

Why the Name Lutheran.

II. WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND BY THE TERM "LUTHERAN"?

We have declared that we did not give ourselves the name "Lutheran." Much less, therefore, do we associate with the term a meaning that makes the bearing of such a name sinful. True it is, we have not refused to allow ourselves to be called Lutherans. But we do not bear this name because we desire to separate ourselves from other orthodox Christians. We remember that the Corinthians, with their party names, were guilty of this sin. Neither have we permitted this name to be applied to us because we found our teachings upon Luther. And, finally, we confess no new religion under this name. Our Church is no new church and consequently no new sect. The question then is: In what sense do we properly call ourselves Lutherans? We answer briefly: By the term Lutheran nothing else must be understood than that we are Christians who accept as correct those teachings brought back to light through the work of Luther. All who profess these teachings we call Lutherans. We consider him a true Lutheran who believes this doctrine in his heart, through the working of the Holy Ghost, and holds it with a pure conscience. A true Lutheran and a true Christian, a Lutheran Church and a Christian Church, God's Word and Luther's doctrine — these all are one and the same thing. With joy and confidence, therefore, we sing: —

God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure
Shall to eternity endure.

And we speak thus not as though Luther wrote as an apostle by divine inspiration of the Holy Ghost. We declare, rather, that Luther's doctrine as we know it is drawn from God's Word, and that through him the Reformation, acknowledged by all as necessary, was effected. In this sense Luther once advised the Lutherans who were called upon by Duke George for vindication of their faith to reply: "We will abide by the holy Gospel. Luther himself desires not to be a Lutheran, except in so far as he teaches Holy Scriptures purely." We fully know what will be said when we declare it to be our belief that the Lutheran Church is the true Church of Jesus Christ upon earth. Our most lenient opponent will say: Indeed, we consider the Lutheran Church *a* church, but not *the* Church of Jesus Christ. The belief that there are several true churches must necessarily be held by those who can never be certain of their doctrine, since they are in their conscience convicted of false doctrine. They must, with that sweet dream of

many true churches, comfort themselves secretly and strive to soothe their crying consciences. Such a belief in several or many true churches makes it impossible for them positively to consider themselves the Church of Jesus Christ. They necessarily acknowledge themselves to be a sect. We, as Lutherans, thank God that He has brought us into the communion of His true Church. We are confident of this, and joyfully confess before the world that we belong to her and not to a sect.

Others will perhaps say: There we hear it again. We know this speech. All sectarians speak in that way. In fact, it is characteristic of every sect to declare it is the only true saving Church, and all others false. It is clearly evident that you Lutherans are arch-papists; for is not the assumption that you are the only saving Church essentially popish? You have thus betrayed yourselves. — We will consider these charges. Therefore suspend your judgment until we have spoken and you have thoroughly weighed our defense.

We are in no sense of the word fanatics. We know that the invisible Kingdom of Christ does not consist solely of those who call themselves Lutherans. This is one of the very reasons why the name of our Church is so glorious. This is one reason why we cling to her with whole-hearted accord, and will, in our simple way, publicly bear witness, pray, fight for her, and endeavor to remove all disgrace that may come upon her. We must remain loyal to her until death, because we know she is not comprised within a human name, country, or time, but is found wherever there are followers of Jesus Christ. The Lutheran Church, in the first place, is not limited either to those who have borne this name from youth, or assumed it later. We extend our hand to any person who submits, without guile, to the entire written Word of God, cherishes it in his heart, and professes before men the true faith in our dear Lord Jesus Christ. We regard such a person as our fellow-believer in Christ, a member of our Church and a Lutheran, regardless of what sect he may be concealed in or kept a prisoner. We believe that God can preserve thousands of His children even where everything appears to be swallowed up in Baal-service. 1 Kings 19, 7—18. The Word of God is sufficiently powerful to convert men to God even where it is mixed with much human teaching; for Christ rules even in the midst of His enemies. Ps. 110, 2. We condemn no man (let him call himself what he will), but repeat the declaration of God: "He that believeth and is baptized shall

be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." An entirely different question it is when we are asked, How is the true Church recognized, and when is it visible? It is also a different question when you hear, What is the Church? To the first question we answer: The Church is recognized by the pure preaching of the Word and the right use of the holy Sacraments. To the second question we reply: The Church is the congregation of all believers. (*Augsburg Confession*, Art. VII, 7. 8.) Therefore our fathers wrote in the introduction to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: "As to the condemnation, censures, and objections of godless doctrines, and especially of that which has arisen concerning the Lord's Supper, it is in no way our design and purpose to condemn those men who err from a certain simplicity of mind, and nevertheless are not blasphemers against the truth of the heavenly doctrine, much less, indeed, entire churches; rather has it been our intention and disposition in this manner openly to censure and condemn only the fanatical opinions and their obstinate and blasphemous teachers (which, we judge, should in no way be tolerated). For we have no doubt whatever that, even in those churches which have hitherto not agreed with us in all things many godly and by no means wicked men are found, who follow their own simplicity, and do not understand aright the matter itself, but in no way approve the blasphemies which are cast forth against the Holy Supper. We are also in great hope that, if they would be taught aright concerning all these things, the Spirit of the Lord aiding them, they would agree with us, and with our churches and schools, to the infallible truth of God's Word."

