know not whereof they speak. The Biblical doctrine of absolution has nothing in common with the blasphemous auricular confession of Rome. Why, it was against this very abuse of the Catholic Church that Luther was impelled to nail his famous Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg.

Rome has limited the power of absolution to its priesthood. The priest is the *judge* of man's sins. At his will he pardons or condemns. Sins not confessed to the priest cannot be forgiven. What says Scripture? "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults." Ps. 19, 12.

From another quarter comes a voice reiterating the objection of the Pharisee: "Who can forgive sins but God only?" True. In the Lord's Prayer we ask God: "Forgive us our trespasses." The psalmist exults: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all Thine iniquities." Ps. 103, 2. 3. If God does not forgive our sins, we remain under its burden though man absolve us a thousand times. God only can forgive sins. But the question is: How does God forgive sins? Immediately perhaps, by a voice from heaven or by an inner voice in the heart? Luther met such enthusiasts. He writes: "If you do not seek forgiveness of sins in the *Word*, you will gape to heaven in vain for grace, or, as they say, for the inward forgiveness." (*Von den Schlus-seln*. St. L. XIX, 1174.) "We should and must firmly maintain that God will not deal with us frail beings except through His external Word and Sacraments. And all that is boasted of independent of such Word and Sacraments (as being the Spirit) is the very devil himself." (*Smalcald Articles*, Art. VIII.)

God forgives sins through the Gospel. Herein the power lies, not in man. "God hath committed unto *us* the word of reconciliation," says Paul. This Gospel has been entrusted to *us* — to *men*, to the Church. "Go ye, preach *the Gospel*," says Christ to *men*. Whosoever believes this Gospel preached by men *has* forgiveness of sins, absolution. To *men* Christ said: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." God forgives sins through the Gospel entrusted to *men*, who are to proclaim: God is reconciled! If it be said man may come to a full assurance of the forgiveness of his sins by the reading of the Word, the answer still is: he received this assurance through *men*, through the Word of the apostles and prophets, not by a voice coming from the skies, nor by an inner revelation. It remains forever true: God, having entrusted "the word of reconciliation" to the Church, thereby has enjoined upon her the duty of forgiving sins.

But still another objection is made by the opposition: To forgive sins man must be omniscient; he must be able to see the state of another man's heart to know infallibly whether a person desiring forgiveness is worthy thereof. We answer: This is a false assumption. Absolution does not pass judgment on the condition of *man's* heart, but it declares the condition of *God's* heart, and this we know: God *is* reconciled. Since God is reconciled with the whole world, there is not a single man on earth to whom the sweet message cannot be brought: God is reconciled also with you. This declaration is valid. God says so. He has given us the "*word* of reconciliation." This *word* man should accept, believe; if man rejects it, that is his fault. "Many do not believe the Gospel, but the Gospel does not lie or fail on that account. A king gives you a castle; if you do not accept the gift, the king has not on this account lied nor failed, but you have deceived yourself, and it is your own fault; the king did certainly give it." (*Luther, St. L. XIX, 946.*)

Finally, in the last analysis, which is the root of all errors with reference to absolution? Says *Dr. F. Pieper* in *Distinctive*

*Doctrines and Usages:* "The main reason why so many Christians take offense at the practise of absolution is to be found in their inadequate ideas as to what the Gospel of Christ properly is. Their conceptions of the *vicarious work of Christ*, and consequently of the *Gospel* also, fail to come up to the Biblical standard. They think that Christ has brought about so much for us that *we* now, by our conversion, faith, and prayers, render God fully propitious, and thus obtain forgiveness of sins. Hence they conceive the Gospel to be the declaration of certain *conditions* on which God would forgive sins. With many Christians and teachers the Gospel is a mere *plan* to save sinners, Christ having caused in the heart of God a certain *tendency* to forgive sin, men *completing* the change in the heart of God by their being sorry for their sins, by their praying to God for forgiveness, by their earnest endeavors to lead a better life, etc. But these conceptions both of the work of Christ and the Gospel are altogether wrong. Christ has already perfectly and completely reconciled the whole world unto God, and the Gospel, being the message of what Christ has done for mankind, is the 'word of reconciliation,' *viz.*, the word stating that God is reconciled — *perfectly and completely* reconciled — through Christ to the whole world and every individual sinner. The Gospel is not a word which teaches how *men* might by their own exertions render God fully propitious, but a word which assures us that God *has been* reconciled to all men through the vicarious sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, to preach the Gospel does not mean to lay before men a mere *plan* of salvation, or to declare the *conditions* of forgiveness, but preaching the Gospel is preaching pardon itself, salvation itself, 'remission of sins' itself. Luke 24, 47. The Gospel is 'nothing else than a great letter of pardon directed to the whole world.' Hence it is that Luther frequently says: 'A minister preaching the Gospel cannot open his mouth without constantly remitting sin.' Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, there absolution is pronounced. *It is from this conception of the Gospel that the Lutheran practise of absolution is to be judged and*

*understood.* It should be borne in mind also that God has already *absolved* the whole world in laying the sins of the whole world on Christ and in raising up Christ from the dead. With *our* sins upon Him Christ entered into the prison-house of death; absolved from *our* sins He was set free in His resurrection. Hence it is seen that the resurrection of Christ actually involves an absolution of the whole world, and *the absolution we pronounce is nothing but a repetition or echo of what God has long since pronounced.*”

“In short,” says Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the American Luther, “the Gospel is a universal absolution, brought from heaven to the whole world by men, sealed with the blood and death of Christ, and confirmed by God Himself most grandly and solemnly in the glorious resurrection of our Savior. And just because the Gospel is an absolution of all men, on account of the perfect redemption of the world, which is already accomplished, therefore also a minister of the Gospel may and shall, in the name of God, assure each and every man who, as a poor sinner, desires forgiveness of the remission of sins. Denying the minister this prerogative is denying him the power of proclaiming the Gospel in its entirety and completeness. For whosoever believes with all his heart that Christ has blotted out the sins of all men, how can he take exception to Christ’s minister’s saying to a man who professes to believe in Christ, Thy sins are forgiven thee!”

As to the great *comfort* afforded by absolution we quote from the *Augsburg Confession*, Article 25: “The people are diligently instructed with regard to the comfort given by the word of *absolution*, and the high and great estimation in which it is to be held; for it is not the word or voice of the individual present, but *it is the word of God*, who here forgives sins; for it is spoken in God’s stead and by His command. Concerning this command and power of the keys, it is taught with the greatest assiduity how comforting, how useful they are to terrified consciences, and, besides, how God requires confidence in this absolution, no less than if the voice of God were heard



from heaven; and by this we comfort ourselves, and know that through such faith we obtain the remission of sins.”

Finally, if the question be asked, Why is the same grace of God offered and sealed in *several ways*—in the Gospel, in the Lord’s Supper, in Baptism, in Absolution? we answer with gratitude towards God in the words of our Confession: “The Gospel affords us more than one means, one counsel and assistance, in opposition to sin; *for God is superabundantly rich in His grace.*”

Springfield, Ill.

LOUIS WESSEL.

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