We also read in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, in Article XIII ("Of Monastic Vows"): "We do not speak of all; it is possible that there are some in the cloisters who know the Gospel of Christ, and do not trust in their good works." Luther in his writings agrees fully with these words. He not only reminds us that God, in the darkest days of papacy, preserved a whole congregation of His children, a whole Church, but that even after the Evangelical light of the Reformation, righteous souls are held in the bondage of popery who are actually members of the true Church. We read in his *Commentary on Genesis*, chap. 28, 17: "The Pope and his followers are not the Church. Should any one raise an objection to this, saying that they have Baptism and the Lord's Supper and such, we would answer: Those who have the pure Word and Baptism belong to us and to the true Church."

Those, however, who at the same time have the churchly pomp of man-made dogmas are not the Church. Although they have Baptism and the Gospel, they nevertheless have them to no purpose." Luther passes the same judgment upon sincere people who are in outward communion with the sects. He writes in his letter "Concerning Anabaptism": "We must confess that the enthusiasts (*Schwaermer*) have the Scriptures and God's Word in other articles, and whoever hears it and believes will be saved, even though the teachers are unholy, heretical blasphemers of Christ."

The old Lutheran theologians never considered those the only Lutherans who called themselves Lutheran. They always spoke of those who bear the name Lutheran, but only dishonor it and by their carnal conduct prove themselves no members of the true Church, no members of the spiritual body of Christ, no true Christians. They hold, on the other hand, that there were those who, indeed, do not call themselves Lutherans and yet are true Christians and therefore Lutherans in reality. Of many proofs in support of this, we choose only one. In 1573 the Reformed Christians of France (commonly designated as Huguenots) suffered the most horrible persecution at the hands of the papists. In view of the fact that nearly seventy thousand of these people were killed with unheard-of devilish cruelty at the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve and during the following two months, a Lutheran theologian, who was joint-author of the Formula of Concord, and who through the trickery of the Reformed had been expelled from Leipzig, published the following: ¹⁾ "There were many innocent people mercilessly slaughtered in the persecution in France and the Low Countries. There were many martyrs among the Sacramentarians, ²⁾ for whom even a heart of stone must justly sympathize. But, dear Lord, all such were killed as Lutherans, not, indeed, because of their doctrine of the Holy Sacrament, but because they would not support the popish abominations. Therefore God stood by them in their dire need and called them away with gladness and comfort in their hearts, forgiving and patiently bearing their weakness and the delusion concerning the Holy Sacrament, even as He always ordains the weaknesses and mistakes of His believers for the best, as long as they are not malicious or knowingly and obstinately held." Thus we hear a man speak who most emphatically rejected

1) N. Selnecker, author of "All Glory Be to God on High."

2) Those who denied the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament.

the Reformed doctrine. And yet he was not of a false condemning and sectarian spirit, but one moved by his love for the truth. It is true that Lutherans, because of their earnest rejection of all false teachings, are often charged with being intolerant, uncharitable, and factious. None deserve this less, however, as long as we bear our name rightly, by refusing to limit the true Church with this name.

Just as little do we believe our Church is confined to any land or time. With the name we profess to belong to the true, catholic (universal, Apostolic) Church, whose doctrine Luther preached. We speak very clearly in our Confessions concerning the first point: "We have the comforting article in our Creed, 'I believe in the catholic (universal) Christian Church,' in order to avoid the probability that any one think (as popery teaches) that the Church is confined to this or that land, dominion, or condition, like the civil government. It remains a fact that the true Church is the sum total of all men everywhere in the world, from the rising to the setting of the sun, who truly believe in Christ and are ruled by one Gospel, one Christ, one Baptism, and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit, even though they have dissimilar ceremonies." (*Apology of Augsburg Confession*, Art. VII.) Luther says the same in these words: "Christendom is not only in the Romish Church, but throughout the world. For the prophets have told that the Gospel of Christ should be proclaimed throughout all the earth. Ps. 2, 8. Christendom is scattered throughout the Pope's realm, among the Turks, the Persians, the Tartars, and wherever men are found. These are united spiritually in one Gospel and faith, and are under the one head, Christ." (Cf. Supplement to the "Major Confession concerning the Lord's Supper," 1528. We cannot refrain from quoting Luther once more in order to acquit him of any sectarian conception of the Church. He writes on Gal. 1, 2: "Therefore the Church is holy in all places, even among the enthusiasts (*Schwaermer*) and factious spirits, in as far as they do not deny and reject the Scriptures and Sacraments. For those who entirely reject these do not belong to the Church. But where the Word and Sacraments remain, there is the holy Church, and it matters not whether the Antichrist himself reign in its midst; for even he sits not in the devil's house, in a pigsty, nor among the unbelieving people, but in the holiest place, yea, in the temple of God." 2 Thess. 2, 4. It is clear that God's temple exists even among spiritual tyrants, who rule and rage

spirit of temporal and earthly things crept into her. It is their conviction that the Pope is the source of all errors, and is ruled by thirst for honor and gold." When Rome grants that such witnesses for apostolic doctrine and against unapostolic popery always existed, and that Luther only championed such doctrines of the truth, she clearly declares that the Lutheran Church existed before Luther and even had its members in the midst of the papacy. This is additional proof that our Church is not concerned with the name, but with the doctrine.
